

School Teachers' Perspectives on School Education Reforms in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

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Abstract

The discourses of inclusive and equitable education for all remained central to Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf's (PTI) political campaign in 2013 general election. After successful formation of government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), the PTI led provincial government in KP embarked on education reforms. There are bold claims of success by PTI government and serious concern and constructive criticism by opposition parties regarding PTI's education reforms. Nevertheless, teachers' perspective on the education reform in KP is missing from the popular discourses. This study, thus, was prompted by a single important question-how do school teachers perceive and experience education reforms in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa? The main objective of the study was to explore teachers' perspective on education reforms at school level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa from 2013 to 2018. The data for the article come from 40 school teachers. Participants were selected with the help of purposive sampling technique. We collected data with the help of interview guide in face to face in-depth qualitative interviews with the respondents. The study findings reveal that the recent educational reforms have resulted many positive changes.

Keywords: Educational reforms, In-depth qualitative interviews, purposive sampling, teachers' perspective

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Introduction

“There is no doubt that the future of our state [Pakistan] will and must greatly depend upon the type of education we give to our children, and the way in which we bring them up as future citizen of Pakistan....We should not forget that we have to compete with the world which is moving very fast...We have to see that they are fully qualified and equipped to play their part in the various branches of national life in a manner which will do honor to Pakistan” (Quaid-i-Azam, 1947 cited in Siddiqui, 2016:275-276). Quaid-i-Azam stressed that education is a matter of life and death for Pakistan. Despite Quaid-i-Azam’s clear vision and provision of basic guidelines for future educational development in Pakistan, education never received central priority and place in successive government policies and development plans. The failure of education reforms and policies (from 1947 to 2009) is due lack of political will, external/foreign hegemonic interest, and their foreignness to the local culture.

Education reforms and policies in Pakistan, ranging from the issue of fixing the national language to the ideological messages, remained subject of debate in criticism since 1947 (Nayyar & Salim, 2005; Siddiqui, 2016; Ullah & Skelton, 2013). In 1959, the commission on education was set up. During this era, Private education institutions in the country were nationalized. The 1979 education policy was prepared and lunched under Zia ulHaq military regime with overemphasis on Islamization of Pakistansociety. The 1992 education came up with detailed recommendations to improve the situation on universities campuses. The 1998 education policy was developed with long term planning and vision. The agenda remained incomplete due to military takeover by General Pervez Musharraf in 1999. With immense pressure and heavy funding from international agencies after 9/11, the government of Pakistan was told to fight terrorism. Heavy funding was made to Pakistan for changing curriculum, textbooks and teachers’ education. Since 2000, various reforms were introduced in the education system across all provinces, including KP. In KP, change in curriculum was one of the priority areas. In addition to curriculum and textbooks, pedagogy, staff selection, fund reform, technology many more areas were focused. Unfortunately, the desired achievements and the substantial improvements could not be observed in the education sector (I. Ahmad et al., 2012). In short the ill-prepared education policies and their implementation have pushed Pakistan education system to be one of the worse education system in Asia (Ullah 2013). Shahid Siddiqui’s book-*Education Policies in Pakistan: Politics, Projection and Practices* provides deeper insight and understanding of education policies and their failures in Pakistan. The book gives a succinct and historical account of education policies and practices in Pakistan.

The study Context

Under the 18th Amendment in 2010, the power and autonomy to run educational affairs was transferred to all provincial governments of Pakistan. Awami National Party (ANP), which was in power in KhyberPakhtunkhwa from 2008 to 2013, introduced the reformed curriculum in schools. In 2008, the ANP led government passed an Act to introduce local language-Pashto- as a compulsory subject in all public schools in the province. It was decided that the medium instruction in schools should be the mother tongue-Pashto(J. Shah et al., 2012). The new reformed curriculum led to hue and cry from the religious parties that viewed the new syllabus as secular and against the spirit of KP's people. PTI, immediately after coming to power in 2013, declared education emergency in the province. In 2013, the government of PTI, introduced different educational reforms at school Level. These educational reforms included a) teachers recruitment through National Testing Service (NTS), b) change in textbooks, c) change in the examination system, d) teacher's promotion on the basis of seniority, and e) reconstruction of schools(Fazal et al., 2014). It is pertinent to mention that these reforms were missing in the previous government. As highlighted by Aslam, (2009)that teacher's selections in the previous governments were not the basis of merit. It is claimed that PTI government changed the old biased and traditional trend of teachers' selection at school level. They also abolished the terms and conditions of professional degrees i.e., Certificate of Teaching (CT), Primary Teaching Certificate (PTC), and Associate Diploma in Education (ADE) Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) for teaching in schools.

The PTI government also introduced biometric attendance system for teachers in schools. This steps led to teachers' regularity and punctuality in schools. This was ensured through Independent Monitoring Unit (IMU) (Khan, 2013). They appointed 303 monitors for boys' schools and 172 for girls' schools. The main objectives of the project were to find out ghost schools, absent teachers and most importantly to supervise the entire functions of the school system. The members of IMU regularly visit different schools to check regularity and functions of the teachers. They have been provided different kinds of modern technological gadgets to keep the record of teachers' performance without any manipulation in the data (Shaheen, 2013). Studies show improvements in the regularity and functionality of teachers with the introduction of IMU in KP education system(A. Ahmad, 2009; Fazal et al., 2014).

The PTI led government in KP also revised school curriculum and textbooks as part of their education reform initiative. Hina and Ajmal (2016)reported that the government of KP has added some new topics in the science subjects-math, physics, chemistry and biology. These changes keep student updated about the new inventions and discoveries in the field of Science and Technology. Moreover, the 'revised

curriculum carries colorful pictures with text which make it easy for students to understand the lessons (Soomro & Tanveer, 2017). Likewise, the government of KP has also translated various text-books into English language in order to enable students of public sector school to compete with the students of elite private schools (S. J. Shah, 2010). Similarly, efforts are done to bring uniformity in the education system in the province (J. Shah et al., 2012). These efforts are claimed to bring similarities in the course contents of public and private schools system and reduce the learning gap (Ghazi et al., 2013).

Review of Literature

The purpose of education has evolved according to the needs of society throughout the ages (Taneri, 2016). Historically, education policies and reforms were guided and driven by human capital approach. Human Capital Theory has promoted education to a key instrumental role in boosting economic growth (Gillies, 2011). The general aim has been to contribute to economic development and to improve the living standards of the people. Each society wants to respond to the current needs of age by its education system (Amanchukwui & Daminabo, 2014). In contemporary credential societies, however, the main purposes of education are to support learners in acquiring knowledge, technical skills, and the dispositions that enable them to be informed, productive, and responsible citizens of their national and global communities. It is to help them to be life-long active learners and effective members of society (Arends & Kilcher, 2010).

It is important to highlight that the contemporary globalized world has become increasingly complex. Due to the increasing complexity of today society, education system is faced with new demands and challenges. Globalization and modern technology has stressed educational reforms within the broader national and international context (Davies & Guppy, 1997). These pressures have always brought changes to education system in Pakistan.

Since the inception of Pakistan, different governments have attempted to introduce educational reforms at school level. Educational reforms is the subject matter of educationists, politicians and policy makers at provincial and federal level in Pakistan (Ford, 2017). Unfortunately, from the beginning, educational reforms in Pakistan did not produced expected results (Ullah & Skelton, 2013). The basic reason behind this failure, is that educational reforms and policies do not reflect the socio-cultural and economic needs of our society (Aslam, 2009). He also asserted that lack of teachers and expert's involvement in educational reforms and policies are the main reasons of its failure. It is pertinent to mention that educational reforms and policy in Pakistan is always the matter of politicians and bureaucrats. They do not want to give opportunities to

educationists to develop a well-designed educational policy for the country. They have been using educational policy for their political interests, which in turn affect educational system in the country(Grindle, 2017).

Research Methodology

The purpose of this paper is to explore teachers' perspective on education reforms at the school level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has a total area of 74,521 sq(R. Ullah et al., 2020). This is a small scale study (covers one district-Dir Upper KP). The study focused on broader question: how do teachers perceive the PTI' led government education reforms in KP? We aimed to have an in-depth understanding of KP education reforms with an insider perspective. The data for the study come from 40 school teachers. They (school teachers) were selected with the help of purposive sampling technique. Only those teachers were included in the study who were willing to participate in the study. Interview guide with open ended questions was used as tool of data collection. The data was collected in a face to face in-depth qualitative interviews during 2017-last year of the PTI's 1st term in KP. Each interview took 40 to 60 minutes.

We processed the data in line with the thematic analysis within the broader qualitative data analysis technique-using coding procedure. At the very out set of analysis, we transcribed our field data and familiarized ourselves with key points and ideas expressed by the study respondents. We, after developing good sense of our data, assigned codes to similar themes. We then looked for similarities and connections between similar responses. The aim here was to organize them under the key education reforms with meaningful discussion. We have presented our respondents' opinions under key education reforms initiatives with informed discussion.

As mentioned earlier and reiterated here that this study is based on a small sample size which does not qualify it for generalization of its results. One of the primary factors limiting the validity of this study remains the respondents gender-all respondents were males and therefore does not represent the opinions of female teachers. We deem it important to mention here that it was not possible for male researchers to interview female teachers for an hour in the cultural context of KP. The study was carried out in one of the rural districts in KP. Its' results, therefore, may not be generalized to urban districts. Another study, similar nature, needs to be carried out for exploring female' teachers' perspective on education reforms in KP.

Findings and Discussion

We analyzed, interpreted and presented through four main themes. These four headings are actually four of the many reforms introduced by the PTI Led government in KP.

School Teachers' Perspective on Educational Reforms in KP

Respondents were asked to express their views on the education reforms. Our respondents unanimously appreciated the newly introduced education reforms. They referred to various educational reforms and spoke high of these reforms. They particularly mentioned teachers' recruitments through National Testing Service (NTS), change in text-books, Independent Monitoring Unit (IMU), introducing new written exams, and teachers' promotion policy. They also appreciated government's investment in school infrastructure (construction of boundary walls) and improving school security, especially the security of girl schools. The following excerpts are a few examples among many that are skimmed from the majority respondents' views regarding education reforms.

The newly introduced reforms are appreciable and fruitful. Improvement could be seen in teacher's attendance, increase in enrollment, merit based appointment and inclusion of Islamic values in textbooks. We see improvement in security as well.

Most of our respondents, especially young teachers, referred to good results of these reforms. It was argued that "the new education reforms have improved teachers attendance and quality of teaching in schools". These responses affirm that educational reforms are necessary for improving quality of education. Some respondents, although few in numbers, asserted that reforms are always informed by political agendas. One of the respondents argued:

Educational reform should be seen as a political agenda of each government. These are intended to modify society as per the wishes of political parties. The current educational reforms cannot decrease the wide gap between the elite and common people education and learning inequalities. These are intended to decisive people and shut the mouth.

The above quote is informed criticism on the current reforms introduced by the KP government. Responses like this are not new but prevailing across societies. Expressing dissatisfaction and distrust in the education reforms and associating them with political agendas of the political party in power is not new and limited to KP but is a global phenomenon(Taneri, 2016). To obtain more detailed understanding of the newly introduced reforms, study's respondents were asked to give examples of educational reforms that are good in their views.

Teachers' Perspective on Changes in School Curriculum and Textbooks

Curriculum is the set of academics courses and contents taught in schools, college and university to achieve certain ends in students (Meyer et al., 2017). In simple words, curriculum is a body of knowledge to be transmitted to students. The politics of curriculum and power war on the pages of textbooks is not new (Apple, 2014; Ullah, 2018). For almost more than hundred years, educators have been at war with each other over what the nature and contents of school curriculum should be in a particular society. Curriculum and textbooks provide key ideological sites through which power is exercised, maintained and challenged. "Education is also a site of conflict about the kind of knowledge that is and should be taught, about whose knowledge is official and about who has the right to decide... what is to be taught" (Apple, 2014). In short, no knowledge is neutral and apolitical. School knowledge is designed, written, approved and taught with hegemonic interest and objectives (Ullah, 2018). Curriculum reforms in Pakistan are no exception. Since the very inception of the country in 1947, school curriculum remained the key site of national and international ideological politics (Nayyar & Salim, 2005; H. Ullah, 2018). Nevertheless, changes in the curriculum could not achieve the desired goals and results and remained subject to persistent change. The political, education and social roles of curriculum and textbooks in KP have always been influenced international and national hegemonic forces (Nayyar & Salim, 2005; H. Ullah, 2018). Shah et al., (2012) and Iqbal (2016) also argued that governments always tried to change curriculum. General Zia ulHaq, after the coup in 1977, took the agenda of Islamization of Pakistani society to legitimize his rule. Education system, including textbooks were used to achieve his quest of Islamization. After 9/11, textbooks were drastically changed and peace messages, discourses against terrorism, idealized form of western cultural values and powerful images of religious diversity were embedded into textbooks during Awami National Party (ANP) (Ullah, 2012). In the same fashion, after coming to power in 2013, the PTI led provincial government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa succumbed to the regressive demands of its coalition partner Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) to revert to the curriculum of public schools. The PTI government, in addition to introducing textbooks in English, added more details about Islam, ideology and nationalism in the textbooks.

Most of our respondents appreciated the current changes in curriculum and loaded their concerns about the previous governments' changes. They said that the changes made by the earlier government were external in nature and irrelevant in the context of social, political, and economic development of the country in general and that of the KP context in particular. One of the powerful excerpts from the data is presented here to share the majority respondents' views.

Previous governments [during Mushrarraf's regime and ANP term] secularized school curriculum. Previous government embedded stuff into school textbooks that were idealizing foreign culture and religions.

Class 8 Pakistan Studies textbook, reprinted by the previous provincial government carried chapters on Raja Dahir and Maharaja Ranjit Singh (Malik, 2006). Similarly, many western values and cultural dresses were idealized as the only form of good dress (Ullah, 2012). The promotion of western cultural values in KP textbooks were criticized by Jamaat-i-Islami (Malik, 2006) and academics (Ullah, 2012). In 2004, SirajulHaq (the senior minister of the MuttahidaMajlis-e-Amal [MMA] in the then North West Frontier Province (NWFP) asserted that the we should come up with a curriculum, which had the potential to produce good Muslims, besides churning out good doctors and engineers. PTI, in consensus with Jumat-e-Islami, introduced many of the changes JI wished. Our respondents argued:

Many of the secular discourses in school books have been replaced with religious text. These referred to the replacement of 'good morning' with '*Assalam-u-Alikum*'. Similarly, young girls and women pictures without *dupatta* [culturally approved piece of cloth with which women cover their heads and chest] have been replaced girls and women pictures earring *dupatta* and scarf. .

These responses show that textbooks' knowledge is not neutral and objective. It is subjective designed, written, approved and taught by real people with real hegemonic interest (Ullah, 2018).

Teacher Recruitments Process

The quality of teaching is directly link to the quality education and the way students learn. One of the key reasons of poor quality of education in public schools is the appointment of teachers without merit. The PTI government declared education emergency and introduced merit based appointment, promotion and transfers of school teachers. PTI government introduced test/exam based appointment of school teachers through the National Testing Service (NTS)-one of the most reputed organizations across Pakistan for academic performance. First, the government decided to recruit highly qualified and professional teachers at school level. Second, they attempted to upgrade professional skills of the teachers through training. To know teachers perceptive on the effectiveness of this newly introduced system, we asked our respondents to express their views. One participants stated:

Since 2013, the KP Elementary & Secondary Education (E & SE) Department has appointed more than 25000 teachers through NTS. The provincial government has also announced that 15000 more school teachers will be recruited till 2018 through NTS. After selection of candidates, nine months compulsory pedagogical training will be given to the selected candidates

The new policy of school teacher recruitment discounted the earlier practice of giving importance to professional education degrees i.e., Bachelor of Education (B.Ed), Master of Education (M. Ed) primary teaching certificate (PTC). The government decided to eliminate the terms and conditions of professional and relevant degrees for teaching. However, newly appointed teachers are provided nine months teachers training. It was argued that this system has given fair chance and opportunities to a large numbers of young graduate to enter teaching profession. Commenting on this newly introduced system of teaching recruitment, one of the respondents argued:

The process of teachers' recruitment through NTS is transparent and meritocratic. Majority of the teacher appointed through NTS are Master and M.Phil. degree holders. Moreover, the selection of teacher through NTS is made without any external influence. The results of NTS are available on website and every candidate can have access to the merit list and other requirements

The above quote revealed that teachers' selection through NTS is one of the most important step towards quality education in province. Teacher selection through NTS is based on merit. Teacher who are selected through NTS are highly qualified and competent. Teachers' selection through NTS is made without any political interventions. Therefore, it is expected that the qualification and potentials of teachers would produce better results as compared to past. Another participant stated:

It is observed that candidates with regular degrees score higher than those with private degrees. Many regular degree holders got excellent marks in NTS and they are appointed in different government primary school of district Dir Upper. Furthermore, NTS qualified teachers understand English, math's and general knowledge better than the teachers who entered teaching on political basis. These three subjects are very difficult for teachers came under the traditional system of recruitment. Therefore, currently appointed teachers are more competent than earlier selected teachers

In the light of the above discussions, it is argued that those who did bachelor or master as regular candidates are good than those who had their qualification as private candidates. It can be said that majority of the teacher appointed in various schools of District Dirare more competent than teachers who were recruited by previous government. Improvement could be seen in students learning outcome. On the contrary, some of the participants did not agree with new system of teachers' selection through NTS. One of the respondents expressed his views as:

Candidate randomly score high in NTS test and make his/ her merit more strong. In district Dir upper, mostly private degree holders are recruited in primary school through NTS, which has declined the standard of education. He said that NTS does not appraise the talent of candidates. Comprehensive test and demonstration would be the best way to recruit teachers in the government schools.

The current study reflects that NTS did not appraise the talent of the candidate properly. Test arranged by NTS organization is not descriptive, that is why it did not highlight the general ability of the candidates. These teachers are also lacking professional skills because; they did not get regular education and professional certificate/course such as Certify Teachers (CT), Primary Teaching Certificate (PTC), and B.Ed. etc. Therefore they are not expecting to produce good and quality education in the new generation. To elaborate the discussion, one of the teachers said that;

It is observed that, a number of selected teachers are private degree holders. Some of the teachers could be seen to have teaching diploma from Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad (AIOU). In most of the cases, even the candidates did not appear in NTS test, and they have sent relatives, friends for test and got higher score in the test. Actually, these types of recruitment ruined the nursery of our nation

The study come up with mixed bag of responses regarding the appointment of teachers through NTS. There are those who have professional teaching certificates and degrees but lack skills how to teach. Most of them have earned their professional degrees under the distance learning system. Some of them have even received it under fake examination. There is a large number of people with these substandard degrees who were successfully qualified NTS got appointment during the education emergency announced by current KP government. Such kind of policy has declined the standard of education school level. Therefore, it should be mandatory that teachers should have professional courses. In addition, teachers' recruitment process needs to be changed. They

should be tested extensively in descriptive test as well as demonstration for the teaching position in various government schools.

Conclusion and Discussion

Our analysis of the field data suggests that majority of the respondents spoke very high of the education reforms in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa between 2013 and 2018. The data also revealed that the teachers were very optimistic about the fruits and results of education reforms. The study also substantiates the argument that school textbooks are used as tools for promoting or subordinating a particular ideology. The results also exposed that teachers' appointment through NTS and merit is the key to quality education and must be encouraged as teaching career is very important, not only to educate children but also to change the future of the society in the right direction.

Recommendations

On the basis of the study findings and conclusion, this article recommends that educational quality and standard can be improved if our educational system is given proper attention. Teaching quality in schools need to be improved. In short, to address this issue, the following measures need to be taken.

1. Curriculum and textbooks revision should be done in the best interest of the people of Pakistan without external influence and interest.
2. Teachers need to be professionally trained before they are supposed to teach in schools as the success of educational reforms largely depends on teachers who have awareness about current educational reforms.

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