



ANALYSING THE IMPACT OF EDUCATION POLICIES AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION ON THE SCHOOL EDUCATION SYSTEM IN PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

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Abstract

In Punjab, Pakistan, a province whose educational outcomes are pivotal to national development, the school system continues to struggle with significant challenges in access, quality, and equity. Despite a long history of ambitious education policies, a persistent and critical gap exists between policy intentions and their practical implementation, leaving many students without quality learning opportunities and teachers without adequate support. This narrative review analyzes the landscape of education policy and reform since 2001, synthesizing a wide body of evidence from policy documents, peer-reviewed academic research, and government reports to diagnose the root causes of this systemic implementation failure. The findings reveal several interconnected bottlenecks that consistently stall improvement. Chronic policy inconsistency, driven by volatile political cycles, prevents long-term strategies from taking root. Weak monitoring and evaluation systems render it nearly impossible to track progress or make evidence-based adjustments, while deep-seated urban-rural disparities in funding and resources perpetuate cycles of inequality. These issues are compounded by systemic corruption and administrative inefficiency that divert critical funds and erode public trust. Crucially, the review highlights a pervasive lack of meaningful stakeholder engagement in the policy process, which undermines local ownership and the sustainability of reforms. The paper argues that breaking this cycle requires a fundamental shift away from top-down reforms towards more adaptive and participatory strategies. This involves a concerted effort to strengthen policy coherence, invest in teacher capacity through continuous professional development, leverage technology for transparency, and empower communities through participatory monitoring to finally bridge the policy-practice gap.

Keywords: Education Policy of Pakistan, Punjab Education System, Policy Implementation Gap, Educational Reform, Teacher Development

Introduction

Punjab's school education system is a product of its history, a long series of policy changes, and ongoing economic struggles (Nabi & Nazir, 2020; Rizvi, 2016). As Pakistan's most populated province, what happens in Punjab's schools has a massive impact on the country's future (Munir & Zaidi, 2023). Like in many developing nations, education has seen as the main engine for social and economic growth and a key to a stable society (Nabi & Nazir, 2021; Shafiq & Afshan, 2024). Yet, despite a great deal of effort from the Punjab government and international partners, good quality, fair education is not a reality for many people (Islam, 2017).

In a developing country, education policies are more than just documents; they are supposed to be the blueprint for building a skilled workforce, sparking innovation, and holding society together (Huma et al.,



2022; Nabi & Nazir, 2021). Good policies can, in theory, fix long-standing problems like too little funding, systems where all decisions are made at the top, and political meddling that has always been a problem in Pakistan's education sector (Rizvi, 2016). However, a policy is only as good as its implementation. If it does not match the reality in schools and communities, it is bound to fail (Farooqi & Forbes, 2020). The history of education in Pakistan is full of changing policies, which shows there is a constant need for real, practical reforms (Khan et al., 2019).

The reason for this review is simple: there is a huge gap between what education policies in Punjab say they will do and what actually happens in schools. This is often called the "policy-practice gap" (Farooqi & Forbes, 2019; Islam, 2017). Many studies have looked at different parts of education in Pakistan, but this review brings together the existing research to see how well policies have actually been put into practice in Punjab. We focus on policies from 2001 onwards, a period that began with major decentralization reforms meant to give more power to local governments (Farooqi & Forbes, 2019). The fact that Punjab still faces so many problems in education, even with all these policies, suggests that something is wrong. The problem seems to be the disconnect between the plans made in offices and the reality faced by teachers and students every day (Islam, 2017; Rizvi, 2016). This review looks for the real drivers and roadblocks to making good education a reality in Punjab (Munir & Zaidi, 2023).

The main goals of this review are:

- To give an overview of the school system in Punjab, looking at its history and current problems.
- To look at the main education policies in Punjab and what they were supposed to achieve.
- To see how well these policies have actually been implemented in schools.
- To figure out what helps or hurts the connection between policy and practice in Punjab's schools.
- To offer some practical ideas for making policy implementation better and improving the school system.

This review asks four main questions:

- What are the most important education policies in Punjab since 2001?
- Have these policies really improved access, quality, and fairness in schools?
- What are the biggest challenges that stop these policies from working?
- How can we close the gap between policy and practice to make schools in Punjab better?

This gap between policy and practice is a serious problem. People simply do not buy them because they are made without consulting the people who need to implement them, such as teachers and parents (Islam, 2017). However, despite the government's attempts to decentralize governance by empowering local authorities, corruption, politics, and scarcity of resources have curtailed this, thus widening the gap (Farooqi & Forbes, 2020; Rizvi, 2016). In pursuit of these problems, this review aspires to develop practical concepts for formulating better policies and more productive methods for implementing the same.

Methodology

To research the connection between education policy and reality in Punjab, a narrative review method was applied in this paper. This approach was selected because it allows us to intertwine notes from numerous sources into a clear, large narrative (Aina, 2024; Khan, 2020). Education policy is sticky and complicated. A narrative review is open enough to handle this complexity, using other points of view and kinds of details that a more structured systematic review cannot do (Černevičienė & Kabašinskas, 2024; Sanogo et al., 2019). This is particularly critical during the process of examining policies in implementation, as one cannot gauge the whole scenario using figures.

We used three major categories of information sources. First, we looked at official policy documents from the Pakistani and Punjabi governments, like the National Education Policies and the Punjab Special Education Policy 2020, to understand what the government intended to do (Muhammad et al., 2024). Second, we searched academic journals for articles that critically analysed these policies, their problems, and how they affected people (Batoool et al., 2022; Jan et al., 2024). Third, we used reports from government bodies and NGOs to get data on things like school performance, funding, and other systemic problems (Kenayathulla et al., 2024; Rizvi & Khamis, 2020). Using these three source types helps to build a complete and more balanced picture.



To decide which sources to include, we set some clear rules. We focused on studies and reports published after 2001 that talked directly about education policy in Punjab, how it was implemented, and what happened as a result (Jan et al., 2024; Safdar et al., 2024). We paid special attention to research on specific reforms, like changes to teacher hiring or the curriculum (Azam & Durrani, 2024; Hussain et al., 2011). We left out studies that were not about Punjab, were not directly about education policy, or had weak research methods (Aina, 2024). This helps ensure our review is based on solid evidence.

The process for analysing the information was straightforward. We pulled out the key information from each source the policy's goals, how it was carried out, what the study found, and its recommendations (Nega et al., 2024). Then, we used thematic analysis to look for common themes, patterns, and even contradictions in the literature (Tang, 2024). This enabled us to get a larger perspective of the fact that policy, practice and outcomes all interrelate with one another (Goldenthal et al., 2024). The concept of the policy cycle, the notion of policymaking as a constant chain of the creation, implementation, and assessment, guides the whole review (Creutzig et al., 2024; Damoah & Omodan, 2022). This framework assists us raise a great deal of pointed questions concerning the manner of policymakers, the way in which they apply these policies and the reasons why they tend to succeed or fail in many cases.

Overview of Major Education Policies in Punjab

The national and the provincial governments have developed several policies which have been directed towards the education system in Punjab. These policies have always sought to enhance the school accessibility, quality and equity, albeit with uneven success (Habib, 2013). To establish what is happening currently, it would be good to examine the objectives and progress of these major reforms.

National Education Policies

At the national level, some key policies have determined the tone of education in Punjab. The NEP 2009 was a milestone document intended to enroll more children in school, enhance the quality of education training, and ensure that education is equal for all (Shahid et al., 2021). It also had ambitious plans, such as increasing enrollment, shrinking gender gaps, and improving teacher training (Azam & Durrani, 2024). Nevertheless, it was hard to implement these ideas, especially because of the lack of funds and institutional support (Habib, 2013).

The National Education Policy 2017 attempted to further develop the policy of 2009 by dwelling on newer concepts such as skills-oriented education and technology in the classroom (Rizwan & Sohail, 2024). The idea was to further equip students in preparation for the labour market through greater vocational and technical lessons.

The latest initiative was the Single National Curriculum (SNC), introduced in 2020, which is a rather ambitious attempt to standardize education nationally. The general rationale of the SNC is that all children should have an equal opportunity to receive quality education because the curriculum taught to them should be the same, and they should be assessed in the same manner (Sher et al., 2024). In principle, this would minimize the disparity between private and public schools. Practically, teachers have been ambivalent towards it, with most concerned about whether they are sufficiently trained and equipped to deliver it (Sher et al., 2024).

Punjab Education Sector Reform Program (PESRP)

The International-funded program to reform the education sector in Punjab, the Punjab Education Sector Reform Program (PESRP), began in the early 2000s and was a gargantuan attempt to repair some of the largest issues in Punjab schools (Habib, 2013). It addressed a number of matters simultaneously: school buildings would be improved, better teachers would be hired, and the system would be made more accountable (Watson & Khan, 2010). This involved the construction of improved classrooms, appointment of merit teachers, and greater control of local authorities. It also attempted to involve parents in the administration of schools and developed more transparent rules to transfer teachers to reduce corruption (Siddiqui & Shaukat, 2021).

School Education Department (SED) Initiatives

These larger policies have also been served by running the programs conducted by the School Education Department (SED) of Punjab. These programs and ideas have involved construction of more



schools, distribution of scholarships, and promotion of education among disabled children (Jahanzaib & Fatima, 2021; Nawaz et al., 2021). The SED has also been friendly towards greater technology in the classroom and has attempted to equip teachers to work with it (Hennessy et al., 2022). However, it has been difficult to make education inclusive for all children despite these efforts. The inequalities remain large, and much more resources should be provided to students with special needs (Jahanzaib & Fatima, 2021).

The following common purposes unite all these policies: they all aim to provide all children with high-quality education, enhance student achievement, narrow the divide between the rich and the poor and between boys and girls, and ensure that the education system is more transparent and efficient (Butler et al., 2024; Halai & Durrani, 2020; Hasan et al., 2023; Rehman & Huma, 2024; Rizwan & Sohail, 2024). In the end, the goal is to build a stronger nation by investing in its people (Munir & Zaidi, 2023; Sher et al., 2024).

Table 1

Summary of Major Education Policies in Punjab

Policy	Year	Key Goals	Implementation Status
National Education Policy	2009	Increase access and quality; promote fairness; boost enrolment; reduce gender gaps; improve teacher training.	Faced major hurdles due to lack of funding and institutional support (Habib, 2013).
National Education Policy	2017	Focus on job skills; use technology; connect education to the job market; promote vocational training.	Implementation is ongoing, with a continued push for technology and skills in the curriculum (Rizwan & Sohail, 2024).
Single National Curriculum (SNC)	2020	Create one curriculum for all; reduce educational divides; ensure equal learning opportunities.	Being rolled out in phases, teachers have concerns about training and resources (Sher et al., 2024).
Punjab Education Sector Reform Program (PESRP)	Early 2000s	Upgrade school buildings; improve teacher quality; strengthen governance and accountability; decentralize power.	Made real gains in infrastructure and teacher hiring, but governance and long-term sustainability are still issues (Habib, 2013).
School Education Department (SED) Initiatives	Varies	Support national policies; improve school facilities; offer scholarships; push for inclusive and digital learning.	A mixed bag of results. Good progress on digital tools, but big gaps remain in making education fair and inclusive for all (Hennessy et al., 2022; Jahanzaib & Fatima, 2021).

Policy Implementation Landscape in Punjab

In Punjab, there is no shortage of policies designed to improve schools. However, the real challenge has always been implementation. A wide gap exists between the goals written in policy documents and the reality in classrooms, a situation shaped by how the system is run, the skills of its workforce, and chronic problems with funding and politics (Habib, 2013; Nawaz et al., 2021; Rashid et al., 2025).

Administrative Structure and Decentralization

The education system in Punjab is layered, with the provincial government at the top, District Education Authorities (DEAs) in the middle, and schools at the bottom (Munir & Zaidi, 2023). For years, the big idea in reform has been decentralization, moving power down to the local level to make the system more responsive and accountable (Watson & Khan, 2009). The reforms in 2001 were supposed to do just that. However, this top-down effort to decentralize has had mixed results. Instead of simply empowering local communities, it sometimes just created new layers of bureaucracy and political power games, which defeated the whole purpose (Watson & Khan, 2009). Real, meaningful decentralization is still more of an idea than a



reality.

Role of District Education Authorities (DEAs)

On paper, District Education Authorities (DEAs) are the key players in making policy happen. They are supposed to oversee schools, manage teachers, and distribute funds in their district (Munir & Zaidi, 2023). In reality, they often do not have the capacity, the authority, or the resources to do their jobs well. They can be stuck between provincial directives and local pressures, with weak accountability systems that make it hard to enforce standards (Rehman & Huma, 2024). Research shows a common problem in Pakistan's education system is this disconnect between what regulatory bodies are supposed to do and what they can actually accomplish, and DEAs are a prime example of this (Rehman & Huma, 2024).

Capacity of Teachers, Principals, and Monitoring Officials

Ultimately, any policy is only as good as the people who have to carry it out every day: the teachers, principals, and monitors (Azam & Durrani, 2024; Javed et al., 2012). The quality of education depends almost entirely on having skilled and motivated teachers. Yet, there is a huge need for better, ongoing professional development to give teachers the skills they need for a modern classroom (Hennessy et al., 2022). Pakistan's low ranking in primary education quality is partly because of a lack of well-trained teachers (Azam & Durrani, 2024). While some organizations like the Punjab Education Foundation (PEF) are helping train teachers in the private sector, a system-wide solution for public schools is still missing (Javed et al., 2012). Principals also need training to be strong leaders, and school monitors need the skills and freedom to give real feedback and hold schools accountable.

Issues of Resource Allocation and Political Interference

Two of the most damaging and long-standing problems in Punjab's education system are the unfair distribution of resources and constant political meddling (Ramsay-Jordan, 2020). Money and good teachers often don't go where they're needed most, making the gap between city and rural schools even wider (Salas-Velasco et al., 2021). Political influence messes with everything from hiring and transferring teachers to deciding where money gets spent. This not only wastes resources but also kills motivation and destroys public trust. Studies have shown that how much is spent per student and whether they have basic materials has a direct effect on learning, which means students in poorer regions are stuck in a cycle of disadvantage (Salas-Velasco et al., 2021).

All these issues create a massive implementation gap. A policy promoting inclusive education sounds great, but it falls apart when schools do not have ramps, trained staff, or support for children with disabilities (Jahanzaib & Fatima, 2021). The Single National Curriculum aims for fairness, but it hits a wall when teachers feel they are not prepared or do not have the right materials to teach it (Sher et al., 2024). Closing this gap will require more than just new policies; it needs better governance, real investment in people, fair distribution of resources, and getting communities involved (Aslam et al., 2024).

Key Impacts on School Education Outcomes in Punjab, Pakistan

The raft of education policies in Punjab has led to a mixed and often contradictory set of results. While there has been some progress in certain areas, major problems with access, fairness, and quality remain, showing just how hard it is to turn policy promises into real change.

Access and Enrollment Trends

The Pakistani government has had the ultimate goal of providing universal education to all since the time of business, but it has witnessed slow transformation due to impending social and economic issues (Khalid & Tadesse, 2024). Access to school for every child remains a significant challenge in Punjab, mostly affecting poor and marginalized groups (Ansari et al., 2024; Halai & Durrani, 2020). ECE, a factor that is identified as largely supporting a child in early development, is very poor in the province, thus restricting the amount of support they can be offered in later life in schooling (Rashid et al., 2025). Evidence from rural Punjab indicates that a large number of women and children read and do math very poorly, which prevents them from realizing the highest possible benefits of their educational experience (Abbasi et al., 2023). The enrolment levels rise and fall based on the grade level and what is happening in the economy, thus indicating that access to education remains very fragile (Fatima et al., 2024; Khalid & Tadesse, 2023).

Gender Disparities



The gender gap in education is one of the most stubborn problems in Pakistan, and Punjab is no exception (Afzal et al., 2013; Rehman et al., 2023). Data from surveys like the PSLM show that girls still face more barriers to attending and finishing school than boys do (Rehman et al., 2023). Even though education policies since 1947 have aimed to get all children into primary school, the gender gap has not gone away (Ahmad et al., 2024). In rural parts of Punjab, old-fashioned attitudes often lead parents to invest in their sons' education, which they see as an economic benefit, while a daughter's schooling is seen as less important than her future domestic role (Purewal & Hashmi, 2015). As a result, despite many programs to empower girls, Pakistan's literacy rate is still low for the region, and gender inequality is a big reason why (Jamal et al., 2023; Latif, 2009).

Quality of Teaching and Learning Outcomes

The quality of teaching and the school environment directly affects how well students learn (Raza et al., 2019). Research in Lahore found that when students are in a positive and supportive classroom, they feel more capable and do better. The message is clear: a good learning environment matters. However, many students are underperforming, and many people are unhappy with public schools, partly because these schools lack a clear strategy for success (Mittal & Jung, 2024). Some argue that schools need to think more like customer-focused organizations. This means focusing on key areas like academics, safety, and technology, and then taking practical steps like tracking student progress, making sure schools are safe, and providing good internet access. This kind of strategic focus could make a real difference in learning (Mittal & Jung, 2024).

Infrastructure and Digital Inclusion

To bring Punjab's education system into the 21st century, it desperately needs better infrastructure and wider access to technology (Alghamdi & Holland, 2020). Today, internet access is not a luxury; it's a basic need for learning (Mittal & Jung, 2024). But there is a huge digital divide between city and rural schools, which just makes existing inequalities worse (Gulati et al., 2024). A good plan for improving schools has to look at everything: physical buildings, libraries and labs, and equal access to computers and the internet (Gulati et al., 2024). It also means teaching students and teachers how to use technology safely and responsibly.

Equity and Inclusion in Education

Equity and inclusion are not just buzzwords; they are the heart of a good education system (Uleanya, 2023). It means making sure every single student has a fair chance to succeed, no matter his or her family background, gender, or ability (Gulati et al., 2024). A truly inclusive system does more than just get kids in the door; it provides extra support for those who need it and works to break down the barriers that hold them back. For example, using technology to teach STEM subjects can be great, but it only works if it is designed to be inclusive, culturally sensitive, and accessible to everyone, including girls and students with disabilities (Naidoo & Singh-Pillay, 2025). Without a serious, ongoing commitment to equity, education policies will continue to fail the very students who need them most.

Critical Challenges and Bottlenecks

Punjab's school system is stuck. Despite having a literacy rate over 70%, it is held back by a number of deep-seated problems that block progress and make good policies ineffective (Munir & Zaidi, 2023). To move forward, we have to honestly look at these challenges.

Policy Inconsistency and Political Cycles

One of the biggest problems is that education policy keeps changing with every new government. This makes any kind of long-term planning impossible (Qutoshi et al., 2019). In Pakistan, education policy is often tied to the political agenda of the party in power. What one government starts, the next one stops or changes completely. This creates chaos and means that good ideas never get the time they need to work. The constant churn prevents any real, lasting reform from taking hold in the system (Qutoshi et al., 2019).

Weak Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

How do we know if a policy is working? In Punjab, it is hard to say because the systems for monitoring and evaluation are so weak. Without good data, it is impossible to see what impact a policy is having, where it is failing, or how to fix it (Tariq et al., 2023). This problem is especially clear in areas like Early Childhood Education (ECE), which has been neglected for years partly because no one is properly tracking its quality or



reach (Tariq et al., 2023). You cannot have accountability in a system that does not measure its own performance.

Urban-Rural Disparities

The gap between schools in cities and those in the countryside is huge and getting wider (Waqar et al., 2024). Rural schools often have crumbling buildings, not enough qualified teachers, and few, if any, learning materials. These problems are made worse by poverty and cultural norms. For example, studies show that the high cost of education is a major reason why girls from rural families do not go on to higher education (Hasan et al., 2023). These deep-rooted inequalities create a vicious cycle that holds back the entire province (Purewal & Hashmi, 2014).

Corruption and Inefficiency in Implementation

Corruption and bad management are like a poison in the education system, stealing resources and lowering the quality of education for everyone (Munir & Zaidi, 2023). Money meant for schools disappears, teachers do not show up for work, and "ghost schools" exist on paper but not in reality. These problems not only cheat students out of an education but also make the public lose faith in the system. On top of that, bad policies, like having huge class sizes or hiring untrained teachers, are signs of a system that is just not working efficiently (Munir & Zaidi, 2023).

Community Engagement and Stakeholder Voice

Too often, education policies are made by officials in offices with no input from the people on the front lines: teachers, parents, and community members. When people have no say in the decisions that affect their children's schools, they do not feel any ownership of the policies, and they are less likely to support them (Jolles et al., 2024). To make policies that actually work, we need to create real opportunities for parents and teachers to share their ideas and concerns.

These are not just Pakistan's problems. A study from the Indian state of Punjab found similar issues with policy implementation hurting schools and teachers (Kaur, 2018). Bangladesh is also dealing with poor infrastructure, a lack of teachers, and high dropout rates. This shows that the solutions require a broad approach that tackles governance, funding, and community involvement all at once (Gulati et al., 2024).

Opportunities and Future Directions

Even with all its problems, Punjab's education system has real opportunities for change. If the province takes a strategic and evidence-based approach, it can build a fairer and more effective system that meets both national goals and global standards.

Strengthening Policy Coherence and Continuity

The first big opportunity is to make education policy more stable and consistent, so it does not change with every election. The constant flip-flopping of policies creates chaos and stops long-term progress (Ali, 2014; Rizvi, 2016). A better way forward would be for political parties to agree on a set of cores, long-term education goals based on national plans like Pakistan Vision 2025 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Hamid, 2016). This would create a stable policy foundation that can be adapted over time but is not thrown out every few years (Butler et al., 2024).

Investing in Teacher Training and School Leadership

The best investment Punjab can make is in its people, its teachers and principals (Kenayathulla et al., 2024; Perveen & Farrukh, 2018). It is time to move past one-off workshops and create high-quality, continuous training programs for all teachers. These programs should focus on modern teaching methods, classroom management, and using technology effectively (Hennessy et al., 2022; Khadim et al., 2023). At the same time, principals need to be trained as strong leaders. They need skills in strategic planning, mentoring teachers, and working with the community to drive real improvement in their schools (Ali, 2014; Bana & Khaki, 2015).

Leveraging Data and Technology for Transparency

Data and technology can be potent resources for making the education system more transparent and accountable (Wollscheid et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2024). A well-designed Education Management Information System (EMIS) may offer real-time information about aspects such as student attendance and tests, teacher placement, and school funding (El-Hamamsy et al., 2021). This would enable policymakers to make wise, evidence-based decisions. The access gap can also be closed with the help of technology. Digital



resources and online learning systems have the potential to deliver high-quality education to learners in distant places that would otherwise have been marginalized (Iqbal & Sami, 2020).

Community-Based Monitoring Systems

Engaging local communities in the surveillance of their schools can make a tremendous difference in accountability. Establishing local community monitoring systems would enable parents and other local authorities to provide direct feedback on the performance of their schools, teacher attendance, and the sufficiency of facilities (Hussain & Akhter, 2025; Kockelkoren et al., 2023). This gives a feeling of collective advocacy for the school's success. Everyone is aware that the more involved the parents are, the better the students perform (Nkansah & Oldac, 2024).

Alignment with SDG 4 and Pakistan Vision 2025

Finally, the province of Punjab is supposed to unite its educational policies with the intentions of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) and Pakistan Vision 2025 entirely. SDG 4 is an international reference point for good and sustainable education (Boafo et al., 2024; Khalid & Tadesse, 2023). The education sector is one of the determinants of Pakistan's future growth because it can foster a rise in the Pakistani economy in accordance with Pakistan Vision 2025 (Hamid, 2016). Future policies must allow themselves to be unambiguously aimed at achieving these objectives with the help of skills that are ready to work in the modern world, the development of innovation, and the introduction of students to the ideas of sustainable development and environmental responsibility (Adnan et al., 2024; Khadim et al., 2023). Punjab can thereby make its education system a force for good by taking advantage of these opportunities (Munir & Zaidi, 2023; Safdar et al., 2024).

Conclusion

Given the picture of the school education system in Punjab, one can say that a significant lack of connection between policy and reality can be observed. As presented in this review, policies tend to be very ambitious; however, they prove to be limited once they are implemented, particularly regarding the enhancement of fairness and quality (Cui et al., 2023; Kunhi et al., 2020; Liu & Dijk, 2022). The tried-and-tested reforms to increase access or standardize the curriculum have continued to be undermined by entrenched issues such as fragile policies, disparity in funding, and a system that is ill-equipped to follow through (Fatima et al., 2025; Uleanya, 2023).

The most important point is that such a discrepancy between policy and practice affects the most vulnerable students (Abbasi et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2021). Inclusive education policies, for example, are not of much use when the classroom lacks support for children with special needs. The gender gap is yet another thorn in the flesh, which, despite years of policies allegedly aimed at developing an equal environment, has persisted (Lily et al., 2020; Sun et al., 2025; Vishal et al., 2021). These issues prove that what we require is nothing but properly written policies that are meant to help with the actual, overlapping disadvantages that most students might have access to (Kleemola et al., 2025). No policy, even the best one, can be implemented without trained and motivated teachers and principals (Kenayathulla et al., 2024).

Therefore, this review highlights the need to shift towards more sustainable and participatory reforms. We should no longer wait only for top-down policies and work collaboratively with local communities, taking the locals into their considerations and developing models with their knowledge that provide solutions fitting in their environment (Cheema et al., 2023; Jourdan et al., 2021; Kunhi et al., 2020). Policies must be dynamic documents created using actual evidence and updated routinely with the contribution of all parties (Haugen et al., 2020). Indeed, by making sustainability, fairness, and community involvement an overriding priority of the education policy, Punjab will be able to begin bridging the chasm between its pledges and the position of things in schools (Johnson et al., 2022; Ramirez-Mendoza et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2021). A new path will require a sincere, common endeavour to create an education system that serves all.

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