



Unfolding Existing School Realities and Implementation of Reforms Initiative

Asia Shaheen*, Nadia Gilani**, Syed Abdul Waheed***

*PhD Scholar (Education), Department of Educational Research & Assessment, University of Okara, Pakistan.

asiajamil20@gmail.com

** Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education, University of Okara, Pakistan. nadia.gilani@uo.edu.pk

*** Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Studies, University of Okara, Pakistan. s.a.waheed@uo.edu.pk

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ABSTRACT

Reform initiatives have always been critical to reforming school systems, maximizing educational output, and improving academic quality. By analyzing the perspectives and experiences of school stakeholders, this qualitative study aimed to shed light on the discrepancies between school reform initiatives, existing realities, and the current situation. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, and phenomenological analysis and reflection were used to interpret the data. The transcripts were read systematically and repeatedly during the course of analysis. For classifying and developing them into themes, the data were reduced into codes, categories, or themes, and thus, the data were made meaningful and interpreted accordingly. The study results are presented in terms of themes, i.e., defining school reform initiatives, continuity of reform initiatives, lack of political vision, the miserable economy of the country, contradictions between reforms and existing realities, and barriers to the implementation process. The research has implications for school improvement, policy-making and implementation.



Introduction

In Pakistan, the Punjab province has become a trial area for both internal and external donor-funded institutions, with a variety of programs ranging from input-based reforms such as improving school facilities to more radical changes and attempts to enhance the teaching cadre. As a result, the goal of this research was to situate itself within the context of these reforms, which were based on the Punjab Schools Reform Roadmap (PSRR) (2010). The Punjab School Reform Roadmap was established in 2010 as part of a broader DFID-funded effort aimed primarily at accelerating the transfer of educational outcomes under the Punjab education sector reform program. Despite progress, authorities feel that school-level education is of low quality (Government of Pakistan, 2013). According to Andrabi et al. (2012) poor teaching quality results in low average achievement, and it is always measured by the competency of the teacher, subject-based knowledge, the efficacy of training, recruitment, motivation, and absenteeism.

Aside from poor teaching and learning, our elementary school system has another major issue. Even though all adjustments and plans are centered on various ways to improve primary education, clear evidence demonstrates that 22.84 million children are still not attending school (Ali et al., 2021; Waheed et al., 2022). Student dropout is a major problem that is not being addressed by any government measures. According to statistics, only 67% of children in Pakistan complete 5th grade and 39% complete secondary school (nemis, 2018). According to aser (2019), the reading and numeracy skills of students in grade 5 are lower than those

of children in grade 2. There is a significant disparity between the student's actual learning and anticipated learning results. Furthermore, our outmoded secondary curriculum provides no technical instruction. There is also a shortage of qualified persons. (Schwab et al., 2011; Zaman et al., 2022). These concerns have been in our country since 1959 and have remained ignored in our educational policies since 1970, 1972, 1979, 1992, and 1998. The policy report and the implementation process to fulfill the policy objectives contain inconsistencies.

Policy commitments, no doubt, emphasize the need of a significant focus on elementary education as compulsory and high aim of achieving a 100% literacy rate and student retention in schools, but there are no discernible effects. There is an intensive need to analyze policy choices, and policymakers should weigh potential impact while taking into account the economic and political costs of change, as well as technological feasibility as well as its implementation process and time horizon (Andreas, 2018). Furthermore, he claims that the reason for the inability to change the structure of education is the invisible component, which is made up of the interests, thoughts, motivations, and fears of the individuals involved. As a result, there is a significant gap between the design of reform initiatives and the implementation process. Policymakers will fail if they do not convince people of the significance of change. In this regard, the institution's stakeholders must have a shared understanding and collective ownership. Furthermore, the suitable policy atmosphere with innovations must be formed (Raza et al., 2021; Yano et al., 2006).

Purpose of the Study

The goal of the research was to get an in-depth knowledge of school stakeholders' experiences with the reform program. The researchers aimed to discover how school stakeholders' thoughts, feelings, and understandings assisted them in understanding the issue and giving meaning to their experiences. A detailed personal story was an excellent source of knowledge. As a result, the current study was conducted in a qualitative manner employing a phenomenological methodology. Education reform refers to the continuous change and upgrading of educational institutions. An initiative is a new strategy, activity, or movement taken to enhance something or solve a problem with positive outcomes and present circumstances. The researchers wanted to find out how school stakeholders' thoughts, feelings, and understandings helped them understand the problem and provide meaning to their experiences. A comprehensive personal story served as an excellent source of information.

The continuing transformation and enhancement of educational institutions is referred to as education reform. An initiative is a new strategy, activity, or move that is put in place to improve something or solve a problem with positive outcomes. A "stakeholder" in the context of education is someone who has an interest in the success of a school and its students. Stakeholders are those who have access to schools and either influence or are influenced by them. Officials, teachers, staff members, students, parents, relatives, and community people are all participants in this study. The study solicited input from stakeholders, as well as the rationale for reform efforts and the current state of affairs in schools. The study's purpose was to uncover gaps and vacuums in the implementation of reform initiatives based on school stakeholders' lived experiences.

Research Questions

1. What are the reflections of stakeholders about the rationale of the reform initiatives taken in Punjab School Reform Road Map 2010?
2. How do the initiatives for educational reform reflect the real situation in schools?
3. How can the initiatives be implemented to bring educational reforms in schools?

Research Methodology

The qualitative approach was chosen by the researchers since the issue under investigation required in-depth understanding. The goal was to have a profound understanding of the phenomenon or issue, and because multiple stakeholders were associated with the phenomenon, it was necessary that the lived experiences of stakeholders be included in the research. As a result, the phenomenological design was chosen. The purpose of the phenomenological approach is to bring to light the specifics of a phenomenon in order to see how stakeholders perceive themselves in a given circumstance. The researchers chose an educational phenomenon to better understand as integral part of the school teaching department. The qualitative method with phenomenological design was the most effective and original way to comprehend the phenomenon. Furthermore, life experiences provided new perspectives for establishing new strategies to ensure the success of educational program and activities.

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Selection of Participants

Because the sample used in the research was comprised of school stakeholders, both homogeneous and maximum variation purposive sampling were employed to obtain more specific information from

informants. The selection of participants who share similar perspectives and insights on a specific experience result in homogeneity (Langdridge, 2007; Smith et al., 2009). As a result, teacher participants belonged to homogeneous sampling. The sample includes parents, teachers, principals, and administrators. The primary purpose of using purposive sampling was to acquire precise information on the topic under investigation. When selecting the sample, the needs of the study topic were taken into account.

The sample size was consisted of 22 participants.

Table

Selection of Participants

Participants	Gender	Age	Title	Education
Participant 1	Male	40-50	Senior Headmaster	PhD (Special Education)
Participant 2	Male	35-40	Headmaster	MPhil (Chemistry)
Participant 3	Male	50-60	Senior Headmaster	MSc (PHYSICS)
Participant 4	Male	35-40	Headmaster	M.A (Political Science)
Participant 5	Female	50-60	Senior Headmistress	MSs (Special-Education)
Participant 6	Female	35-40	Headmistress	M.A (Education)
Participant 7	Female	35-40	Headmistress	M.A (Urdu)
Participant 8	Female	50-60	Headmistress	M.A(Islamic studies)
Participant 9	Male	40-50	SST	M.A (Urdu)
Participant 10	Male	30 -35	EST	M.A (History)
Participant 11	Male	30 -35	EST	MPhil (Islamic studies)
Participant 12	Male	30 -35	PST	MSc (Chemistry)
Participant 13	Female	25-30	SST	M.A (English)
Participant 14	Female	40-50	SST	MPhil (Chemistry)
Participant 15	Female	25-30	PST	M.A (Islamic studies)
Participant 16	Male	40-50	Parent	Matric
Participant 17	Female	30-35	Parent	F. A
Participant 18	Male	45-50	Deputy DEO	MPhil (Education)
Participant 19	Female	45-50	Deputy DEO	MPhil (Education)
Participant 20	Female	14-16	student	Matric
Participant 21	Female	30-35	EST	M.A
Participant 22	Female	14-16	student	Matric

Data Collection

The best method for phenomenology is an in-depth face-to-face interview. A personal interaction between a participant and an interviewer is defined as an interpersonal conversation. In this study, a type of study was conducted using qualitative research methodologies, and an interview was employed to investigate the phenomenon. Essential questions were asked in semi-structured interviews to identify the areas to be researched. Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer or interviewee to get deeper into or respond to the study phenomenon in greater depth. A semi-structured interview can be conducted using an interview guide as a framework. (Salmons, 2015). A researcher can ask follow-up questions and encourage participants to provide more details using probes and prompts or by giving a short period of silence (Bonevski et al., 2014).

The adaptability of the study tool also allowed the researchers to elaborate on a crucial concept for the phenomenon. The interview was extended for another 60 to 80 minutes.

Data Analysis

In accordance with the objectives of the study, researchers conducted a thematic analysis of the obtained data, taking into account the four characteristics of the various alterations. Throughout the interviews, many informants shared ideas or points of view that later emerged as major themes. The researchers used an analytical coding system to generate these topics. This coding system notifies the researchers of new data or concepts, assists the researchers in exploring and creating new regions, and assists the researchers in discovering connections (Richards & Morse, 2012). Thus, the categorization study enabled the researchers not only link and connect particular areas of the information (i.e., deductions), but also to pose questions regarding the creation of new (inductive) concepts.

Results of the Study

Defining School Reforms Initiative

When asked to explain the School Reforms Initiative, the majority of participants defined it as a process of making modifications to schools for overall improvement, generally for student academic success. Some participants considered it as a new plan, activity, or move that will enhance something or address a problem and provide positive consequences. One person characterized it as an organized procedure to reach a goal and referred to it as a supported, focused, and productive approach to achieving school excellence.

According to one administrative informant, the "key areas of reform" are the "development of standards and provision of better assessment, adoption of better data systems under the reform initiative process to schools, teachers, and parents with complete information on student progress, and providing support for teachers and school principals to become more effective." When participants were asked about school reform measures, they welcomed all steps taken by governments while also pointing out faults. Almost the majority of the participants expressed dissatisfaction with the reform attempts. These initiatives add to their workload and almost reduce their productivity.

Continuity of Reform Initiatives

Some participants mentioned the continuance of the reforms during my conversations with informants. They stated that in order to attain the long-term goal of these reform attempts, continuity and stability must be developed. The majority of participants discussed the government's did not continue "Continuous Professional Development" initiative. It had a significant part in the development of teachers' abilities. One former DTE head teacher said:

"I had been allotted 15 schools. I regularly attend my schools on its turns. Teachers had to prepare their lesson plans. I performed the duty of mentoring them. But now that I am a head teacher, I see that teachers have become lazy. They do not bother to prepare their lessons and don't like to teach students. They are promoting rote learning."

Another senior female teacher expressed her dissatisfaction with the discontinuity of training programs. She expressed that newly recruited teachers are highly qualified but unaware of teaching strategies. Some participants criticized our reform initiatives for remaining uncompleted. They also criticized our multilayered curriculum. One participant quoted evidence of the SNC (single national curriculum). He praised the initiative and commented that though this initiative is good, it has to face strong criticism. He said the private sector is resisting because by adopting it the discrimination of their institution will be dissolved. He commented,

"We are such a nation hanging between 'haves' and 'have-nots.'"

A number of participants proposed a constant reformation process to attain educational goals in Pakistan in order to address issues of accessibility, quality, equity, and good management. Furthermore, a strong political will is required to enhance our budget allocations by 5% of GDP or more in comparison to the country's demands. Appropriate capital investment in the education sector will result in the achievement of the stated goals. One of the participating deputy DEO females stated that the government has no strategy to meet the immediate needs of any school and that the department is helpless to meet the immediate needs of any school. She said that government policy and initiative becomes a victim of delay and the needs of the institution become a problem because of not meeting timely. She pointed out that government procedure is not being adopted properly.

The majority of interviewees also emphasized the terrible fact that our administrations lack stability. They claimed that the government's instability had harmed all of our reform efforts. One participant used the government project known as SNC (single national curriculum) as an example. PTI took this initiative for a brief length of time. He stated that if a project is given enough time to mature, it might be successful and bear fruit. According to one participant, the government should maintain the program that is producing good outcomes while discontinuing those that are not producing good results. After midday, the school initiative appears to have failed owing to a long wait since female personnel cannot stay in remote regions, especially

in winter, because the closing time is 5.30 p.m. and there is no monitoring in the evening. The participant noted that such an unreasonable program should be terminated after its completion so that the time, resources, and budget can be utilized for more productive goals.

Some of the participants talked about the discontinuity of the initiative of the Dengue app. According to them, it has become a useless activity that is continuing even on Sundays. Teachers expressed that the dengue activities have to come to school for sending activities through an app. According to them if the purpose of this app was to make people aware of dengue fever and bring awareness in society, so the awareness has been brought enough and the app should be discontinued so that the time and budget can be saved and could be used in some purposeful activity.

Lack of Political Vision

The majority of interviewees stated that Pakistan lacks political vision. Leaders are frequently unconcerned with our educational system. According to one participant, our great leader Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah's vision pointed out the highest sense of respect, honesty, responsibility, character building, and courageous and selfless service to the nation, and these characteristics lead to the country's socioeconomic development. Our Quaid placed a strong emphasis on Islamic teachings, technical and vocational education, and universal elementary education. He claimed that education is a matter of life and death in Pakistan. According to the participant, this form of political vision is required to meet the demands of the current century. One participant stated that the education budget is frequently underfunded.

According to one participant, education money is regularly abused due to political interference. Building funding, for example, is allocated to political groups such as the MNA and MPA and is typically utilized in areas where their vote bank is in the majority. Another area where there is a big need is neglect. She stressed once more that addressing our educational challenges requires a wide political viewpoint. Political intervention should be avoided in the education system. All school-related problems, like rationalization, are now significantly affected by politics. The government took the initiative to rationalize teachers in schools based on student requirements; however this was delayed owing to political involvement. The problem of teacher shortage would be alleviated if this was done.

Miserable Economy of Country

When participants reported their school circumstances and highlighted the absence of funds, amenities, infrastructure, and both instructional and support staff, it was discovered that schools were in poor condition and that there was an urgent need to enhance school funding. The majority of participants agreed that effective budget allocation for education departments, particularly at the school level, was necessary because the problem of access, quality, and equity began at the school level. That was said in public schools. They emphasized the importance of education policy for developing a learning environment which offers an equal chance for all academic achievements. The majority of them stated that our low economic situations are to blame for the difficulties in schools.

Contradictions between reforms and existing realities

The majority of the participants grumbled that policies are developed at a high level after foreign countries with different social and economic circumstances than Pakistan, so during the implementation process, local governments suffer a lot and sometimes have to be engaged in such practises that produce positive results on the surface but are negative in reality. They used PEC findings as an example, which had significant discrepancies when compared to students' learning achievements. Again, many hidden truths render the examination results untrustworthy. Some participants informed out that the school's enrollment figure, as reported in official documentation, is incorrect. According to practically all participants' thoughts, it is a regrettable fact that trustworthy information about completed years of schooling, age of starting school, literacy and numeracy skills, school quality, and technical training is not obtained through surveys. As a result, data availability is also an issue.

Again, there are inconsistent assertions in our policies. It is said that emphasis will be placed on obligatory primary education in order to attain 100% enrollment, yet the budget is set for higher education, which the poor cannot afford, and the problem remains unresolved. The issue at hand here is that the central authorities are still unaware with this reality that is obscured from policymakers' perspective. The government has concentrated on the local context in which the intervention will be implemented, yet the success of an intervention does not produce the same results in all regions. It is also highlighted that any transformation endeavour will fail if the higher authorities do not understand the underlying reality. Some of them also claimed that district rankings based on evaluation scores of school performance indicators led local governments to display fictitious statistics. These types of metrics lowered educational standards and generated ambiguity about the extent to which those measures were sensible.

“The government focused on UPE and forced the school teachers to bring students to public schools but

some students were missed due to not adjusting in public school and got admission to private schools. This was considered a fault or negligence on the part of the head teacher.”

Barriers to the implementation process

According to the majority of participants, proper implementation will be achievable only when initiatives are easily obtainable and realistically constructed. At the school level, they encounter numerous challenges such as a lack of funding, resources, time, and management. They stated that while free books were offered under the scheme for education for all and compulsory free schooling for all, the goal could not be met due to poverty. Many parents expressed their desire to earn bread rather than attend school. Most participants agreed that proper planning and supervision were required for reforms to be successful. Corruption, according to one participant, is the root-level barrier in the policy implementation procedure. She placed emphasis that because there is no effective check and balance in any initiative, all of our activities lead to corruption. She stated that without a check and balance, all teachers and principals become demotivated and dishonest. She emphasized that everyone is aware that there is no motivation or penalty, and that there is no need to work honestly. She went on to say that whenever a teacher was found guilty and was about to face an investigation, he was approached by a political leader, and the procedure against him was halted, wasting money, time, and resources.

The majority of participants saw our school environment as a hindrance to initiative implementation. According to them, the environment includes teachers, students, and school infrastructure, and the driving force behind them is the country's economic realities, which have a direct impact on children. Some participants stated that in order to remove barriers, piloting at a small scale should be initiated, and outcomes should be analyzed before the project is implemented at a larger scale.

Discussion

Despite government initiatives to make schools more conducive for instruction, schools remain in trouble due to a shortage of financing. In terms of school facilities Pakistani government schools face numerous issues. According to current research, schools lack suitable buildings and rooms, as well as a dearth of teaching staff. Because all categories of schools, primary, elementary, and secondary, lack a sweeper, school cleanliness has always been a problem, and school sanitation is a key indication assessing district ranking. Many shortcomings in education were discovered during the examination of the Fifth Five-Year Plan from 1977 to 1983. (GOP et al., 1977). To illustrate the parallelism, Jensen (2012) found in his study that Hong Kong has led its reform efforts through a careful evaluation of its education system, which revealed severe shortcomings in the education system.

The second and third study questions sought to investigate the difficulties confronted by educational institutions while dealing with reform initiatives. Person begins to deliver improved results as part of the school improvement plan, according to Crowther (2011). School changes are possible if school leadership participates, shares responsibilities with personnel, and is embedded in school culture. Glover et al. (2002) made this claim. As a result, it is the responsibility of school officials and teachers to improve the school's culture. Glaver et al., 2002. Teachers were discovered to collaborate with head teachers to perform various tasks set by the authorities, even though this required them to neglect their courses, and they claimed that they were accused of not teaching correctly.

The results of the third study question revealed discontent with the unrealistic policy concept. Generally, there were numerous complaints about these programmes because stakeholders were pressured to execute projects that could not be realistically achieved because they were expected to have 100% student and instructor attendance. If there was a drop in attendance, the principals were summoned to explain. Then the cleanliness should be perfect. The majority of participants stated that the district ranking system resulted in both positive and negative results. The positive aspect was that schools were improved in all aspects, but the negative aspect was that incorrect information was provided to mask school problems. During this procedure, the monitoring team as MEA abused its authority and threatened school personnel, including teachers and principals. The practise was largely observed in female schools. Fullan (1982) statement is in accordance with the above mentioned realities who said, “one person claims that schools are burdened with new changes; other says that there is nothing new under the sun.

The policy maker views teachers as reluctant for accepting change while a teacher grieves that changes are introduced for the self-aggrandizement of administrators. A university professor is of the view that schools are not the suitable place for the implementation of any reforms or change as being the reflection of society ;the other says that school head teachers are required more visions if any change is being taken place. The persons being “innovations establishment “ponder on the new ways to make new programs the part of institutions but teachers are of the view that these promoters should be the part of institution instead of programs.”

The third key theme, on the other hand, was the Continuity of Reform Initiative. It was stated that in order to attain the long-term goal of any reform initiative, stability and continuity must be developed. As a government effort that was abandoned, Continuous Professional Development played a significant role in increasing teacher ability. Due to a lack of training, teachers no longer bother to prepare their classes, dislike teaching students, and rote learning is promoted. As Afridi and Gul (2018) said similar words, "we are such nation taught by the untrained teachers". The study's findings also revealed the terrible fact that our governments lack stability. Hickey and Hossain (2019) presented a similar finding, stating that the political settlement plays a vital role in redefining capacity building and satisfying elites' commitment to education delivery. According to Bari's (2021) findings, one reason for training discontinuity is a shortage of finances, which is frequently waiting for donors like as DFID (now FCDO). Secondary sources such as the World Bank Report, the United Nations Report, and the OECD Reports further reinforced the idea that political and economic stability have a significant impact on educational reforms.

The fourth theme is on the tensions that arise between reforms and existing realities in schools. In Fullan theory, there are three phases or categories: commencement, implementation, and continuance. Fullan emphasized in his 2003 paper that educational reform should aim for the lofty objective of altering the context. Fullan (2003) contends that sustainable and long-term developments will be unable to be comprehended in developed and unhealthy contexts, and this point was clear from analysis that policies are established at a high level after foreign countries where their socioeconomic circumstances are different as compared to Pakistan, so during implementation process the local authorities suffer a lot and sometimes they have to be involved in such practices which bring positive outcomes at superficial level but in reality those are negative.

The example of PEC results was presented, which show significant discrepancies when compared to students' learning achievements.

Again, there are numerous concealed wrongdoing that render examination results questionable. Teachers in PEC centres are recognized to work to assist pupils studying in PEC centres (Khan, 2018). It was pointed out that the school's enrolment statistics in official records was incorrect. According to the Pakistan Economic Survey (PES, 2018), Pakistan has set targets for achieving 100% education during the last few decades; nevertheless, it has made modest progress and has only reached 62%. According to Diefenbach and Klarner (2008), as well as other current Western and Eastern research, reform initiatives in high schools have been failing due to the operational complicated nature of the institution and usually contradictory waves of imposed reform. This viewpoint was shared by (Hargreaves, 2003; Sarason, 1990; Shabbir et al., 2010).

Conclusion

The present research looked into the fundamental cause of why these initiatives failed and what plans of action were required to obtain the desired results. This research can help policymakers, new researchers, curriculum designers, parents, and other stakeholders build new programmes to attain educational goals. Furthermore, this research is valuable for province and district school leaders, educators, curriculum planners, politicians, and other participants who can incorporate recommendations into future duration policies and curriculum plans for youth holistic self-development. This study looked into the fundamental cause of why these initiatives failed and what strategies for implementation were required to obtain the desired results.

Many studies on the success and failure of initiatives have undoubtedly been conducted. However, this study was carried out in a unique manner. Different school stakeholders were participated in this study by evaluating their perspectives of various school reform projects. Their lived experiences provided fresh aspects for developing new tactics to ensure the success of programmes and initiatives to reform the educational system. The conflicts and disparities in initiative execution were investigated. Moreover, there was little research that investigated the implementation of reform initiatives at the school level.

Furthermore, this study can add to the existing body of knowledge and provide new perspectives for researchers as they examine more and more approaches to improve the outcomes of government programmes and plans. Furthermore, the research methods of this study can contribute to the current body of literature, particularly in Pakistan.

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