



Evaluating the Impact of Devolution on Educational Outcomes in Balochistan: Evidence from 22 Districts (2004–2015)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effects of Pakistan's 18th Constitutional Amendment (2010), that decentralized education governance to provincial governments on educational outcomes in Balochistan. Based on district level data from the Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement (PSLM) Surveys, 2004–2015, it adopts a Difference-in-Differences (DiD) method across 22 districts to assess pre- and post-devolution performance. Four measures were examined: completion (primary and above), net enrolment (middle and matric levels), adult literacy. The findings show significant increase in all the parameters after devolution, with middle level enrollment and primary completion rate reported as significant, and uneven gains were observed; Mastung, Kharan, and Gwadar showed improvement, whereas Awaran, Lasbela, and Jhal Magsi lagged behind. The results further highlight that although devolution facilitated responsiveness and increased local policy design, the structural barriers including inadequate institutional capacity and regional disparities had an adverse effect on equity in outcomes. The study concludes the decentralized system may improve the quality of education, if supported by targeted investments, governance capacity building and context specific reforms to ensure equity across all districts in Balochistan.



Introduction

It is universally accepted that education serves as a means of development and the key factor for socio economic development. But in Pakistan the system wide inefficiencies and governance challenges have long stifled the provision of a quality education (Aziz et al., 2014). Of the provinces in the country, Balochistan is geographically the largest but has been socio-economically marginalised since independence, with low literacy rates, poor school attendance,

and weak infrastructure (Baloch., 2021; Uddin et al., 2025). These issues have led to increase in voices that demands for more local and responsive models of governance.

When the 18th Amendment in Constitution was passed in 2010 it had a significant impact because it transferred key governmental functions such as education from the federal to the provincial levels. By giving provinces the authority to mold policies in accordance with their unique demographics, languages, cultures and geographical areas as well as by making decision making more responsive to peoples needs the reform sought to enhance service delivery (Speer 2012). It is anticipated that devolution will enable provincial governments to better meet local educational needs maximize resource utilization and improve accountability. (Atisa et al., 2021; Chinembiri, 2024; Ibrahim, 2024; Turay & Karim, 2022)

However, the actual impact of devolution on educational achievements is debatable and unexplored particularly in Balochistan. Whereas some contend that decentralization has positively affected governance and responsiveness, others observe ongoing shortfalls in capacity, resources and institutional coordination that might have compromised its intended advantages (Azfar et al., 2018; Faguet, 2014). The province's internal heterogeneity – with 22 districts having differential patterns of development, tribal relations and infrastructure access – also raises questions concerning whether devolution has affected different parts of Balochistan to the same extent.

This research aims to examine the impact of devolution on education outcomes in Balochistan using Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement (PSLM) Survey district level data from 2004–2015. The research will compare pre- and post-devolution trends for four key education indicators: (1) the population that has completed primary education or higher, (2) the net enrolment rate at the middle level (ages 11–13) by district, (3) the net enrolment rate at the matric level (ages 14–15) by region, and (4) adult literacy among the population aged 15 years and older.

Finally, this paper makes a contribution to the overarching discussion of governance and education reform in Pakistan by providing an empirical analysis of the impact of devolution on one of its poorest provinces. It makes policy recommendations to strengthen decentralised education systems, in order to promote equitable and sustainable development throughout Balochistan.

Literature Review

Decentralization of education governance has emerged around the world as a policy solution to improve service delivery, enhance responsiveness, and tailor policies to local needs (Azfar et al., 2018). Devolution has coincided with increased educational performance but the power of this system varies widely depending on the setting. Decentralization has been seen in fragile or low capacity states to exacerbate inequality particularly if local governments lack the capacity to effectively administer education systems (Moreno & Sulasula, 2024; Naidoo, 2005; Shoesmith et al., 2020; Tsala et al., 2024). Despite these challenges, the experiences of national and international organizations highlight how entrenched power dynamics continue to influence Pakistan's devolution process, particularly in Balochistan.

The 18th Constitutional Amendment in Pakistan's 2010 governance reforms, is described as a game changer. It devolved several critical responsibilities (education among them) from the federal to provincial governments, in hope of providing provinces leeway to create and enforce policies tailored to their respective socio cultural and geographical circumstances. The amendment

was lauded, and was regarded as a step toward greater provincial independence and responsiveness. The shift has not been uniform among provinces, however, Punjab achieved success in policy making and implementation, Sindh to a lesser extent whereas Balochistan remained unsuccessful because of its low institutional capacity and the complexity of its political environment(Durrani, 2024; Kureshi et al., 2024).

The education sector in Balochistan was characterised by chronic underinvestment and poor infrastructure, low levels of access to schooling and gender disparities before devolution (S. Kakar & Ali, 2025). ¹Pakistan's overall literacy rate was 60% recorded. Male literacy stood at 68%, while female literacy lagged behind at 52%. Among provinces, Punjab had the highest rates (male 72%, female 60%), followed by Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan, which recorded the lowest (male 55%, female 28%). The vast terrain, scattered population, tribal milieu and centralized governance make the transport services less effective at grassroots level. Such a hierarchical structure puts great strain on local level decision making structure. Devolving the decision making power to local hierarchy would result in more education friendly policies.

After the enactment of 18th Amendment, Balochistan Government has taken a number of reform initiatives to enhance education in province. These involved establishing sectoral five year plans, decentralization to district and sub district levels, exam based recruitment of teachers, performance based monitoring mechanisms, operationalization of parent teacher committees and prioritizing mother languages as obligatory subjects and expanding budgets for school building were also undertaken by the province. But despite all those efforts, learning remains stagnated and the number of out of school children even grew between 2013 and 2018, casting doubt on these reforms' success and revealing just how much capacity for proper governance at the provincial level remain behind after devolution(R. Kakar et al., 2022). Educational disparity among the districts is a critical issue and existing literature also finds the high variations in education status across the districts of Baluchistan(Ahmed, 2023; Wasim & Munir, 2017). The uneven application of reforms is influenced by local leadership, patriarchal structures, logistics,necessary infrastructure and administrative capacity.

There is a noticeable gap in the literature because the majority of analyses of educational policy in Balochistan are still provincial in nature and ignore the variations across districts. In order to close that gap this study looks at changes in four key indicators at the district level: adult literacy, middle and matric level enrollment and primary education level completion. The internal diversity within the province and the localized nature of governance following devolution make that gap especially significant.

Although the literature presents a conflicting and occasionally controversial picture devolution was meant to improve education in Balochistan. Although the reforms were extensive, progress has been hampered by structural issues such as political interference, weak institutions and a lack of community involvement. The effects of devolution to the district level where governance actions are most immediately felt require immediate empirical research. This research aims to close that gap by analyzing the patterns in educational indicators across 22 districts in Balochistan over a ten-year period and determining whether or not devolution has actually improved the country's educational situation.

¹ Economic Survey of Pakistan (2024-2025)

Methodology

The impact of devolution on educational outcomes in each of Balochistans 22 districts is evaluated using a longitudinal mixed methods design between 2004 and 2015. The method incorporates trends and quantitative analysis of district-level educational data. Pre-devolution (2004–2010) and post-devolution (2011–2015) which corresponded with the ratification of Pakistans 18th Constitutional Amendment make up the two separate time periods. A comparison of the quality of education in different districts before and after the devolution of education policy is made possible by this dichotomy.

The data cover district level statistics from 2004–2015 and focus on four key indicators: (1) the population that has completed primary education or higher, (2) the net enrolment rate at the middle level (ages 11–13) by district, (3) the net enrolment rate at the matric level (ages 14–15) by region, and (4) adult literacy among the population aged 15 years and older.

Analytical Model and Description

In the analysis of devolution, the study follows the Difference in Difference (DiD) technique, that has been widely used in policy evaluation and is suitable to estimate the causal effect of devolution (Malesky et al., 2014; Salinas & Solé-Ollé, 2018). The DiD method contrasts changes in educational achievement before and after devolution. It provides a very suitable way of assessing the effects of policy interventions when it is not possible to perform a randomized experiment.

The fundamental form of the DiD model is given as follows:

$$Y_{it} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Post}_t + \beta_2 \text{District}_i + \beta_3 (\text{Post}_t \times \text{District}_i) + \epsilon_{it}$$

Where:

Y_{it} = Represents the educational outcome in district i at time t

Post_t = A binary variable indicating the post-devolution period (1 for years 2011–2015, 0 otherwise)

District_i = Captures district fixed effects

$\text{Post}_t \times \text{District}_i$ = The interaction term estimating the differential impact of devolution

ϵ_{it} = The error term

The coefficient β_3 is of primary interest as it represents the average treatment effect of devolution on educational outcomes. A positive and statistically significant β_3 would indicate devolution had a positive effect on the chosen dependent variable.

Percentage change of pre and post devaluation of completed primary education, net enrolment rate at the middle level (ages 11–13), net enrolment rate at the matric level (ages 14–15) and adult literacy are examined across 22 districts of balochistan, in addition to the DiD model.

Although the approach is intended to enable robust conclusions, there are a number of caveats. Analysis completeness may be impacted by lack of data and inconsistencies over years. Even with the DiD approach, there remains a risk of unobserved data. In addition, the results are only representative for Balochistan and not generalizable to other provinces with diverse administrative arrangements and socio political conditions.

This approach provides a rigorous and holistic structure for assessing the role of devolution in Balochistan. Using district level information and employing statistical analysis in parallel with a discussion of the policy implications, this study is an attempt to address this gap and provide guidance for future reforms in decentralized education governance.

Results

The comparison between the pre-devolution period (2004-2010) and the post-devolution period (2011-2015) shows clear improvements in most education indicators while these improvements reflect progress in access, enrolment, and literacy across several districts. The findings suggest that decentralization has strengthened local governance and improved service delivery

The analysis focuses on four key indicators. These include: (1) completion of primary education or higher, (2) net enrolment at the middle level (ages 11–13), (3) net enrolment at the matric level (ages 14–15), and (4) adult literacy (ages 15 and above)

Table 1: District-Wise Change in Middle Level Net Enrollment Rate (%)

District	Pre-Devolution Avg	Post-Devolution Avg	% Change
Quetta	36.3	42.7	17.60%
Pashin	20.5	22.7	10.70%
Qilla Abdullah	12	17.3	44.20%
Chaghi	16.2	16.3	0.60%
Sibbi	25.2	31	23.00%
Ziarat	32	29.7	−7.2%
Kalat	23.2	33	42.20%
Mastung	24	45.3	88.80%
Khuzdar	17.4	27.3	56.90%
Awaran	23.2	23	−0.9%
Kharan	14.6	25.3	73.30%
Lasbela	17.8	17.7	−0.6%
Gwadar	28.2	44.3	57.00%
Zhob	17.2	21.3	23.80%
Loralai	16	25.3	58.10%
Barkhan	10.6	17.3	63.20%
Musa Khel	10.8	15.3	41.70%
Qilla Saifullah	20.6	24	16.50%
Nasirabad	13.4	18	34.30%
Jafarabad	22.4	23.2	3.60%
Jhal Magsi	20.6	15.7	−23.8%
Bolan	14.8	22.7	53.40%

Overall, the data reflect a pattern of increases across most districts, though to varying degrees. The significant improvements were seen in Mastung, Kharan, Gwadar, and Loralai and all these districts showed clear progress in educational outcomes after devolution while the gains may be linked to earlier educational investments or stronger local governance. In contrast, districts such as Ziarat, Awaran, Lasbela, and Jhal Magsi showed little or no improvement and this suggests that devolution alone cannot overcome deep rooted challenges like remoteness, conflict, and weak administrative capacity.

Table 2: District-Wise Change in Population Completing Primary Level or Higher level (%)

District	Pre-Devolution Avg (%)	Post-Devolution Avg (%)	% Change
Quetta	52.4	58.6	11.80%
Pashin	28.1	33.5	19.20%
Qilla Abdullah	18.3	22.1	20.80%
Chaghi	21.7	24.3	12.00%
Sibbi	34.5	39.8	15.40%
Ziarat	41.2	44.7	8.50%
Kalat	29.6	35.2	18.90%
Mastung	31.4	39.5	25.80%
Khuzdar	26.2	32.6	24.40%
Awaran	23.1	25	8.20%
Kharan	22.4	28.9	29.00%
Lasbela	27.3	30.1	10.30%
Gwadar	35.6	42.8	20.20%
Zhob	24.5	30.3	23.70%
Loralai	25.1	31.9	27.10%
Barkhan	19.6	25.2	28.60%
Musa Khel	18.7	23.4	25.10%
Qilla Saifullah	27.2	31.6	16.20%
Nasirabad	20.3	26.1	28.60%
Jafarabad	29.4	32.7	11.20%
Jhal Magsi	26.1	28	7.30%
Bolan	23.7	30.4	28.30%

The data show that all districts recorded positive growth. This most visible in the completion of primary education or higher. Districts like Kharan, Barkhan, Nasirabad, Bolan, and Loralai made the largest gains and their increases were above 25%. The results suggest better school access, improved retention, and stronger local governance. Overall, many districts made clear progress in education across the province.

Ziarat, Awaran, Lasbela, and Jhal Magsi showed smaller improvements. Geographic isolation and weak infrastructure may have limited their progress. Quetta, the provincial capital, also recorded only a modest increase. These differences highlight that some regions benefited more than others.

Overall, the analysis shows that devolution supported educational progress in Balochistan. However, the extent of improvement varied widely across districts. This suggests the need for policies suited to local conditions and stronger investment in capacity building.

Table 3: District-Wise Net Enrolment Rate at Matric Level (Age 14–15) (%)

District	Pre-Devolution Avg (%)	Post-Devolution Avg (%)	% Change
Quetta	18.4	23.5	27.70%
Pashin	9.2	12.4	34.80%
Qilla Abdullah	5.6	8.1	44.60%
Chaghi	7.8	9.2	17.90%
Sibbi	13.5	17.3	28.10%
Ziarat	16.2	18.1	11.70%
Kalat	10.4	14.9	43.30%
Mastung	11.6	19.2	65.50%
Khuzdar	8.7	13.4	54.00%
Awaran	10.2	10.1	−1.0%
Kharan	6.9	11.8	71.00%
Lasbela	9.3	9.1	−2.2%
Gwadar	14.1	21.6	53.20%
Zhob	8.1	10.7	32.10%
Loralai	7.6	12.3	61.80%
Barkhan	5.2	8.9	71.20%
Musa Khel	5.4	7.6	40.70%
Qilla Saifullah	9.8	11.7	19.40%
Nasirabad	6.7	9.8	46.30%
Jafarabad	11.3	12.4	9.70%
Jhal Magsi	10.2	8.3	−18.6%
Bolan	7.4	11.2	51.40%

Most districts reported significant increases in enrolment at matric level. Barkhan, Kharan, Mastung and Loralai recording gains above 60%. These encouraging changes suggest that devolution might have facilitated secondary education access in previously unreached areas. Awaran Lasbela and Jhal Magsi are among the districts where stagnation or decline has been noted. A favorable change in educational participation is reflected in the increasing trend in matric level enrollment in the majority of districts.

Table 4: District-Wise Adult Literacy Rate (Population 15 Years and Older) (%)

District	Pre-Devolution Avg (%)	Post-Devolution Avg (%)	% Change
Quetta	58.1	63.4	9.10%
Pashin	32.4	37.2	14.80%
Qilla Abdullah	21.3	26.1	22.50%
Chaghi	26.7	30.4	13.90%
Sibbi	41.2	46.5	12.90%
Ziarat	47.6	50.2	5.50%
Kalat	34.1	39.3	15.20%
Mastung	36.5	44.8	22.70%
Khuzdar	30.2	36.7	21.50%
Awaran	28.4	29.1	2.50%
Kharan	25.6	32.4	26.60%
Lasbela	31.3	33.1	5.80%
Gwadar	44.2	51.6	16.70%

Zhob	29.1	34.5	18.50%
Loralai	28.7	35.9	25.10%
Barkhan	22.4	29.3	30.80%
Musa Khel	21.8	27.6	26.60%
Qilla Saifullah	33.2	37.8	13.90%
Nasirabad	24.6	31.2	26.80%
Jafarabad	36.1	39.4	9.10%
Jhal Magsi	33.4	35.2	5.40%
Bolan	27.8	34.6	24.50%

The data show that all districts experienced an increase in adult literacy rates over the study period. Districts with improvements exceeding 24 percent including Barkhan Kharan Loralai Musa Khel Nasirabad and Bolan showed the biggest gains. According to these findings devolution might have made it possible for literacy programs to be more locally focused and successful especially in places where access to adult education programs was previously restricted.

On the other hand, districts like Awaran, Lasbilla, Ziarat, and Jhal Magsi showed relatively modest gains, indicating that geographic isolation, limited infrastructure, or administrative constraints may have tempered the impact of decentralization. Quetta, while showing a smaller percentage increase, maintained the highest overall literacy rate, reflecting its urban advantage and stronger institutional capacity.

A difference-in-differences regression model was used to estimate the causal impact of devolution. The model estimated changes in educational indicators before and after devolution, with district level fixed effects and time trends.

Table 5: Difference-in-Differences Regression Results

Outcome Variable	Coefficient (β_i)	Std. Error	p-value	Interpretation
Completed Primary Education (%)	6.3	1.9	0.001	Significant positive impact
Middle Level Enrollment Rate (%)	5.8	2.1	0.004	Strong improvement post-devolution
Matric Level Enrollment Rate (%)	4.1	1.7	0.018	Moderate improvement
Adult Literacy (%)	5.1	2.3	0.027	Statistically significant gain

The findings suggest that devolution has had a statistically significant positive effect on all sets of education indicators. The strongest impact was observed at the middle level of enrolment and in the completion of primary education. This indicates that provincial autonomy allowed for the

development of policies better suited to local needs. These locally adapted initiatives may have improved access and participation at the school level. Although the gains were smaller in literacy and matric level completion, the trends remained positive. Overall, the results point to broader progress in educational access and retention following devolution.

The findings show that devolution brought positive change in educational development. However, progress was uneven across districts of Balochistan, with some performing far better than others and this uneven progress highlights the need for stronger and more focused education policies. Local capacity must be strengthened to address regional gaps. Investing in area specific resources can help ensure fair and balanced educational outcomes across all districts.

Conclusion

The evidence produced in this study is strong and broad enough to conclude that the newly established provincialized education system following the 18th Constitutional Amendment did contribute significantly to achieving positive changes in educational outcomes across Balochistan. Using district level data from 2004–2015, this study provides evidence that, primary education level completion middle level enrolment, matric level and adult literacy all improved considerably after devolution. These gains indicate that provincial autonomy is able to produce policy interventions that are rapid, results focused and locally customized, particularly in areas where centralized governance had already proven ineffective.

Significant differences in performance between districts are also shown by the data. While Ziarat Awaran Lasbilla and Jhal Magsi districts showed little to no improvement and in some cases even negative change districts like Kharan Mastung Gwadar and Loralai made impressive progress. The inconsistent development demonstrates the limitations of structural reform in the absence of community mobilization institutional capacity building and supporting investments. Since interdistrict inequality persists devolved structures will never be able to completely address the underlying problems of administrative fluidity institutional weakness or the larger sociopolitical environment.

Further evidence that devolution increased attainment in education indicators particularly on enrollment and literacy is also provided by this difference-in-differences regression analysis. However the lack of notable drops in the number of out-of-school children and the limited progress made in a few districts suggest that reform initiatives require more situational sensitivity and a finer calibration in order to be successful. Equity district-level governance and location-specific needs and challenges in resource allocation should be the new focus of the reform.

In conclusion devolution has changed Balochistan's educational governance and its long-term viability will rely on ongoing political support efficient execution and adaptable policymaking procedures. The evidence presented here supports the transformative potential of decentralization while also emphasizing the urgent need for complementary policies to guarantee that its benefits are distributed equally throughout the province. Balochistan cannot be guided toward a more efficient and just educational system without reorganized reforms and focused interventions.

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