



Journal for Social
Science Archives

Journal for Social Science Archives

Online ISSN: 3006-3310

Print ISSN: 3006-3302

Volume 4, Number 1, 2026, Pages 1821 – 1839

Journal Home Page

<https://jssarchives.com/index.php/Journal/about>



Impact of Education Policy Reforms on Teacher Autonomy and Classroom Innovation: A Case Study of Pakistan

Dr. Zahid Hussain Sahito¹, Asad Ali², Muzamil Ihsan³, Agha Muhammad Ali⁴, Kanwal Zahid Sahito⁵

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Teacher Education, Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur,
Email: zahid.sahito@salu.edu.pk

²MPhil Scholar, Department of Teacher Education, Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur,
Email: asadlalsiyal@gmail.com

³MPhil Scholar, Department of Teacher Education, Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur,
Email: muzzamil.ihsan@gmail.com

⁴MPhil Scholar, Department of Teacher Education, Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur,
Email: aghakhandurrani@gmail.com

⁵MPhil Scholar, Department of Teacher Education, Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur,
Email: kanwalzahidsahito@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received: January 11, 2026
Revised: February 25, 2026
Accepted: March 03, 2026
Available Online: March 17, 2026

Keywords:

teacher autonomy; classroom innovation;
education policy reform; Pakistan;
curriculum reform; Single National
Curriculum; professional development

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Zahid Hussain Sahito

Email:

zahid.sahito@salu.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

Pakistan Education policy reforms have attempted more and more to address two similar issues: unequal access to high quality schooling and continuing learning inequality. However, reforms based on national standards, harmonization of curriculum, teacher professional standards, and harmonization of assessment all manipulate the professional space in which teachers make decisions. This article will discuss how teacher autonomy and classroom innovation in Pakistan have come under the influence of major reforms including the National Education Policy 2009, post 18th Amendment governance change agenda, the Single National Curriculum/National Curriculum reform agenda and teacher-professionalization initiatives. The research will be applied to a single-case policy study with a qualitative approach on the basis of document analysis, synthesis of institutional and peer-reviewed evidence. The main line is that policy change has allowed increasing the language of activity based, concept based and inclusive learning but has not always provided the decision rights, time, resources training and assessment flexibility that teachers need to transform classroom practice. The results show six mechanisms that include: curriculum standardization constrains curricular autonomy and may clarify minimum expectations; professional standards raise expectations but are weakly related to classroom support; assessment pressure drives textbook coverage and the examination preparation; resource and language disparity generates unequal autonomy; teachers engage in tactical innovation rather than system wide pedagogical change; and school leadership mediates whether reform produces either compliance or professional learning. The article suggests a supported-autonomy model where nation coherence is maintained but the teachers are formally authorized and practically supported to make curriculum, pedagogy and formative assessment, to be adapted to local learners. Contributing to the literature on education reform, the paper demonstrates that in Pakistan, formatted autonomy rather than independent autonomy should not be an issue, but instead equitable classroom innovation should be gained through structured autonomy.



Introduction

Governments in low- and middle-income education systems are increasingly increasing the levels of policy reform to seek quality, equity, accountability and global competitiveness. Pakistan is a convenient example since the reform agenda entails a combination of constitutional devolution, minimum national standards, curricular harmonization, teacher professional standards, and recent engagements with concept-based learning. These reforms are not objective measures of administration. They restructure who has the power to decide what they call knowledge, how teachers deliver it, how students are evaluated, and to what degree professional judgement can be exercised within the classrooms.

The policy issue covered in this article is the conflict between standardization and professional discretion. On the one hand, there are compelling reasons why Pakistan should work towards minimum learning standards. Inequality in schools, regional disparities and disproportional learning outcomes have long been facing the country. Across the board, classroom innovation seldom emanates out of scripted compliance alone. When children fail to learn, teachers are expected to diagnose knowledge to students, adjust illustrations to the language and culture, create activities, utilize formative evaluation and reform instruction. Teacher autonomy, in this sense, is not a luxury but a working condition to meaningful pedagogy.

Recent policy discussion in Pakistan expressly requests movement toward rote memorization instead of concept, activity based, inquiry and skills based learning. Reform as a movement toward Student Learning Outcomes and uses of ICT (with being aware of the adaptation of mathematics and science to international standards). However, the same reform milieu also facilitates standard coverage of the curriculum in all systems, both in the public, in the private, and in the madrasa systems. This twofold motion creates a central paradox to policy in which the teacher assumes the role of innovative topics within the limits of time and space provided by the policy.

This paper then poses the following inquiry: What were the impacts of education policy reforms in Pakistan on teacher autonomy and classroom innovation? The point is that autonomy may turn into a way of developing the ability to make professional judgements or be a source of inequalities when some teachers have resources and some do not. In the article, the concept of autonomy is understood to be structured professional discretion, but not unlimited freedom. It explores the questions of whether reform has led to supported autonomy or caused only more compliance demands. It is a conceptual and evidence-based case study that establishes a causal relationship between policy reform, teacher agency, and classroom-level innovation in Pakistan.

Research Questions

The article is guided by four research questions: (1) Which major education policy reforms in Pakistan have most directly influenced teacher autonomy? (2) Through what mechanisms do these reforms enable or constrain classroom innovation? (3) How do contextual conditions, including assessment pressure, resources, language diversity, and school leadership, mediate the reform-autonomy relationship? (4) What policy design can strengthen teacher autonomy while preserving equity-oriented national standards?

Policy and Educational Context of Pakistan

The reformist path of Pakistan can be characterized as a prolonged struggle between national and provincial and local diversity. The National Education Policy 2009 conceptualised education reform based on access, quality, governance, curriculum, textbook policy, teacher education, and

implementation. It also realized the earlier policies were mostly affected by gaps in governance and execution. This is important to the autonomy of the teachers since a policy can say quality and professionalism are the goals, but the teachers experience reform in the form of textbooks, inspections, teacher training workshop, examinations, workload, and school management practice.

Amendment 18th of the Constitution altered the framework of governance by increasing the powers of the provinces in education and adding Amendment 25-A according to which the free and compulsory education of the children aged 5 to 16 is recognized. Devolution in theory creates room in which the provinces adapt. But in reality, it is complicated to coordinate federal standards and the provincial implementation. The post-devolution era of curriculum reform has thus been associated with a two-fold logic: that provinces should possess and own the implementation, but that national actors still pursue the development of minimum standards and common learning expectations.

This tension was heightened by the reform agenda on the Single National Curriculum and later National Curriculum of Pakistan. Curriculum harmonisation was also seen by its supporters as a way to reduce the division by classes between elite private schools, public schools, and madrasa education. There were also critics like uniformity can stifle pluralism, regional diversity, and professional judgement. To be innovative in the classroom, the critical question is not merely the content that a curriculum delivers but rather the structure underlying such a curriculum: Are resources, training, assessment flexibility, and school-based assistance to transform standards into learning packages made accessible to them?

The pressing nature of this policy debate is inspired by the learning crisis in Pakistan. According to UNICEF, it is estimated that 25.1 million children aged 5-16 in Pakistan have the second highest number of out-of-school children in the world. According to the World Bank-UNESCO learning poverty learning brief, 80 percent children in late primary age in Pakistan have not mastered reading after adjusting to the out-of-school children with schooling deprivation being estimated at 31.8. The indicators do not directly measure teacher autonomy but they indicate that conventional schooling routine has failed to provide equitable scale learning. The policy reform should however not just be reviewed based on documentation of the curriculum but it should also be reviewed on whether or not it helps the teacher to create better learning environments.



Figure 1: Timeline of Education Policy Reforms Relevant to Teacher Autonomy in Pakistan.

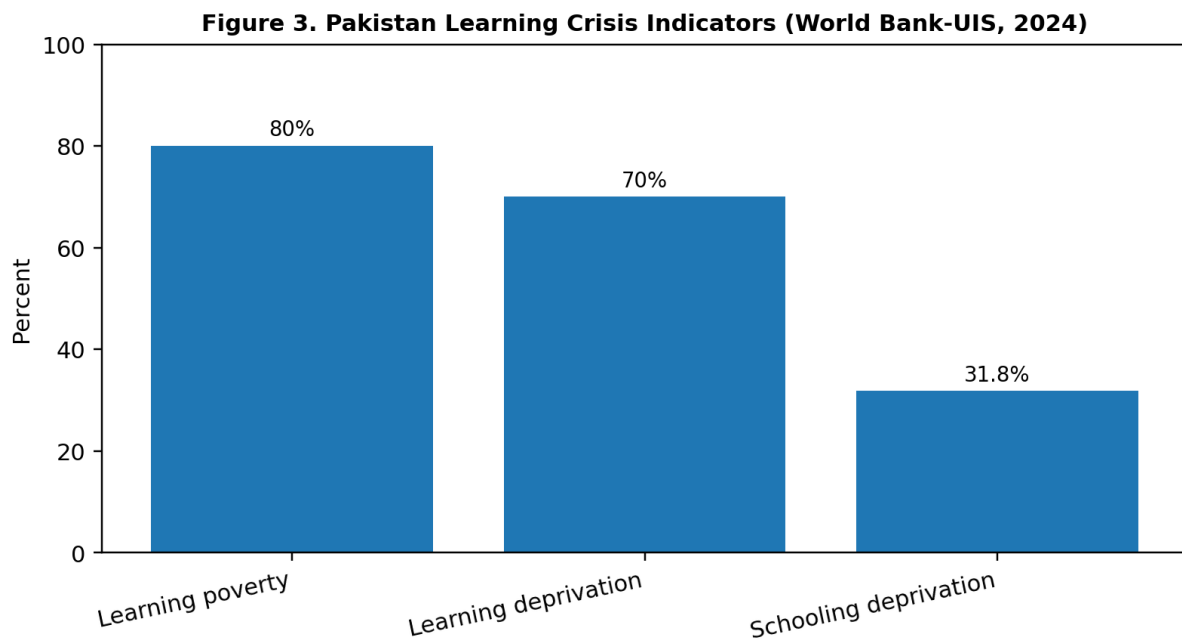


Figure 3: Pakistan Learning Crisis Indicators. Source: World Bank-UNESCO Institute for Statistics Learning Poverty Brief, April 2024.

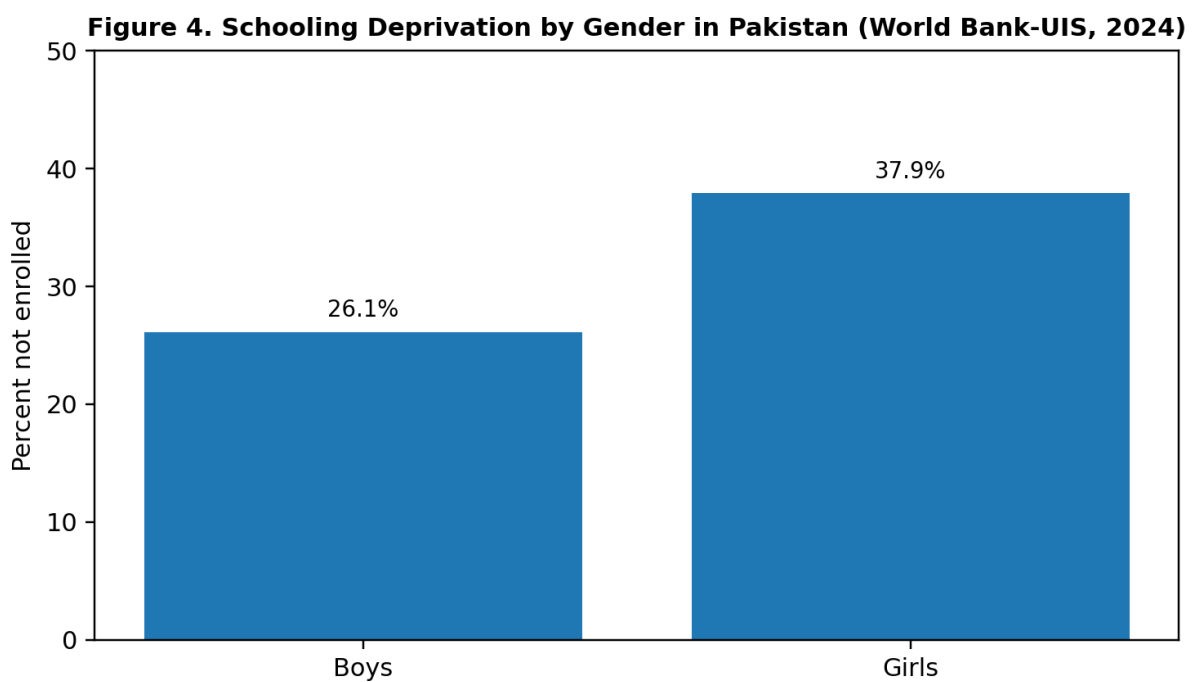


Figure 4: Schooling Deprivation by Gender. Source: World Bank-UNESCO Institute for Statistics Learning Poverty Brief, April 2024.

Classroom Realities Behind the Policy Debate

Policy manifestation is seen in the classroom. In Pakistan, a teacher can receive a classroom of students which can sharply differ in their native language, prior exposure to the English language, parental support, nutrition, regularity of attendance, and access to books or digital tools. These differences cannot be well predicted in a uniform policy document. Thus, classroom innovation can start with minor adaptations: explaining a concept the first time in the language known to the students, using examples of local markets in mathematics, asking students to sketch a diagram before writing a formal response, or providing oral feedback before taking a formal exam. These adaptations do not follow reform; they are the concrete way by which reform is extended to learners.

Teacher autonomy is not without an emotional aspect too. When a teacher perceives trust, they are better able to attempt to use new questioning methods, group work exercises, student presentation, or formative assessment. And when they sense that they are monitored, primarily with a view to making mistakes, they end up trying to protect themselves by engaging in safe practices: reading textbooks, copying boards, and practicing expected questions in an examination. Such a defensive professionalism will make sense in a system where one can be punished to rectify mistakes and where innovation may not attract much acknowledgment. Policy reform must thus transform the risk calculating within classrooms.

The Pakistani example can also reveal that innovation is not necessarily developed on the basis of costly technology. In an under-resourced school, innovation can be in the form of reorganizing seating, using local-available objects, forming peer-support pairs, building vocabulary walls, using student notebooks to show evidence of learning, or converting textbook questions to discussion prompts. Technology can be used, yet reform that is autonomy-sensitive should not constitute innovation as being digital innovation. In most schools, permission, time, and encouragement to teachers to teach differently is a requirement before a tablet or smartboard is purchased

Literature Review

Teacher autonomy is often defined as the ability of teachers to exercise professional judgement in the interpretation of the curriculum, in the pedagogy taught, in the assessment process used, in the organization of the classroom and the professional learning underway. Ingersoll (2003) attributes the source of teacher control of work conditions to the organizational nature of schools, whereas Pearson and Moomaw (2005) differentiate between curriculum autonomy and general teaching autonomy. Autonomy is also related to agency in the curriculum theory: teachers do not merely carry out their policy but decipher it and translate it into practices (Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson, 2015).

Classroom innovation is a pedagogical change that enhances the quality of student learning tasks, their engagement, feedback, creativity, problem solving, inclusion and relevance. Innovation can entail enquiry-based learning, formative assessment, project work, multilingual scaffolding, collaborative learning, the use of low-cost technologies and localized examples. Nonetheless, individual enthusiasm is seldom a sufficient fuel of innovation. Fullan (2007) asserts that change in the education sector is underpinned by coherence, capacity building, and implementation support. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) also focus on professional capital: the pool of human, social, and decisional capital that teachers require in my opinion to make sound judgements.

The correlation between policy change and teacher autonomy is thus conditional. Providing clarifications that elucidate goals but do not specify all the instructional actions can support autonomy. When they are scripts, inspections or exam based pacing guides, they can hurt autonomy. Education policy, Biesta (2010) insists, can become measurement dominated at the cost of judgement as to the purpose of education. This is also demonstrated by Ball (1993) that policy is text and discourse: it does not merely teach us practice but creates categories, pressures, and identities of the teachers.

These concerns are reflected in literature that is specific to Pakistan. In reference to teacher professionalism, Khizar, Anwar, and Malik (2019) discovered weak alignment between the National Education Policy 2009 and National Professional Standards for Teachers in relation to teacher professionalism. According to recent research of the Single National Curriculum, teachers experience issues in training, resources, technology, and preparation of pedagogies. The analysis of SNC practice in Punjab and Balochistan highlights a lack of balance in capacity, the socioeconomic barrier, and the mediating effect of teacher autonomy. Taken as a whole what is proposed to us by this literature is that the problem that Pakistan is grappling with is not the lack of language in policy that talks about better pedagogy; rather it is the low rate of conversion of policy language into the teacher decision capacity.

Conceptual Framework

This paper suggests one theory supported-autonomy. There are four propositions to the framework. To achieve a sense of equity, first, national curriculum standards can only raise minimum standards of learning, but not the classroom implementation of each standard as uniformly as possible. Second, Autonomy enhances the process of innovation only when autonomy is coupled with capacity, resources, and professional collaboration. Third, the most powerful tool in terms of narrowing classroom experimentation in reform is assessment pressure. Fourth, is whether reform is professional learning or bureaucratic compliance and all depends on school leadership.

Teacher autonomy within this framework has five domains: curricular autonomy, pedagogical autonomy, assessment autonomy, professional learning autonomy and relational autonomy. Curricular autonomy means that teachers have the power to choose instances, order of learning, and modification of materials. Pedagogical autonomy can be defined as approaches, grouping, interrogation, tasks design, and utilization of local resources. Assessment autonomy describes the formalistes beside the tests in addition to the formative checks and feedback. Professional learning autonomy The power of teachers to explore issues of practice. The concept of relational autonomy involves how teachers can relate classroom learning with the language, family environment, community, and identity of the students.

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework: Reform, Autonomy, and Innovation

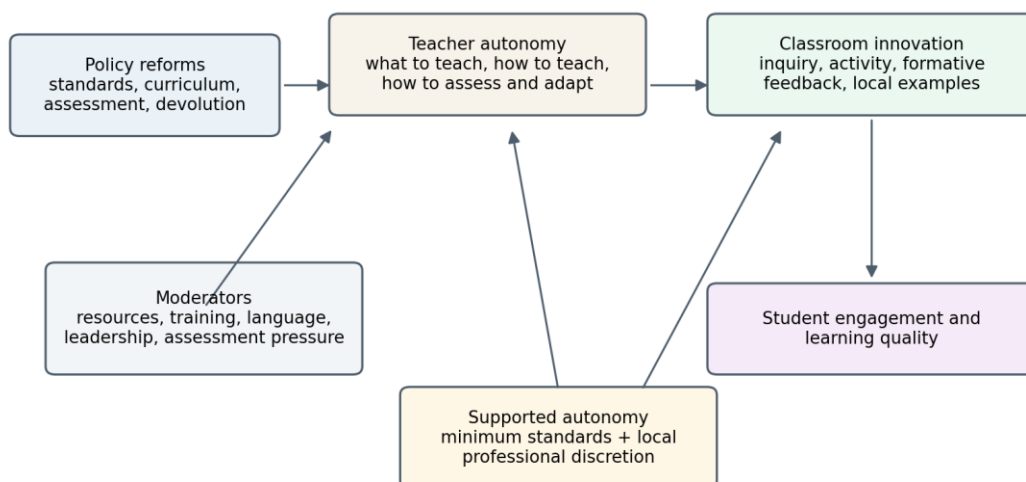


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework: Reform, Teacher Autonomy, and Classroom Innovation.

Policy Enactment, Accountability, and Teacher Agency

The policy enactment theory is helpful as it clarifies why the same reform may lead to various classroom practices. A curriculum document may be identical across schools, but teachers interpret it through local resources, leadership expectations, student needs, parental pressure, and examination routines. This implies that implementation does not represent a machine to machine movement between ministry to classroom. It involves an interpretation process. It is up to the teachers to determine what is possible, what is safe, what is valued and what will be judged as being successful by the supervisors and parents.

A public education system and therefore a system where there is a serious concern with regards to access, teacher attendance and learning outcomes demands accountability. Nevertheless, accountability can be developed in other forms. Thin types of accountability are evident, they are files, registers, textbook coverage, and test scores. Thick accountability looks at the quality of learning: whether students are able to explain concepts, read with a high level of understanding, apply knowledge, collaborate in teams, and learn through feedback. Without accountability being thick due to teachers learning to do compliance, it damages teacher autonomy. Teacher autonomy is enhanced where the accountability is thick because teachers are not only required to justify their professional choices but also needs to provide evidence showing student learning.

The reform discourse in Pakistan is often accompanied by an assumption that increased central direction will decrease inequality. Partially, this assumption is accurate that minimum standards can ensure that disadvantaged students get a classroom that is weak in its curriculum. However, the assumption proves detrimental as standardization is conflated with sameness. Equality of standards need not be accompanied by equality of pedagogy. Actually, the same pedagogy can be inequitable since students are not equal in terms of language, socioeconomic status, attendance and prior knowledge. Teacher agency is then the process through which the conversion of equal standards into responsive teaching takes place.

The supported autonomy concept shuns two extremes. It opposes laissez-faire autonomy, in which the teachers are left on their own with no guidance, material and feedback provided. It also

opposes scripted control, in which teachers are seen as vehicles of a given delivery of a fixed text. Supported autonomy supports teachers to work under well-known standards but with known room to adjust teaching. It is also the case that the system invests in professional learning and uses the assessment as feedback as opposed to using only judgement. This is the model that most applies to Pakistan since the country is in need of coherence and responsiveness.

Methodology

This article uses a qualitative single-case policy study design. Pakistan is examined as a case, and the policy modification is studied in the prism of teacher autonomy and classroom innovation. The research is also interpretive, based on documents as opposed to being experimental. It compiles policy documents, peer-reviewed literature, institutional reports, and peer-reviewed education indicators. Its aim is to describe mechanisms, and is not to approximate a causal impact by statistical identification.

The document corpus would consist of the National Education Policy 2009, the official material of curriculum reform, studies of the 18th Amendment and devolution, research on teacher professionalism and standards, peer-reviewed and recent empirical studies on the Single National Curriculum, as well as secondary indicators provided by UNICEF and World Bank. Sources were chosen based on fulfilling at least one of four criteria: reform design, teacher professionalism, curriculum implementation, or learning/access context. Thematic coding was used in the analysis. Some of the first-cycle codes were standardization, devolution, training, assessment, resources, language, leadership, teacher judgement, and innovation. These were then grouped in second-cycle coding as mechanisms that either facilitate or limit autonomy.

This manuscript did not involve any primary interviews, surveys or classroom observations. This is a shortcoming, but also befits a policy case study that deals with synthesis and theory building. The research thus does not purport to directly measure the lived experience of teachers beyond that which they claim is reported just elsewhere in existing empirical research. The proposed framework needs to be tested in the future by classroom observations and teacher interviews in various provinces.

Findings

Finding 1: Curriculum standardization reduces curricular autonomy but may elucidate minimum expectations. The curriculum reforms in Pakistan are efforts to deal with inequity in different school systems by establishing common learning expectations. This can assist teachers because it can clear up the results and there will be no more misunderstandings about what is needed to be learned by the students. Nevertheless, once curriculum requirements are translated into strictly sequenced textbooks, or inspection regimens, teachers can make coverage the goal, and reduce adaptation. In these circumstances, curricular autonomy is not fatally murdered; it is crowded out by pacing, fear of exams and administrative demands.

Finding 2: Teacher professionalization reforms do not necessarily increase decision rights with the increase in expectation. Teacher professional standards, training reforms and wording of policy about activity-based learning puts teachers in the role of professional. However, professionalism is not just a matter of workshops. It involves judgement that is trusted by others, peer learning, time to plan and feedback that helps teachers do better. When the policy merely instructs teachers to be innovative, but does not realign the workload, assessment and resources, then it becomes such that professionalization is a mere propaganda.

Finding 3: Assessment pressure has the greatest strength as a constraint to classroom innovation. The teachers can assist in questioning, discussion, formative assessment, and on-site examples, yet when the stakes in higher education are rewarded by memorization, the classroom will be an examination room. The official reform goal of shifting towards rote learning is thus pegged on assessment reform. At its worst, assessment alignment becomes dangerous to the concept of teacher autonomy: when students are tested in a traditional way, teachers who experiment lose the chance of being labeled as responsible for depriving the students of an opportunity to undergo testing in a traditional manner.

Finding 4: The inequalities of resources and language give rise to disproportionate autonomy. The notion of autonomy can be relevant only in circumstances where teachers possess feasible alternatives. A teacher who has overcrowded classes, has limited textbooks, lacks strong digital access, is pressured to meet his or her syllabus, and has multilingual learners with little mother-tongue support does not feel autonomy in the same way as a teacher in a well-resourced school. It is the reason why autonomy is something that cannot be addressed as the universal policy directive. It will also have to be supported variably among provinces, districts and school types.

Finding 5: Teachers are tactically, but not systemically, innovative. The existing evidence points to the idea that small adaptations are used by many teachers: explaining in the local languages, providing examples, changing the seating, using teaching helps that might be improvised, etc. They are actual innovations but they always stay confidential and tentative. They are seldom written, discussed, trained or tested. The system then becomes deficient in terms of teacher knowledge since the solutions to problems in classes do not be able to flow upward to policy feedback.

Findings 6: School leadership mediates reform effects. Principals, head teachers, and supervisors of their respective districts can either safeguard professional discretion or increase compliance. In places where the leaders request only lesson-plan files, syllabus completion, and test scores, autonomy is diminished. Reform is a professional learning process where leaders observe lessons constructively, organise peer planning and encourage student thinking. The relevance of the layer of leadership in the context of Pakistani schools is clear because the process of reforms in the schools is often delivered via the espousal forms of communication to the schools of Pakistan in the form of circulars and textbooks instead of the full instructional coaching.

Figure 5. Mechanism Linking Teacher Autonomy to Classroom Innovation

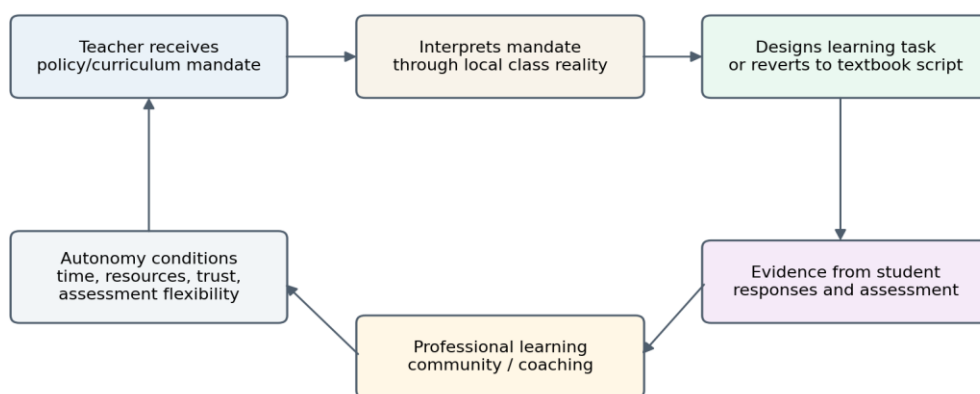


Figure 5. Mechanism Linking Teacher Autonomy to Classroom Innovation.

Policy-to-practice gap grows when each layer adds compliance demands without adding discretion or support.

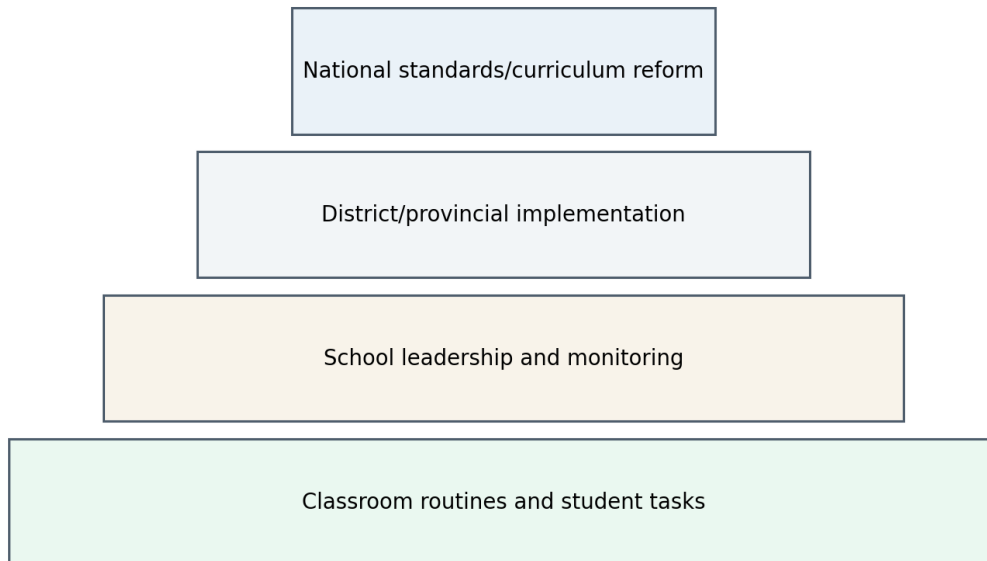


Figure 6: Multi-level Policy-to-Practice Gap.

Discussion

These results imply that the reform agenda of Pakistan has both autonomy-enhancing and autonomy-limiting factors. The aspect of autonomy enhancement can be observed in terms of concept-based learning, activity-based pedagogy, ICT integration, and professional standards. The autonomy-restrictive aspect can be observed in textbook-based, uniform curriculum implementation, pressure of the examination, and ineffective school level professional learning systems. This amalgamation is why reform can lead to both hope and resistance simultaneously.

One of the most common policy errors lies in associating the national standards with teacher autonomy, which chart them as opposites. They are not. Equity demands minimum standards to the effect that poor children should not be given a tainted curriculum. Again equity entails teacher accommodation due to the fact that children do not enter school with equal language resources, knowledge, social assistance, and learning rate. Curriculums that feature a strict uniformity may seem to be just on paper but create the inequitable realities in the classroom. Supported autonomy can thus be more justified than extreme centralization as well as unstructured decentralization.

The case of Pakistan also demonstrates a point that innovation is not only a method. It is a state that is organizational. It is not possible to have a teacher always adopt inquiry based learning when the timetable, syllabus, assessment, class size, and inspection culture all promote lecture and memorization. Reform of the policies needs to transform the instructional ecosystem therefore. This consists of assessments design, school leadership, teacher learning communities, school leadership, feedback systems, and textbook flexibility.

The strongest implication is that reform should move from compliance architecture to learning architecture. Compliance architecture asks: Has the teacher completed the syllabus? Has the textbook been followed? Has the file been maintained? Learning architecture asks: What did students understand? What misconception appeared? What task helped students reason? What local example made the concept meaningful? What evidence should guide the next lesson? Pakistan's reforms will influence classroom innovation more strongly when policy monitoring begins to ask these learning-centered questions.

Figure 7. Supported Autonomy Model

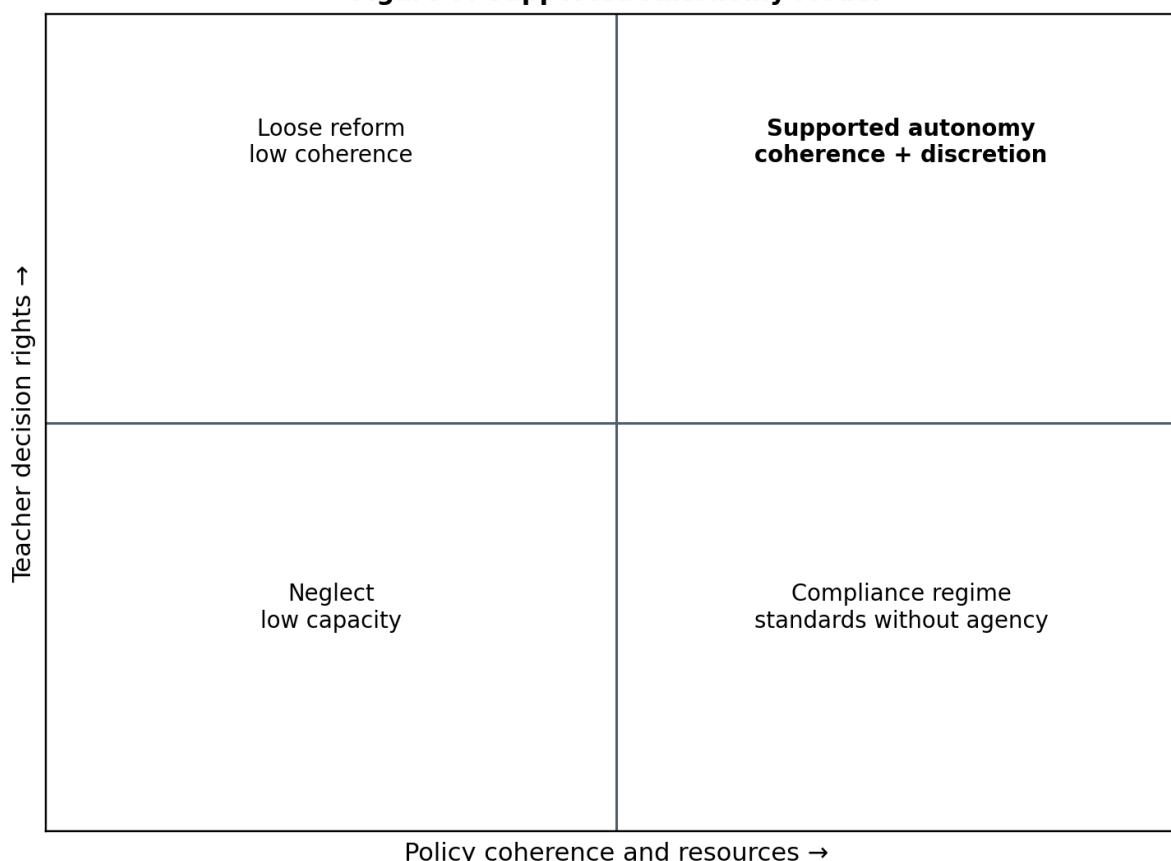


Figure 7: Supported Autonomy Model.

Interpreting the Pakistan Case for Q1-Level Scholarship

The Pakistan case would be crucial to the scholarship of international education policy since it prompts skepticism of a simplified narrative of reform. The many reforms presuppose that improving the curriculum standards will lead to improvements in teacher practice. The evidence that has been synthesized herein indicates that there is a more complex sequence. Standards might be needed but not adequate. Educators must possess both the means and ability to translate standards into the sorts of tasks that students can in reality attempt to do, converse about, revise and comprehend. The change policy unit is not just the curriculum document; the unit of instructional interrelations between teacher, student, task, and learning evidence.

The case is also related to the discussions of teacher professionalism in the Global South. In environments where accessibility in systems is problematic, political insecurity, financial constraint, and examination pressure, autonomy is occasionally considered risky. The

policymakers can get scared by the possibility of discretion resulting in inequality of quality. This fear is not in vain. Nonetheless, low-quality routines can be maintained by limiting professional discretion as well. The more practical policy question is how to make discretion transparent, backed and held to account. Obtaining teacher autonomy should be recorded by way of lesson artifacts, student work, peer observation, and reflective evidence, rather than be assumed or overlooked.

Another implication is that reform should be the classroom level. A policy can formally take place whereby textbooks are distributed and training sessions are executed, but pedagogical reform is being instituted only when tasks of students are changed. Unless students keep on with copying, memorizing, and reproducing answers, reform is symbolic. In case students are talking, explaining, questioning, applying and getting feedbacks, reform becomes instructional. This difference should inform the further considerations regarding the curriculum reforms in Pakistan.

Policy Recommendations

One, the notion of curriculum policy needs to decouple the non-negotiable learning outcomes and the flexible pathways in the classroom to achieve this goal. Minimal standards may be specified by national or provincial agencies, but they should allow teachers to be flexible in applying examples and activities, language support, and the pace within those standards. This must be put in the letter of the teacher guide, as opposed to tacit reliance.

Second, assessment reform should be considered the working core of a pedagogical reform. In case the assessment persists with rewards based on recall, teachers will have rational incentives to safeguard the students by teaching towards recall. Pro provincial examination and assessment authorities are supposed to put more items that require reasoning, explanation, problem solving, reading comprehension and application. When teaching students, teachers are expected to offer them sample formative tasks in line with these expectations.

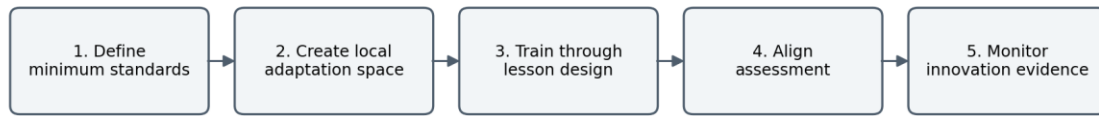
Third, teacher training needs to reorient towards practice-based professional learning; instead of one-off teacher orientation. Teachers should also be trained to design instruction and try it, to collect student work and discuss it with peers, and to revise instruction. This model can be supported at low cost by district-level teacher learning circles provided, of course, the headteachers are trained to facilitate them.

Fourth, the state must establish local curriculum adaptation cells at the level of districts or clusters. Such cells may accumulate teacher-based samples, low-cost assignments, multilingual scaffolding, and assessment assignments. Rather than innovation being something that a separate classroom does not realize, it can be a collective professional asset.

Fifth, the school leaders need to be oriented to ensure that they protect instructional time and minimize paperwork that does not enhance learning. Evidence of student work and collaborative work with peers, formative feedback, and student engagement should be monitored, rather than just completing the syllabus.

Sixth, it should offer reforms that comprise an autonomy equity audit. Policy makers ought to inquire about which schools possess sufficient resources to practice autonomy and which schools require supplemental resources. Resource-free autonomy can increase inequality as the advantaged schools are able to innovate and the disadvantaged schools are not able to comply with the innovations.

Figure 8. Implementation Roadmap for Autonomy-Sensitive Reform



Feedback loop: teachers report what works, policy adjusts, resources follow evidence.

Figure 8: Implementation Roadmap for Autonomy-Sensitive Reform.

Limitations and Future Research

The fact sheet is structured as an analysis of policy documents and synthesizing the available evidence. The first weakness is that it does not get to the primary classrooms. Teacher autonomy can be captured not merely in policy text but through classroom practices, school conferences, visits to inspection, planning of lesson and the own description of risk and discretion by the teachers. Further studies should thus encompass observations in the public, private and madrasa schools within more than one province.

The second constraint is that Pakistan is not one uniformity reform setting. Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, Islamabad Capital Territory, Gilgit-Baltistan and Azarah Jammu and Kashmir have varying administrative capacities, political priorities, school conditions and teacher support structures. Further research must be a comparison of the provinces to determine where autonomy-sensitive reform is succeeding and where it is stalled by either capacity, politics, or assessment design.

The third limitation is that the article considers classroom innovation to be a wide concept. Empirical research should come up with measurable findings in future studies, including frequency of formative assessment, quality of student work, level of student talk, use of local examples, differentiated instruction, and adaptation of curriculum materials by teachers. This research may then be tested using mixed-method research to prove that greater supported autonomy is linked to enhanced classroom innovation and classroom learning outcomes.

The role of headteachers and district supervisors should also be studied in the future. In most systems, it is at the middle layer that the course of policy becomes either learning or paperwork. Research ought to pose the question of how school leader types of schools interpret reform, the types of things they reward and those they discourage, whether or not they have the skills to coach the instruction and not simply check compliance.

Lastly, an additional consideration in the future policy research is to incorporate teachers in the co-design. There are considerable numbers of good teachers in Pakistan who know the needs of the students, but the process of reforms, often, consults teachers late or addresses them as being the beneficiaries of the training. The participatory design research or study can document teacher-

crafted adaptations and transform them into scalable resources. This would bring classroom knowledge to policy knowledge.

9. Conclusion

This paper has discussed how education policy reforms affect both teacher autonomy and classroom innovation in Pakistan. The main conclusion is that reform has increased expectations of modern pedagogy but has not consistently established the autonomy supported to the transformation of classroom practices. The policy issue that Pakistan has is not just to pick either between uniform standards and teacher possibilities. It is to formulate a system where the bare minimum is used to safeguard equity and yet teacher judgement helps to be relevant, inclusive, and a deeper learner.

The supported-autonomy model proposed provides a viable path ahead. Teachers must not be left to work alone on structural issues and neither must they be forced to become mere technicians who read off a prepared paper. They must be viewed as professionals who operate in a consistent curriculum, and who are actually supported, use student evidence and are responsible in their instruction. Provided that the reforms introduced to Pakistan are aimed in this direction, classroom innovation can become more than focused (individual) efforts to transform the educational process.

Table 1: Major Policy Reforms and Expected Implications for Teacher Autonomy

Reform/period	Core policy direction	Potential autonomy effect	Innovation implication
National Curriculum 2006	Defines subject learning expectations and textbook-aligned content	Moderate curricular guidance with continued textbook dependency	Innovation depends on teacher interpretation and assessment flexibility
National Education Policy 2009	Quality, access, teacher education, governance reform, implementation planning	Recognizes professionalism but leaves classroom decision rights indirect	Potential support if teacher development is linked to practice
18th Amendment 2010 and Article 25-A	Provincial authority and right to education for ages 5-16	Creates provincial space for adaptation but complicates federal-provincial coordination	Innovation may become province-specific if capacity differs
SNC 2020/2021 rollout	Common curriculum across public, private and madrasa systems	Clarifies minimum standards but may narrow local curriculum discretion	Activity-based aims depend on training, resources and assessment alignment
National Curriculum of Pakistan 2022-23 framing	SLO alignment, conceptual learning, ICT integration and international benchmarks	Potentially strengthens pedagogical discretion if SLOs are not treated as scripts	Can support inquiry and application if examinations change

Note. The table synthesizes policy implications from official policy material and peer-reviewed literature;.

Table 2: Domains of Teacher Autonomy Used in the Analysis

Domain	Definition	Example indicators	Expected link with innovation
Curricular autonomy	Ability to adapt sequence, examples and supplementary materials within standards	Teacher-created examples; local content; adjusted pacing	Improves relevance and inclusion
Pedagogical autonomy	Ability to choose methods, grouping, questioning and classroom tasks	Inquiry, group work, demonstrations, low-cost materials	Improves engagement and active learning
Assessment autonomy	Ability to use formative checks and feedback beyond formal tests	Exit tickets, oral checks, peer feedback, student work analysis	Improves responsiveness to misconceptions
Professional learning autonomy	Ability to identify learning needs and collaborate with peers	Lesson study, peer observation, reflective planning	Sustains innovation beyond one teacher
Relational autonomy	Ability to connect learning with student language, community and identity	Mother-tongue scaffolding, culturally familiar examples	Improves access for diverse learners

Table 3: Document and Evidence Corpus

Source type	Examples used	Reason for inclusion
Policy documents	National Education Policy 2009; National Curriculum of Pakistan official material	Directly define reform aims, governance and curriculum direction
Legal/governance analysis	18th Amendment and education devolution studies	Explains federal-provincial authority and implementation complexity
Teacher professionalism literature	Khizar, Anwar, and Malik (2019); teacher autonomy theory	Connects policy and professional standards to teacher agency
SNC implementation studies	Punjab and Balochistan studies on teacher challenges and preparedness	Provides empirical insight into implementation barriers
Education indicators	UNICEF and World Bank-UIS learning poverty data	Provides macro context for urgency of reform

Table 4: Secondary Indicators Relevant to Reform Urgency in Pakistan

Indicator	Value reported	Interpretation for this study	Source
Out-of-school children ages 5-16	25.1 million	Access pressure increases demand for system-wide reform	UNICEF Pakistan
Learning poverty at late primary age	80%	Quality crisis requires more than enrollment expansion	World Bank-UIS, 2024
Learning deprivation	70%	Many enrolled students do not reach minimum reading proficiency	World Bank-UIS, 2024
Schooling deprivation	31.8%	Access and learning deficits overlap	World Bank-UIS, 2024
Girls' schooling deprivation	37.9%	Gender inequality shapes classroom and system reform priorities	World Bank-UIS, 2024

Note. Values are reported as secondary data and are not generated by this study.

Table 5. Cross-Mechanism Synthesis of Reform Effects

Mechanism	Autonomy effect	Innovation effect	Policy risk
Uniform curriculum	Narrows content choices but clarifies expected outcomes	Can support equity if localized examples are allowed	Compliance replaces learning
Professional standards	Raises image of teacher professionalism	Can promote reflective teaching if linked to coaching	Standards remain paperwork
Assessment alignment	Can legitimize formative and conceptual learning	Strongest lever for classroom change	Exams continue to reward memorization
Devolution	Allows provincial adaptation	May generate locally relevant reforms	Capacity gaps widen provincial inequality
School leadership	Can protect discretion or enforce compliance	Determines whether teachers experiment safely	Monitoring focuses on files and coverage
Resource distribution	Determines practical options for teachers	Enables or blocks active learning	Autonomy benefits advantaged schools only

Table 6. Risk Matrix for Teacher Autonomy and Classroom Innovation

Risk	Probability in current context	Impact	Mitigation
Reform becomes textbook compliance	High	High	Separate SLOs from textbook scripts and train teachers in adaptation
Activity-based learning remains	High	High	Use practice-based training and classroom observation feedback

slogan			
Assessment undermines innovation	High	Very high	Revise item design and include reasoning/application tasks
Provincial capacity gaps widen	Medium	High	Create shared resource banks with provincial adaptation
Teacher workload blocks planning	High	Medium-high	Reduce low-value paperwork and protect planning time
Autonomy used inconsistently	Medium	Medium	Use professional learning communities and evidence of student work

Table 7: Recommended Policy Actions and Monitoring Indicators

Recommendation	Responsible level	Short-term indicator	Long-term indicator
Define flexible pathways under minimum standards	Federal/provincial curriculum bodies	Teacher guides include adaptation options	Teachers report greater curricular discretion
Align assessment with conceptual learning	Assessment/exam bodies	Sample reasoning items released	Reduced reliance on memorization in classrooms
Build teacher learning circles	District and school leadership	Monthly lesson-study meetings held	Improved lesson quality and student work
Create local adaptation banks	District clusters	Teacher-created resources collected	Resources used across schools
Train headteachers for instructional leadership	Provincial departments	Observation tools revised	Monitoring supports teaching improvement
Conduct autonomy equity audits	Provincial departments	School resource/autonomy profiles completed	Targeted support reaches under-resourced schools

References

1. Ahmad, I., Rauf, M., Imdadullah, & Zeb, A. (2012). Implementation gaps in educational policies of Pakistan: Critical analysis of problems and way forward. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 2(21), 240-245.
2. Ball, S. J. (1993). What is policy? Texts, trajectories and toolboxes. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 13(2), 10-17.
3. Biesta, G. (2010). *Good education in an age of measurement: Ethics, politics, democracy*. Paradigm Publishers.
4. Bray, M. (2007). Control of education: Issues and tensions in centralization and decentralization. In R. F. Arnone & C. A. Torres (Eds.), *Comparative education: The dialectic of the global and the local* (3rd ed., pp. 177-200). Rowman & Littlefield.
5. Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE.

6. Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). Teacher education around the world: What can we learn from international practice? *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 40(3), 291-309. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2017.1315399>
7. Day, C., & Gu, Q. (2007). Variations in the conditions for teachers' professional learning and development. *Oxford Review of Education*, 33(4), 423-443. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054980701450746>
8. Desimone, L. M. (2009). Improving impact studies of teachers' professional development. *Educational Researcher*, 38(3), 181-199. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X08331140>
9. Fullan, M. (2007). *The new meaning of educational change* (4th ed.). Teachers College Press.
10. Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Education. (2009). *National education policy 2009*. Islamabad: Author.
11. Hargreaves, A., & Fullan, M. (2012). *Professional capital: Transforming teaching in every school*. Teachers College Press.
12. Ingersoll, R. M. (2003). *Who controls teachers' work? Power and accountability in America's schools*. Harvard University Press.
13. Jamal, H. (2021). *Educational status of Pakistan: Pre and post 18th Amendment scenario*. Social Policy and Development Centre.
14. Khizar, A., Anwar, M. N., & Malik, M. A. (2019). Role of National Education Policy-2009 and National Professional Standards for Teachers in developing teachers' professionalism. *Bulletin of Education and Research*, 41(3), 101-118.
15. Khan, S. (2025). Problems faced by teachers in the implementation of Single National Curriculum at primary level. *Journal of Education and Development*, 5(1), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.58932/MULI0021>
16. Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training. (2023). *National Curriculum of Pakistan: Government of Pakistan initiative*. Government of Pakistan.
17. OECD. (2019). *TALIS 2018 results (Volume I): Teachers and school leaders as lifelong learners*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/1d0bc92a-en>
18. Pearson, L. C., & Moomaw, W. (2005). The relationship between teacher autonomy and stress, work satisfaction, empowerment, and professionalism. *Educational Research Quarterly*, 29(1), 38-54.
19. Priestley, M., Biesta, G., & Robinson, S. (2015). *Teacher agency: An ecological approach*. Bloomsbury Academic.
20. Sain, Z. H., Aziz, A. L., & Serban, R. (2025). Evaluating the impact of the Single National Curriculum on educational equality and teacher preparedness in Pakistan. *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Public Administration and Governance*. <https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.30-10-2024.2354744>
21. Shaikh, R., & Benedetti, C. (2024). Pluralism or uniformity: Case of (Single) National Curriculum of Pakistan. *International Journal of Educational Reform*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10567879241255322>
22. UNICEF Pakistan. (2025). *Education*. UNICEF.
23. Ullah, L., & Sajjad, S. (2026). Bridging the gap from policy to practice: Examining teacher autonomy, socioeconomic factors, and curriculum implementation across school levels in District Ziarat, Balochistan. *Bulletin of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.48112/bms.v3i1.1239>
24. World Bank. (2024). *Pakistan learning poverty brief*. World Bank and UNESCO Institute for Statistics.
25. Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). SAGE.

26. Zaman, M. S., Saleem, K., & Ali, S. (2021). Implementation of the Single National Curriculum at primary level: Teachers' expectations and concerns. *Jahan-e-Tahqeeq*, 4(4), 161-168.