Bridging the Gap: Addressing Barriers to Education Policy Implementation through Stakeholder   Engagement in Multan

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Policy Statement

A comprehensive five-year plan is proposed to enhance Multan's education system. The plan prioritizes strategic investments in infrastructure, short term teacher training programs, vocational education, and active community involvement.

Abstract

This research critically examines the barriers that hinder effective implementation of education policies in Multan. Focusing on the voices of students and teachers, it highlights the complex issues that prevent progress in the education sector.

The research examines the underlying barriers to educational progress through student and teacher reviews gathered from the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews.

Participants provided statements that highlighted critical concerns, including inadequate resources, poor infrastructure, and a lack of institutional support. They also offered practical solutions, encouraging policymakers to engage more deeply with their lived experiences to create actionable and considerate policies. They proposed solutions that can help elevate the educational standards and increase education quality.

Introduction

Education is the foundation of societal progress, equipping individuals to realize their potential and contribute to their communities. In Pakistan, however, the education system faces continuous challenges, such as inadequate infrastructure, scarce resources, and untrained teachers thoroughly mentioned in *Reayat, Shah, and Shah (2020)* These issues severely affect learning outcomes.

In Multan, the situation is particularly alarming. With a literacy rate hovering around 60% according to the government website, the city trails significantly behind other regions. Schools are suffering with a shortage of qualified teachers, unsatisfactory infrastructure, and limited resources, creating an environment that weakens educational quality.

Despite policy efforts, the education sector in Multan continues to struggle. Policymakers often overlook meaningful engagement with key stakeholders, including students, teachers, and the local community. This disconnect results in policies that fail to address ground realities, limiting their effectiveness.

This study aims to explore the obstacles faced by stakeholders in Multan's education system, focusing on policy implementation. Through focus group discussions with students and interviews with teachers, it seeks to uncover the root causes of these challenges and identify actionable solutions. Ultimately, this research aspires to inform more inclusive, applicable policies that genuinely meet the needs of all stakeholders.

Literature Review

The existing body of research on education policy implementation in Pakistan highlights numerous barriers, ranging from socio-political limitations to gaps in stakeholder engagement. However, while these studies indicate towards critical challenges, they often unable to offering realistic, actionable strategies for bridging these gaps.

The challenges of implementing education policies in Pakistan are not well-documented in existing literature, the existing studies highlight systemic barriers such as weak stakeholder engagement, socio-political inequalities, and public misunderstandings of policy goals. *Irshad Ullah and Khan (2023)* emphasize the crucial role of public awareness in ensuring successful reforms. They argue that without community involvement, policies are often misunderstood and fail to achieve their intended impact. However, their analysis lacks a practical framework for establishing meaningful collaboration with stakeholders, leaving policymakers uncertain about how to translate awareness into actionable results.

Socio-economic and political constraints further compound the challenges of policy implementation. *Sattar et al. (2019)* explore these obstacles in Southern Punjab, including Multan. They suggest that increasing public understanding of policies could mitigate some of this resistance, yet their work does not address how deep-seated socio-economic inequalities can be effectively overcome through policy design or execution. Similarly, *Akram (2021)* identifies a significant gap in stakeholder engagement, noting that policies are often perceived as top-down directives. This perception fuels skepticism, particularly among students and teachers as they feel excluded from the decision-making process. Akram's findings point to the need for the active involvement of these groups to foster a sense of responsibility and ownership, but specific methods for achieving this are not briefly explained.

Another recurring theme in the literature is the lack of connection between policy formulation and execution. *Akhtar et al. (2022)* argue that this gap is also because of a lack of public awareness, which leads to widespread misconceptions and strengthen the barriers in the implementation. While their study highlights the importance of addressing misunderstandings, it does not explore how these misconceptions vary across human ecology, nor does it offer region-specific solutions. In the case of Multan, where cultural and socio-economic conditions are different from more urbanized areas, this oversight underscores the need for localized research that accounts for these unique factors.

The inactivity in perceptions of educational quality is another barrier identified in the literature. *Iftikhar et al. (2024)* examine how outdated views on education have persisted for decades,

largely due to limited public engagement in making policies. They emphasize the need for a strong feedback mechanism that incorporates public input to modernize the education system. However, their work remains largely focused on historical trends, giving little attention to new strategies for bridging the gap between policy designs and the lived realities of students and teachers.

Student engagement has also been highlighted as a critical component of effective policy development. *Shah et al. (2023)* demonstrate the importance of student feedback in improving the quality of education. Their findings reveal that students' perceptions and experiences are key to aligning policies with ground realities. However, like other studies, their work falls short of indicating systematic methods for gathering and integrating this feedback into broader policy frameworks.

In summary, while the existing literature provides valuable insights into the challenges of education policy implementation in Pakistan, several gaps still remain unaddressed. There is a lack of focus on specific and actionable strategies for engaging diverse stakeholders, particularly in regions like Multan. Additionally, existing studies often fail to consider the regional socio-economic disparities and the localized barriers that prevent effective policy execution. This research seeks to address these gaps by centering on the lived experiences of students and teachers in Multan, with the aim of developing practical solutions to enhance policy effectiveness in the region.

If we look into other countries successful models for guidance, we find a lot that can help us stabilize our education system. Zhiyang Zhou's study, *Inspiring Practices in Educational Globalization: The Case of Finland*, provides a compelling analysis of Finland's education system as a model of instructional excellence and equity. The research highlights Finland's success in integrating high-quality teaching with equal access to education, ensuring that all students, regardless of background, receive a strong academic foundation. A key factor in this success is Finland's detailed and methodical teacher training programs, which require educators to obtain advanced degrees and participate in continuous professional development. The study also emphasizes Finland's innovative pedagogical framework, which prioritizes critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability. By examining Finland's education system, Zhou's research offers valuable insights into how other nations, including Pakistan, could improve their education policies by focusing on teacher quality, equitable resource distribution, and modernized teaching methodologies. This study strengthens the argument that sustainable educational reforms require not just infrastructural changes but also investments in teacher capacity and student-centered learning approaches.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach, combining focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews to investigate barriers to education policy implementation in Multan.

Geographic Focus:
The geographic focus of this research is Multan because after viewing several research papers, it was observed that there isn't much recent research on the respective topic. According to the census in 2017, the literacy rate of the city is approximately 55% which is very low. So there is a need for immediate attention to raise the literacy rate and the first step is research.

Focus Group Discussions:
Two focus group discussions were conducted with students from diverse educational backgrounds. Each of the focus group discussions had 12 students.These students were selected from different environments; 12 government students and 12 private. This helped in understanding the problems they face and the issues that are in their knowledge. The balanced and minimal number of students made the conversations easier and the analysis better. The students These discussions aimed to gather insights into students' perceptions of existing educational policies and the challenges they face in their implementation. By fostering an open dialogue, the focus groups allowed the participants to share their experiences and collectively identify key barriers.

Interviews:
Three semi-structured interviews with teachers provided professional insights into systemic issues affecting policy implementation.The teachers were selected in accordance with experience; a veteran teacher with a lot of experience of the education sector, a mid-carrier teacher to understand the ongoing struggles and a newer teacher to understand the initial challenges. This helped in determining the mutual and individual issues they notice in the education system.

The data collected from both methods was processed following a qualitative thematic analysis approach. This thematic approach made it possible to identify the key points and explore the deeper complexities of the problems.

Results

This research identified a series of critical challenges that significantly hinder the effective implementation of education policies in Multan. These insights collected from students and teachers, highlight systemic issues that require immediate and targeted solutions.

1. Insufficient Resources:

One of the most frequently cited issue was the shortage of essential learning materials and technological tools in schools. Students reported that textbooks were either outdated or insufficient in number, making it difficult to study effectively. Additionally, a lack of access to technology such as computers, projectors, and reliable internet limits opportunities for students to engage in modern, technology-driven education.

"*Our school has a computer lab, but most of the computers don't work. How are we supposed to compete with students from other schools when we don't even have basic technology.***" - An Intermediate Student**

Teachers emphasized that this resource gap not only hinders their ability to deliver quality instruction but also leaves students unprepared for competitive academic and professional environments.

"*Many students don't have access to technology at home, and the school doesn't have enough computers. How can we prepare them for the modern world when they lack the most basic resources?***" - A Senior Teaacher**

The absence of these fundamental resources has created a learning environment that is inactive and unresponsive to the demands of the 21st century.

2. Poor Infrastructure:

"*It's hard to focus when the environment itself is so discouraging.***" - A Matriculation student.**

The condition of school infrastructure in Multan emerged as another major concern. Many schools operate in unsafe buildings with insufficient classrooms, broken furniture, and inadequate sanitation facilities. Students described these environments as demotivating, they cited them as key barriers to their regular attendance. Teachers highlighted that the absence of safe, well-maintained spaces negatively impacts both teaching and learning outcomes.

"Classrooms are overcrowded, furniture is broken, and there aren't enough facilities. In such conditions, both teachers and students struggle to stay motivated." **- A Teacher**

3. Limited Teacher Training and Support:
The research also revealed significant gaps in teacher training and professional development. Many teachers reported that they lacked access to updated training programs, leaving them unequipped to adopt modern teaching methods or effectively manage multiple classrooms.

"We rarely get opportunities for professional development. Teaching methods keep evolving, but we are left to figure things out on our own." **- A Teacher**

The limited availability of workshops, seminars, or mentorship opportunities further supports this issue, making it difficult for educators to improve their skills over time. Teachers expressed frustration at the lack of institutional support, noting that they often felt isolated in addressing the challenges they face in the classroom.

4. Lack of Vocational and Career Guidance Programs:
Students consistently expressed the need for vocational training and career guidance programs, which are largely absent from Multan's education system. Many students described feeling uncertain about their future career paths, citing a lack of opportunities to develop practical skills that align with market demands. Teachers also highlighted that the absence of such programs leaves students unprepared for the job market, particularly in a city where economic opportunities are limited.

"Not every student will go to university, yet we don't offer practical skill training. If we had vocational programs, more students could secure jobs after school." **- A Senior Teacher**

5. Weak Parental and Community Engagement:

"Parents often see education as just getting good grades, but they don't realize the importance of active involvement in their child's learning process." **- A Matriculation Student**

Parental involvement in children's education was reported to be minimal, with most parents either unaware of or disengaged from their child's academic progress.

"Whenever we try to involve parents in school matters, attendance at meetings is low. Many don't see education as a shared responsibility." **- A Teacher**

Teachers noted that this lack of communication between schools and families limits the effectiveness of educational interventions.

Consequences of These Challenges

The combined impact of these challenges has far-reaching consequences for students, teachers, and the wider community.

Poor Academic Outcomes: Many students struggle to meet basic academic benchmarks due to resource and infrastructure limitations. This leads to disengagement, low self-esteem, and poor performance in examinations. This makes the students feel discouraged and they lose interest in education.

"*Sometimes, I feel like no matter how hard I try, I won't succeed because the system isn't built to support us. It's frustrating to know that students in better-funded schools have so many more opportunities.***" - A Matriculation Student**

High Dropout Rates:

"*A lot of my friends didn't continue after school because they had to start working.***" - An Intermediate Student**

Economic pressures, coupled with inadequate support systems, contribute to a high dropout rate, particularly among students from marginalized backgrounds.

Unprepared Workforce: The absence of vocational training and career counseling leaves students unequipped for the demands of the job market. The students are not taught the practical fundamentals of what they study in the books. They are hence unprepared to step into their practical life after studies and face issues.

"*I worry about my future because I don't have any practical skills. We study theory, but when it comes to real-life applications, we are completely unprepared.***" - A Matriculation Student**

The teachers are unable to preach quality education due to lack of training. They cannot prepare the students without the important basic tools. Due to insufficient resources, the students are left unprepared to face the real world.

Teacher Burnout and Turnover: Teachers, overwhelmed by resource constraints and a lack of support, often experience burnout, leading to high turnover rates and a decline in overall teaching quality.

"*When teachers don't get training, resources, or even basic appreciation, motivation decreases. This affects how they teach, I've seen so many new teachers who left the profession because they don't see any improvement in conditions. We lose teachers with potential everyday, and in the end, it's the students who suffer the most.***" - A Teacher**

The Solutions Proposed by the Teachers and Students

Despite these challenges, both students and teachers offered valuable suggestions to address the systemic issues facing Multan's education system.

Infrastructure Development: Students and teachers stressed the need for urgent repairs and upgrades to school buildings.

"*Improving school buildings and providing basic facilities like clean drinking water and proper classrooms should be a priority. A better environment will help both students and teachers perform well.***" - A Teacher**

Basic amenities such as functional classrooms, proper sanitation, and access to clean drinking water were identified as priorities for creating a more conducive learning environment.

Access to Modern Resources: Teachers advocated for the provision of updated textbooks, learning materials, and technological tools. They emphasized that access to computer labs and internet facilities could significantly enhance both teaching and learning experiences.

"*If we had a proper computer lab and internet access, we could learn skills that would actually help us in the future. Right now, we're far behind students from better-equipped schools.***" - A Matriculation Student**

Regular Teacher Training Programs: Teachers highlighted the need for consistent professional development opportunities to equip them with modern teaching methods and classroom management skills. They also proposed the establishment of mentorship programs to provide ongoing support. The programs should be provided by the government to help the teachers adapt to new teaching methods. The students also mentioned that their performance can be better if the teacher is skilled. An unprepared teacher can never prepare the students for the future.

"*Sometimes teachers just read from the book and don't explain things properly. If they got better training, classes would be more interesting and helpful for us.***" - An Intermediate Student**

Vocational Training and Career Guidance: Students suggested the introduction of practical skill-building workshops and career counseling sessions to help them navigate potential career paths. They recommended partnerships with local businesses and industries to create hands-on learning opportunities. The teacher also showed concerns for the students practical learning.

"*Students need career counseling and vocational training so they have options beyond traditional jobs. Schools should collaborate with industries to offer practical skills training.***" - A Teacher**

Community Engagement: Teachers proposed greater involvement of parents through regular parent-teacher meetings and awareness campaigns.

"*The parents should also be more active about their child's academic conditions.***" - A Teacher**

They also recommended collaborating with local NGOs and community leaders to mobilize resources and support for schools.

"*Local NGOs and government… they have to contribute in the education sector if we want to secure a bright future***" - A Teacher**

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Conclusion

This research uncovers the multifaceted challenges hindering education policy implementation in Multan. By amplifying the voices of students and teachers, it offers actionable insights for improving the system. Policymakers must prioritize inclusive strategies, drawing on local perspectives to create policies that are not only effective but also deeply rooted in the realities of those they aim to serve. The government should start short term teacher training sessions to prepare the teachers for the education system ahead. Academic and vocational training programs should be made to encourage the students to provide better learning outcomes. The curriculum should be updated according to the latest world standards.

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