

POST 18TH AMENDMENT CURRICULUM DESIGN: A DISTRICT LEVEL DECISION -SPACE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Curriculum development is one of the essential steps in educational reform. Its significance can be gauged from the fact that it directly impacts the systematic rationalization of the implementation process. Therefore, this exploratory research tries to interpret the broader spectrum of curriculum development after the 18th Amendment and its complexities. Interviews with the key stakeholders were conducted which provided insights regarding the configuration of national and provincial priorities, the structural and financial tasks assigned to curriculum development officers CDOs, representation in decision-making from district and taluka levels, etc. The research features conceptual preliminaries through existing models and decentralization approaches to construct a theoretical framework for the study. It evaluates the curriculum by linking decision space to capacity and autonomy in primary education in Larkana after the 18th Amendment. The research demonstrates that the required capacity and autonomy to exercise functions of the curriculum at the district level is seemingly moderate to narrow.

Keywords: *Decentralization; Curriculum Development; Decision-Making.*

INTRODUCTION

Decentralization and devolution have become popular governing strategies in the last couple of decades. With the view to improve the service delivery mechanisms, different states around the world have devolved basic services such as health, agriculture, sanitation, and education (Mudalige, 2019). Besides, improving service delivery the transfer of power involves grassroots power centers in the decision-making making thus widening the scope and reach of the state. Pakistan has time and again experimented with the devolving authorities. 18th Amendment was perhaps the most detailed blueprint for devolution as it aimed at the distribution of powers institutional rearrangement, and management and distribution of

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financial and human resources, etc. Primary education was among those subjects devolved to the provinces. The purpose was to create space for the local decision makers who might have limited input in decision-making of the governance and management of education. This work primarily attempts to scrutinize the extent of autonomy and capacity of local actors through an analysis of the decision space of curriculum design in education (Bossert, 2014).

States today are confronted with multiple challenges internally as well as externally. The internal pull and push factors and the rise in sub-national identities have pushed states towards some form of decentralized authority. Moreover, decentralization has also been on the agenda of global donors such as the World Bank. Countries around the world have applied different mechanisms to transfer powers at the grassroots level. These include privatization, delegation, deconcentration, and devolution. All these mechanisms have shown results in different conditions. Among these, devolution has arguably been the most effective strategy because of its ability to maximize the space for peripheral actors. The kind of devolution brought about by the 18th Amendment has proposed to transfer powers from federal to provincial governments. For instance, important decisions in policy, planning, curriculum, and standards of education have now been rendered a provincial responsibility. This, however, is not a complete transfer of powers until the decision-making authority is ensured at the local level. There is a consensus among academics and policy experts that a complete devolution is one, in which the lowest tier of the government is also a stakeholder. The Local Government Acts introduced in Sindh provide that district, Taluka, and Union Council be treated as the lower tiers of the government with reference to the transfer of power (Tahir, 2011; Cheema et al., 2007; Thapa, 2020). The district is an important unit of administration. The studies focusing on devolution or decentralization of services normally focus on provinces. Thus, the objective of the complete devolution is taken out of the analysis.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Decentralization has been presented by political scientists and governance experts from around the world as a solution to the administrative and management problems modern nation-states are confronting (Fiske, 1996). The 18th Amendment was introduced to bring Pakistan towards a quasi-decentralized state structure (Shah, 2012) of the many different forms of decentralization, namely delegation, deconcentration, and privatization, devolution was proposed in the amendment (Randinelli et., 1983). Many important subjects that were previously a part of the federal jurisdiction were devolved to the provinces. The ministries devolved included health, human rights, climate change, population and welfare, food and

agriculture, and education (Haq, 2020). The devolution of education offered a new set of possibilities as far as service delivery was concerned. The framers of the devolution scheme introduced as the result of the 18th Amendment claimed that it would offer provincial autonomy and empower local authorities at the grass-roots level to participate in the formation of policy, planning, curriculum, standardization of education, etc. This offers a complex problem that needs to be unpacked in detail. While there have generally been arguments for or against devolution. Most of those arguments are limited to investigating the political rhetoric surrounding devolution. A few development-oriented studies have seen the effects of decentralization on the macro politics of Pakistan (UNDP, 2019; Shah, 2012). There is little research on what devolution means for education specifically. Few analyses that have focused on the devolution of primary education do not see education at the most basic tier of the government, i.e., district. This research is an attempt to fill all these gaps, as the question is to what extent the decision-makers of the education sector exercise “space” with reference to capacity and autonomy in curriculum design after the 18th Amendment in Larkana.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Thomas Bossert in 2014 first used the ‘decision space analysis’ to measure the effectiveness of devolution reforms in the health services in Latin America. This research uses ‘decision space analysis’ and mixes it up with the ‘principal agent approach’ of public administration to understand the effectiveness of decentralization of curriculum in education at the district level in Sindh (Bossert, 2014). Various models have been used to study decentralization and devolution. For instance, these models approach the subject from a public policy perspective. There are many studies that use one or a combination of the public administration model (Mollah, 2007; Tom Christensen, 2019) Public Choice Model (Holcombe, 2011; Vaubel, 1986; Boyne, 2003), or the Principal-Agent Model (Gailmard, 2014; Tommasi, 2007). These models though effective in their own way miss out on one important dimension of devolution. That dimension involves understanding devolution essentially as a mechanism for creating more and more space for local actors to make rational choices and decisions. Therefore, an important theoretical contribution of this study is concerned with locating the precise utility of devolution in the curriculum as a source of improving service delivery through empowering peripheral agents.

Decision space gives an easy matrix against which the extent of autonomy and capacity for the local actors can be gauged as ‘moderate’, ‘narrow’, or ‘wide’. This is extracted through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with officials of education at the provincial and district

levels. To theorize devolution itself, the ‘principal-agent approach’ has been employed. The theory sees devolution as a source of effective resource management at the local level (Liwanag, 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

A huge variety of literature on decentralization has emerged from different parts of the world. Some writers have focused on the decentralization of one or more subjects either in one country or in several countries that share regional as well as administrative similarities. These subjects include health, agriculture, sanitation, and education. Experts have also written about decentralization generally and not specifically focusing on one or more than one country.

A great deal of literature on decentralization and devolution focuses on the new institutional and governance arrangements created by these reforms thus creating a bottom-up instead of a top-down hierarchy in the governance structures (Masanyiwa et al., 2013; Litvack et al., 1998). Some studies have attributed to devolution the increase in the allocative capacity of the state (Greene et al., 2000; Govinda et al., 2005). This can normally lead to equity issues among different regions and sections within the state. Therefore, a great deal of literature on devolution suggests ways to strike up a balance between different departments and different tiers of the same department (Kubal, 2006). Decentralization and devolution reforms have often been seen with skepticism. Some experts do not see decentralization as an all-embracing solution. They instead focus on the context and the type of devolution in order for it to be successful (Nueni, 2014). Thus, some experts do not propose reforms such as decentralization or devolution as an all-encompassing solution (Moutray & Chad, 2001). Another strand of literature sees devolution as a mechanism for a previously centralized state to garner

legitimacy. The state today, they argue is facing challenges from disparate groups claiming an opposite source of identity. The phenomenon is quite stark in post-colonial states. Decentralization in these states has been brought to empower the dissident elements and hence to restore the legitimacy of the state (Zamjani, 2016; Akhtar, 2015). In other words, it is not merely an effective governance strategy, but it also is a process of nation-building. This is true of decentralization in Pakistan. The devolution brought forth in the wake of the 18th Amendment mixed provincial autonomy an important objective of the amendment (Rabbani, 2012). The framers of the devolution scheme attempted to make a complex Pakistani identity based on regional variations. The variations along regional lines are represented by provinces in the case of Pakistan.

It is not only the factors within the nation-state that push for decentralization. A great deal of stress on devolution comes from international monetary institutions. Of particular interest is the quality of decentralized reforms. World Bank recommends certain strategies towards this end. Its 1983 report suggests that small-scale decentralization programs are more likely to be successful than large-scale programs. Secondly, gestation time is required before the reform can take a deep root. Thirdly, the reform initiative requires training, capacity building, and proper attention from the central government. The report further found out that decentralization reforms had been moderately successful in the countries where it was understood to be an ‘incremental process’ and reforms were gradually allowed to build institutions. Research associated with the World Bank has also found that the success of reforms treated as decentralization depends upon political commitment, cultural conditioning, effective design models, and adequate financial supplies (Rondinelli et al., 1983).

This study marks a break from all these themes by focusing on decentralization reforms as a way of increasing the decision-making capacities of the local or peripheral actors. The impulse to conceptualize devolution reforms in this way comes from the very idea of devolution itself. One of the basic aims of the framers of the devolution reforms in Pakistan was to empower people and communities hitherto disempowered by a highly centralized state apparatus. Thus, global literature on devolution reforms might focus on the ‘institutional arrangements’, ‘increase in the allocative capacity of the state’, or the contextual factors for the success of devolution (Ali, 2018). the devolution reforms in the case of Pakistan need to be studied in terms of their ability to create decision space for the peripheral actors who might not have a stake in a centralized state apparatus.

In the same way, most of the literature from around the world focuses on health and agriculture. There are a few studies that carry out an analysis of devolution in education. Various factors have drawn countries towards the decentralization of education specifically. One of those reasons is the possibilities offered by the globalization and free market economy. Decentralization is perceived as an outcome of the privatization of public services. Hence, this process becomes a trade-off between the forces of international political economy, national intentions, and actors’ local interpretations (Rhoten, 2010). The trend towards decentralization of education is visible in post-Mao China. This era also coincides with the popularization of the free market and privatization. Education went from a highly centralized to a decentralized model wherein ‘the role of the state as a primary guarantor was diminished’ (Mok, 2002). However, the role of the state as a coordinating link between the central and local actors was increased. Decentralization reforms have also arisen in post-colonial countries as a reaction to

strong centralization by the colonial administration and as a way to do away with the colonial baggage. A decentralization modeled only to break up the colonial legacy has sometimes resulted in the monopoly of the local elites on the services as Gennaioli et al. have shown in the case of Africa (Gennaioli & Rainer, 2005).

The set of reforms brought forth under the rubric of the 18th Amendment belong to the devolution which is, but a part of decentralization. Other terms used to describe decentralization and those that regularly appear in literature are community participation (Matete, 2022). For the sake of convenience, this study has used ‘decentralization’ and ‘devolution’ interchangeably, depending on the context (Brosio, 2014).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research focuses on the interpretivist approach followed by a case study as the research strategy to help understand the extent of decision-making autonomy and the capacity of local actors through interactions, to analyze the effectiveness of decentralization in curriculum design. Besides, keeping in view the perspectives, components, and dimensions of the topic, it is fraught with challenges to collect, analyze, and investigate data across the province. Consequently, it will not be feasible to discuss each component with the same depth and it will also require a lot of time and resources. Therefore, to overcome these concerns, the research purposively is limited to one district of Sindh i.e., Larkana District through a purposeful sampling technique. The study uses a combination of data collection techniques which include interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. On the other hand, the data analysis and selection of the techniques follows thematic analysis, because an inductive, qualitative data analysis method involves deriving themes from data.

Contribution to Knowledge

Decentralization has been proposed as a solution to the problems in public service delivery. Governance experts today are divided on the question of the effectiveness of decentralization or devolution. Moreover, decentralization has become an issue of politics in recent years. One side of the debate sees the devolution of authorities as the only solution in the face of weakening the state’s legitimacy (Zamjani, 2016). The other side sees it as the only reasonable way to keep the supposed unity of the state intact (Rabbani, 2012). In Pakistan, education specifically the curriculum has traditionally been seen as a subject of central authority. It is feared that if education is devolved to the provinces it might lead to the break-up of unity of the state. Thus, to have a uniform idea of the nation, education must be centrally designed and controlled. This research attempts to clear these myths about decentralization by focusing on the practical side

of devolution in education. It measures the efficacy of devolution reforms against its promised idea of provincial autonomy by analyzing the space in decision-making for local actors. Therefore, the study attempts to supplement the micro level analysis of decentralization and curriculum design in existing literature. Since most of the research around the world focuses on giving a macro analysis of devolution. The study empirically verifies the effectiveness of devolution of the curriculum at the grassroots level, which is often overlooked for investigation. Hence, this research is an attempt to understand the efficacy of devolution as the governance strategy in curriculum design after the 18th Amendment, through an interplay of the two dimensions of decision space at the local level.

Therefore, the research has attempted to supplement the existing literature through methodological and theoretical additions. With reference to these, in understanding decentralization reforms, there is little on how to gauge the effectiveness of devolution. The decision space analysis employed in this study also solves a methodological quibble. Once the decision space analysis for the peripheral actors in the field of education is carried out, it makes the way for other scholars to use a similar frame of analysis for measuring the effectiveness of devolution in other subjects of social sectors. The verifiability aspect of this research therefore has the potential to push the disciplinary boundaries and launch the same analysis in other fields of inquiry.

Curriculum Design

Curriculum design involves a sequential process that is based on the identification and drafting of the content according to specifications of grades and regional diversity. Besides, it covers the teaching methodologies and assessment system in an ordered manner. It facilitates teachers and students to follow a rigorous curriculum that has defined learning objectives and educational outcomes. The compulsory components of curriculum design contain a set of comprehensive instructions, well-defined aims and objectives, and target learning experiences and actions. These components are based on models of curriculum carried out during the designing process. For instance, a student-centric approach which follows the subject-matter-based designs. (Mohansundaram, 2018).

Curriculum design is an important step in improving the quality of education. It is a repetitive process, subject to changes depending on targeted content and its impact on learning outcomes. Besides, the designing process in curriculum development involves revisions and refining the old curriculum to bring innovations based on technology and growing challenges. Following

the process, the effectiveness of the content is evaluated through an assessment process (Druzhinina et al., 2018).

The key stakeholders for framing the curriculum are teachers, administrators, policymakers, and subject experts. The thorough implementation of the curriculum is directly proportional to the teaching methodologies followed by teachers to support curriculum reform. Therefore, the professional development of teachers is the key to getting the desired outcomes. Moreover, the subject specialist targeting the core of the content in curriculum design and its development plays a prominent role in improving the quality of education through the systematic articulation of curriculum development (Altaf Hussain et al, 2022). In addition, interdisciplinary-standards-based curriculum design is produced by the active involvement of teachers in the development process. (Christine & Hilary; Hughes, 2021).

A participant underscoring the internal challenges of the Directorate of Curriculum, Assessment, and Research DCAR draws attention to the reasons for loopholes in the curriculum framework and noted:

Lack of coordination between the members of the curriculum design committee. The process, therefore, is hindered and often results in an erroneous framework because the subject specialist and curriculum experts do not end on a single page (Majeed, personal communication, May 29, 2024).

It determines the lack of consensus and professionalism in the designing process, which often creates mistrust and misunderstanding among the stakeholders and enormously affects the execution of curriculum policy.

The process of curriculum design is conducted at the provincial level in Sindh, but as a result of the constitutional obligation after the 18th Amendment, the authority of curriculum design and development is further devolved to districts. Currently, the whole process of framing the curriculum is not exclusively completed at the district level. Yet, the composition of the curriculum design committee of E&LD favors the participation of members from the district level. The participants are usually the district-level officers and teachers (subject specialists) providing the instructional strategies needed at the district level. Besides, the task for implementation of the curriculum is also executed at the district level.

In Larkana, DEO is responsible for providing the provincial curriculum development authority with the information or input for curriculum design. Conversing the functional dimension of

curriculum design at the local level, the role of the district is limited to developing supplementary material along with the content being produced at the provincial level.

A participant commented on the involvement of the district level in curriculum design and stated that:

Although the curriculum falls under direct provincial powers without the involvement of districts, the participants of curricula development are subject specialists who work as teachers, and lecturers in colleges and schools in districts. This selection is also random and does not include all districts equally. (Qureshi, personal communication, June 3, 2024).

In line with the argument, another participant while noting the developments after the 18th Amendment said:

Larkana has a District Curriculum Council DCC to develop district-specific requirements that are necessary for the implementation of the curriculum. Its function includes the identification and provision of supplementary material to assist teachers in effective implementation through better instructional methods (Solangi, personal communication, June 30, 2023).

It shows the development in the form of DCC at the local level after decentralization but simultaneously highlights the limited space for local actors to exercise authority.

Standardization of Content at District Level

To ensure uniformity and coherence across all the districts, District Curriculum Councils DCC are formed with the prime objective of prioritizing the framework that aligns the content with provincial and national standards. Besides, it also aims to ensure the effective implementation of the curriculum at the district and sub-district levels. In addition, it confirms the strict compliance with curriculum benchmarks, and the practices are intentionally designed to harmonize the parameters of DCC with the provincial curriculum framework. Additionally, DCC has the capacity to monitor schools to ensure compliance with provincial standards. Thus, it aims to administer the assessments and examinations to measure SLOs. Moreover, clear, and consistent instructions are established through this platform for the implementation of standards in all levels and grades to create consistency and coherence in learning outcomes and assessment results.

National Curriculum of Pakistan

The debate around a Single National Curriculum SNC was initiated in 2019-20 when the federal government announced the objective to implement a uniform curriculum all over Pakistan. Ever since the passage of the 18th amendment, the transformation of power and mandate from federal to provinces endured many alterations in the realm of the curriculum. The launching ceremony of the National Curriculum of Pakistan in Karachi in October 2022 is the announcement of the biggest partnership between the federal and provincial governments. Education has been oscillating between federal and province since the inception of Pakistan (ISAPS, 2014). The 18th Amendment in 2010, ensured provincial autonomy by devolving the key subjects of education to provinces. It poses many apprehensions after the said Amendment which gave jurisdictional rights to the province. Curriculum is one of them. It has always become a bone of contention between federal and provincial governments on the question of uniformity and coherence.

The single national curriculum which was originally attempted to promote social harmony and to eliminate disparity in Pakistan encountered opposition from the provinces, especially from Sindh. It was considered a sudden and deliberate policy by the PTI Government that ignored different educational structures with different capabilities of the students in a province (Dawn, 2022).

The debate about the Single National Curriculum has been discouraged from proceeding further. After legislation in 2010, the curriculum along with other subjects of education became a provincial mandate which was unanimously accepted by all the provinces including the federal. Later SNC and the argument related to it were not accepted by the Sindh government due to certain social and cultural constraints. Moreover, the provincial argument to follow the amendment in letter and spirit has been contravened.

SNC instead of promoting harmony highlighted the fissures between the federal and province on the question of curriculum. Besides, SNC policy overlooked provincial concerns and, hence, became ineffective. One participant described this relationship by saying the following:

“Curriculum in education plays a pivotal role in maintaining federal province relationship. An opportunity in the form of a national curriculum has been provided in which every province will learn from one another”. Over 60,000 teachers have been trained in Sindh to meet the challenges of 21st century skills which is one of the crucial achievements for any province in Pakistan. In addition, international organizations

also have appreciated the reforms introduced by Sindh Government” (Khan, personal communication, October, 12, 2023).

In addition to this, another participant demonstrated the intricate relationship between the federal and provinces by saying the following:

Unlike the Single National Curriculum, the federal and provincial governments are on the same page on the question of the National Curriculum of Pakistan. We both share a cordial relationship. Though before NCP Sindh and the federal government didn't have any table talk. The federal government writes about the concerns and contradictions it has with the Sindh government in editorials of the newspaper. Similarly, as an opponent of SNC, the Sindh government responded with antagonistic views about the curriculum (Akbar, personal communication, June 30, 2023).

Another respondent equally noted that:

Single National Curriculum was not acknowledged by Sindh E&LD. But yes, when the National Curriculum of Pakistan was proposed with subjects common for all the provinces, the Sindh government too accepted the new curriculum and the changes proposed in it Pyaro Khan (personal communication, May 31, 2024).

Describing the reason behind the change in nomenclature and rationale of the National Curriculum of Pakistan, one of the participants during the National Curriculum of Pakistan, launching ceremony explained:

“We have removed the word single from the national curriculum. The national curriculum is now the curriculum for all the provinces. Federal and provincial governments are working on different subjects to create uniformity in textbooks”. Unlike the Single National Curriculum which excluded the diverse elements of Pakistani society, the National curriculum focuses on inclusivity for maintaining multiplicity in all the spheres. (Hussain, 2023)

Basic standards in core subjects like mathematics, science, computer, and English must be the same in all provinces. It is the prime motive of the National Curriculum of Pakistan. Besides, in subjects like social studies, provinces could add regional language or any text in their mother tongue to help students understand the regional and civilizational knowledge particular to the province. National Curriculum Council (Chigtai, 2023)

The excerpt from another participant provides a unique window into the effectiveness of NCP in promoting coordination and uniformity among the provinces.

“Provinces will develop their own textbooks. Co-standards will be set for all provinces including federal. These common set of goals not only construct uniformity and coherence in the curriculum of all federating units but will also create the possibility for students from other provinces to study in Sindh and vice versa. This initiative will definitely promote coordination in which province could cherry-pick whatever suits their locals and help develop the common ground for universal standards of the curriculum in Pakistan” (Shah, June 2023) Telephone interview with Mariya (personal communication).

With respect to the increased representation to make any curriculum decision, one of the participants narrates the following:

Yes, representatives are from both district and taluka levels: DEOs and TEOs.³⁴ In fact, these are District and sub-district level officers, who are responsible for reporting the pitfalls in the implementation process. The first-hand information and data require the local officials to directly highlight the problems and to discuss them with concerned officials at a higher level i.e., the provincial level in this case. To maintain the chain of devolution, all the stakeholders from the upper to local tier are responsible for keeping it going. (Khan, personal communication, October 12, 2023).

Through the Sindh Curriculum Council⁵ a series of meetings have been held since 2015 till now to improve the quality of education. The development process primarily requires a review and orientation of the existing curriculum with a special focus on quality assurance through the upgradation of textbooks and the assessment process. SCC⁶ is headed by the chairperson and vice chairperson who is the minister for education and secretary respectively (Khan, personal communication, October 12, 2023).

The participant insights contribute to the deeper understanding of the composition of SCC in which members of all the levels from provincial to district and sub-district have been integrated.

³ 11th Meeting of Sindh curriculum council in September 2021

⁴ Meeting of Quality Assurance Committee on 8 to 10th August, Hyderabad

⁵ 11th meeting of Sindh curriculum council held on September 9, 2021 (Sardar Ali Shah attended that meeting)

⁶ Sindh Curriculum Council

The Curriculum Board undertook significant changes in institutional structure and functional responsibilities. The composition of the bureau has been changed after the passage of the 18th constitutional amendment. The Directorate of Education Extension and Specialized Services was established under Education Policy 1970. It was changed to the Bureau of Curriculum and Extension Wing BCEW in Education policy 1972-78. It has now been restructured and renamed as the Directorate of Curriculum, assessment, and Research after 2010. It is not merely the change in nomenclature, but special focus has been given to enhancing the institutional capacity through special partners STEDA, PITE, and RSU. Under the DCAR a committee of curriculum and assessment experts was formed to rationalize the process. The main function of DCAR is to develop conducive educational standards by designing the framework of curriculum based on evidence and research. Additionally, it emphasizes on transparent assessment process through the guidelines provided by the curriculum policy wing the Sindh textbook board, and other concerned departments. Eventually, stress has been laid on the teacher's readiness to rationalize the implementation process of curriculum reforms by focusing on teachers' training and development. In addition, the Curriculum wing⁷ is established by the government under this Act (The Sindh School Education Standards and Curriculum Act, 7, 2015).

DCAR, being one of the important allied institutions of the government of Sindh, is also fraught with many challenges. Through probing during fieldwork, this research tries to identify the experiences and perspectives of the officials directly related to the department. Their narratives illustrate the complex interplay of the factors influencing the development of curriculum assessment and research and its impacts on implementation at large.

For example, the Director DCAR underscores the need to address the inadequacies in the development process as:

“The most challenging task in curriculum development, assessment, and research tasks is the recruitment of the team. However, the process in DCAR comprised of members as 20 percent of members who are recruited appointed through commission, and 80 percent of those who are promoted. Before the 18th Amendment, these experts who were supposed to be PhD in their concerned subjects were selected from training colleges. But from 2017 and onwards, the rule to include experts and staff from the colleges has

⁷ Conceptual Framework for establishment of Curriculum Wing, Notification: NO.SO (G.1) E&D/ Curriculum/2014 link/; <http://www.sindheducation.gov.pk/Contents/Menu/Establishment%20of%20SCW.pdf>

been excluded from recruitment policies” (Saharan, personal communication, May 16, 2024).

It was reiterated by Director DCAR as:

In allied institutions like DCAR, three things are necessary for implementing policy i.e., human resource, financial assistance, and technical experts. Though the curriculum wing was officially changed yet, the inadequacy of these factors forced the department to work in the existing setup (Bhurt, personal communication, May 29, 2024).

Based on these narratives it can be ascertained that lack of technical staff is one of the prominent challenges that needs to be addressed, to minimize the bottlenecks for effective implementation of policies and quality assurance in curriculum development, assessment, and research process. Moreover, DCAR is still lagging in the field of expertise, standards, and a poor culture of research. Institutions for teachers’ development and assessment are not fully functioning. Since the development process is ongoing and slow in some areas to be specific, it is challenging to gauge progress (Bhurt, personal communication, May 29, 2024).

The participants' reflections highlight the factors of the Curriculum reforms that need to be translated into practice by stressing skill development and creativity.

Another participant's excerpt emphasizes the launch of initiatives like the Teachers Education Division TED, Provincial Institute of Technical Education PITE, Initial Teachers’ Education ITE, and Continuing Professional Development CPD, aimed at promoting professionalism and grooming of teachers and staff. Moreover, it also sheds light on teacher's limited awareness of the aims and objectives of government initiatives. According to the data, this not only creates obstacles in the development of teachers but also interrupts the implementation process. (Siddique, personal communication, February 24, 2023).

The narrative provides a stark example of the lack of a significant gap in teacher's awareness of the reform.

Contextualization and Diversity

Content is an important component of the curriculum, therefore, the alignment of the content with set standards and quality is a prerequisite to impact students' learning outcomes. The content also specifies the influences on student's interpretative and perception abilities. In relation to this, the content also indicates the teaching methodologies used in classrooms. Besides, the assessment processes and assessment tools are also dependent on the content being

taught through the curriculum. Therefore, it is pertinent to design the curriculum and assessment process in a way that is representative of societal needs and values to promote critical thinking among students.

Obsolete and Outdated Curriculum encompasses the content of books and teaching material that is no longer accurate according to modern needs. Sindh Curriculum and Implementation Framework CIF 2014, promotes curriculum development that emphasizes the revisions of existing content and processes.

Describing the textbook's developments and revision as a part of Sindh Curriculum and implementation framework CIF 2014, after the 18th Amendment, the participants highlighted the relative developments by saying that:

We have developed a curriculum from primary to secondary and onwards. The books and notifications have also been uploaded to the website for easy access. Moreover, notifications for the other four subjects i.e., General Science, General Mathematics, English, and Computer have also been issued. Since it is an ongoing process, it will require some more time and resources to complete the task (Saharan, personal communication, May 16, 2024).

Another participant while addressing the revision process said the following:

The Directorate of Curriculum, Assessment, and Research DCAR has initiated the revision process of textbooks. The institute has completed the primary step of revision which includes curriculum review and curriculum development. Proceeding in the same line, the textbooks of Biology, Computer, Chemistry, English, Islamiat, Mathematics, Pakistan Studies, Physics, and Sindh for IX and X have been modified with inclusive and diverse content. Special attention has been placed on contextualization of the content. It was consistently emphasized to incorporate multiple perspectives to encourage the diversity of the content of textbooks (Bhurt, personal communication, May 29, 2024).

There are several factors influencing the content of the curriculum. These are contextual factors which include social and educational context. The policies, legal and institutional frameworks, and guidelines are included in the context of education, whereas cultural and societal norms and socio-economic and political circumstances fall under the scope of societal perspective. Secondly, the stakeholder's factors comprised of teachers, learners, administrators, parents,

and the community. Lastly, pedagogical factors learning goals and objectives, teaching, and learning strategy, assessment, and evaluation (Soomro et al., 2024).

As a crucial part of language promotion in the Sindh curriculum, the preliminary step is to make Sindhi a compulsory subject. Besides preserving and promoting heritage and cultural diversity it is quite pertinent to include the significance of the Sindh language and culture⁸. It helps students understand the border spectrum and awareness of the culture.

Explore the different forms of culture: Material Culture, Non-material culture, and regional cultures. Investigate the social, cultural, and historical importance of the major languages of Pakistan: Urdu, Sindhi, Punjabi, Pushto, Baluchi, Siraiki, Hindko, Brahvi, Shina. Highlight the prominent features of Sindhi society: power structure, cultural values, Folk tales, folk music, folk wisdom & cultural festivals (DCAR⁹, 2019).

One participant noting the cultural and linguistic diversity of Pakistan, established the following:

“E&L department Government of Sindh has always stressed on the importance of inclusion of regional heroes in curriculum. Heroes of Sindh should be taught at least at the school level. For example, in the context of Sindh Khiljis and Gauhori are considered villains who forcefully invaded Sindh but are contemplated as heroes according to the federal syllabus. It shows the conflict of regional heroes between Sindh and Islamabad. Likewise, Dodu Soomro was the hero of Sindh” (Akbar, personal communication, June 30, 2023).

As part of research and development after decentralization in curriculum, DCAR has incorporated the cultural and linguistic content in textbooks to promote diversity in provincial curricula.

Sindh Textbook Board STBB is an important allied institution of E&LD. It is responsible for the management of textbooks which includes designing, printing, and distributing textbooks to schools. A lot of apprehensions have arisen on the poor management of the institute. For instance, STBB is often criticized for some recurrent issues. These include Erroneous Content in their textbooks. Most of the books have typographical, factual, and printing errors which precipitate concerns for teachers as well as students to comprehend the text, hence resulting in

⁸ Notification: https://dcar.gos.pk/National_Curriculum/Pakistan%20Studies%20Grade%20IX-X%202019%20Final%20with%20Notification.pdf

⁹ Curriculum for Pakistan Studies Grade IX-X (Revised, 2019). p,10

poor understanding of concepts. It is quite detrimental to student learning outcomes and the performance of the teachers. Moreover, biases have also been experienced which hinders student's critical thinking and understanding of broader perspectives. These biases comprised distinction and division based on geography and language. Moreover, the sub-standard quality of papers in textbooks and monochromatic text makes them unappealing for students and is subject to less durability of books. In addition, due to delayed printing and publication of books, students are subject to the unavailability of free textbooks, especially in far-flung and remote areas.

Old methods vs Contemporary methods of teaching /Instructional Improvement Methods

The instructional improvement methods of teaching encompass education for all which is inclusive and free from all biases and disparities. The approaches and methods used in education undergo a constantly changing process to produce an encouraging and quality learning atmosphere for better educational outcomes. There are different approaches to teaching methodology, i.e., teacher-centric, students-centric, etc. In a decentralized education setting where authority is dispersed and divided at local level. It is required to produce a policy that has productive results for students learning. Teacher teacher-centric approach follows methods in which the teacher directs the students which is inverse to a collaborative and conducive learning atmosphere for students.

A participant while discussing the approaches in the curriculum said the following:

It is quite difficult to change traditional methods because they have historical roots that have been followed for so long. Old methods are teachers centric whereas modern and contemporary methods are students centric. Nowadays, since we focus on modern-day teaching techniques, we focus on ICT tools and technology (Shahani, personal communication, May 5, 2024).

Assessment and Evaluation of Students (District Level)

The assessment and evaluation process is a crucial component of the curriculum which is undertaken through an assessment tool i.e., the School Assessment Test SAT to measure student's learning outcomes. A& E annually or biannually in schools helps teachers and policymakers to determine the academic performance or learning outcomes of students. Therefore, it is important to have a comprehensive and well-structured assessment system and assessment tool to encourage critical thinking and problem-solving ability through these tests.

Besides, it is also essential to check the impacts of curriculum on students' understanding and learning.

SAT was initiated and designed in a way to test the SLOs and understanding in schools in all the districts of Sindh. Similarly, in Larkana, the district-wise assessment process is effective at the district and Taluka level (sub-district). Though the assessment and evaluation process were already present before the 18th constitutional amendment, currently district-level education officers manage and evaluate these test results, prepare the data at the district level, and send the report to the provincial education department after further analysis.

A participant while describing the impacts of a transparent assessment process, explained the importance of assessment tools in policymaking and curriculum development and stated:

To ensure credibility and accountability, currently, the assessment process at the district level is well framed to systematically identify the gaps in students' performance and teaching methodologies and material. The test reports facilitate policymakers to design a curriculum that ensures improvement in critical understanding among students and simultaneously teaching practices in schools. Moreover, to discourage defective examination systems at the local level participation of stakeholders is required. Therefore, DCAR, an allied institute is responsible for training PSTs, JSTs, and HSTs for assessment and paper setting at the district level (Korejo, personal communication, February 19, 2023).

In parallel to the argument another participant outlined the challenges in the SAT testing process and said the following:

Though the test conducting system and analysis are executed at the district level, there are multiple hindrances. Sometimes it is insufficient data management, sometimes the data analyst lacks the capacity, and sometimes it's because of the limited resources and other necessary facilities like limited test centers and accommodation of students to avoid unfair means during the examination. (Chandio, personal communication, February 21, 2020).

Assessment Tools and Methods

Analysis of the SAT as an assessment tool aims to measure students' learning outcomes and the effectiveness of teachers. It is conducted through the Sindh Testing Service (STS). The statistical evaluation of SAT at two stages in class 5th and class 8th reveals a concerning situation. It shows poor SAT results of students in both phases reference RSU. The SAT is

meant to examine student outcomes in subjects like mathematics, English, Science, Social Studies, and Language. The objective primarily is to recognize the areas with low SLOs. These assessment tests are executed in District Assessment Centers at present in every district to expedite the process for analysis. The focus of these assessment tools at a lower level is to identify the domain that needs improvement and data-driven policy decisions. Therefore, the District Education Officer DEO who is in charge of the execution of the test at the district level, analyzes the data and sends the feedback to schools to measure progress and track the shortcomings. The reporting process circulates from the district to the provincial level where the academic performance report is sent to E&LD Sindh by underlining the strengths and weaknesses of the process.

A participant discussed the challenges and concerns, the testing tool is facing and noted the following:

It is fraught with many challenges. For instance, limited financial and human resources, and variability of curriculum in different schools within one district so it is difficult to access the comparative analysis among schools in one district (Korejo, personal communication, February 19, 2023).

A participant while lamenting the teaching gaps between the content and teaching methodologies and their impacts on assessment and learning outcomes said the following:

It is because of the teaching methodologies that are not aligned with the content of the curriculum being taught, thus creating difficulties for students to comprehend the text, especially for those with language barriers (Khosro, personal communication, September 3, 2023).

Sindh Education Student Learning Outcome Assessment Framework, SESLOAF is used after the 18th Amendment in Sindh to provide the details for the assessment process both at the provincial and local levels. It aimed to assess the subjects like Language (Sindhi and Urdu), Science, Social studies, and Mathematics. The assessment is meant for policymakers and educators to reform curriculum and development. It ensures to promotion of the quality of education through a robust assessment system through the interpretation of data. Besides, the improvement in teacher training after the introduction of new curriculum and assessment techniques in Sindh is indicated by the fact that more than 50 percent of the teachers have attended the training (STEDA, 2007).

Research and Development

Research and development are essential components to bring innovations in curriculum which has a direct bearing on the quality of education. For responsive and effective curriculum there is a vast variety in learning and teaching styles around the world. It is research and development through which new practices and strategies are explored and included to experiment with new dimensions essentially demanding better results. A participant while talking about the limited incentives provided to researchers said that:

Research culture is very limited at the local level. Sometimes it is because of the limited incentives. For example, 2000 per page is remuneration (to be paid in a year) for research and revision of textbooks. It is very discouraging which leads to a lack of research interest. (Sahito, personal communication, April,7,2020).

The 18th Amendment allows the provinces to develop their textbooks. Co-standards will be set for all provinces including federal. In response to the amendment Sindh government too brought changes in institutional and innovative rearrangements in the existing educational set-up. Likewise, in the curriculum, there are areas to be modified in accordance with innovations required to promote new skills and approaches. For instance, the development of new textbooks from class 1 to X by E&LD. Similarly, in collaboration with USAID, there have been important developments of DCAR i.e., SESLOF and Early Grade Reading Curriculum EGRC which are research-based initiatives.

Curriculum development after decentralization and the capacity of local actors in decision space are required to provide a framework for teachers to be delivered in class and to create curriculum content and assessment. Besides, the local decision-makers are also desired to develop and implement rigorous curricula and align curricula with provincial and national standards. Furthermore, regularly reviewing and modifying the curriculum according to changing circumstances and systemically organizing content is also desired to be performed at the district level. The findings of the study disclose the curriculum is the subjects that are provincially organized to maintain unity and coherence without the involvement of districts, but the participants of curricula development are subject specialists who work as teachers, and lecturers in colleges and schools in districts. The selection of the participants is random and does not aim to include all districts equally. The local actors on the other hand possess capacity in terms of reviewing and modifying in certain cases. For instance, arrange District Curriculum Committees DCC for each subject to develop curriculum content at the district level with the

approval of the provincial government. Therefore, it is maintained that the required capacity in above mentioned functions at the district level is seemingly moderate.

Moreover, the extent of autonomy by decision-makers at the local level includes designing curriculum framework, assessment and evaluation methods and the implementation of curriculum policy is moderate. Since the implementation of the curriculum lies directly in the hands of the province. The province approves and implements curricula through textbook development and teacher training. It is carried out through an institute of the Directorate of Curriculum, Assessment & Research (DCAR) Sindh. The aim of the institute includes the development, review, and orientation of the curriculum. Regarding decision space autonomy exercised by the district level, the involvement of curriculum development is narrow at the district level.

In terms of autonomy for the assessment evaluation and implementation of the curriculum by local authorities, the officers are responsible for executing the policy through a district representative by DCAR at the district level. Therefore, the autonomy enjoyed by local actors to perform the functions of assessment and evaluation in the curriculum is said to be moderate.

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