

Public School Teachers' Opinion on Curriculum Reforms in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa between 2013-2018

Madiha Mehmood¹

¹ PhD Scholar, Department of Teacher Education, Faculty of Education, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

✉ madihazohaib0@gmail.com

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Abstract: The curriculum reforms refer to an action plan to improve the selection and organization of school knowledge and associated pupils learning. The curriculum reforms were made in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to promote literacy, enhance learning outcomes, and improve the standard of quality education across the province to align with global standards. These reforms encompassed significant changes, including the introduction of outcome-based education, the revision of textbooks to inculcate critical thinking and modern themes, and the implementation of the English language as a medium of instruction. The curriculum identifies the learning outcomes, standards, and core competencies that students must demonstrate prior to advancing to the next level. The government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa took substantial steps to introduce curriculum reforms to elevate the standard of quality education in the province. This study thus was prompted by a single significant question- what curriculum reforms were made in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa? The main objectives of the study were to explore curriculum reforms that took place and were implemented in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during the years 2013 and 2018. The data for the study was collected from 40 schoolteachers of public schools. The participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique. The data were collected with the help of an interview guide with an open-ended questionnaire face-to-face, and in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted while focusing on the implementation of curriculum reforms and its perceived outcomes. Subsequently, the findings highlight the achievements and opportunities as well as the problems and difficulties that can be identified for future educational policy and development.

Keywords: Curriculum Reforms, Semi-structured Interview Guide, Purposive Sampling

Corresponding Author:

Madiha Mehmood
PhD Scholar, Department of
Teacher Education, Faculty of
Education, International Islamic
University, Islamabad, Pakistan.
✉ madihazohaib0@gmail.com

Introduction

Undoubtedly, the future of Pakistan will definitely depend on the type of education we impart to our children and the way in which we are preparing them as the future Gen of Pakistan. We should not forget that we have to compete with the world, which is going at a fast pace, in order to be sure that they are fully equipped and are capable of contributing their share in different fields of national life, which will definitely be an honor for Pakistan. The educational environment in Pakistan has grappled with inequalities between private and public education systems. Under the 18th Amendment, educational responsibilities have been delegated to provinces, bringing new challenges and opportunities for curriculum development in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Naz, 2016). The world's growing trends in educational settings emphasize the importance of revised national curricula with global standards in order to equip students with the necessary skills required for the current educational environment (UNICEF, 2016).

The government, either central or provincial, must play a fundamental role in achieving the aims and objectives of educational policy in terms of bringing educational reforms. The provincial government has taken different initiatives in terms of educational reforms to enhance the learning outcomes and elevation of the overall literacy rate.

After invoking the 18th Amendment in the constitution of Pakistan and insertion of Article 25-A, the right of free and compulsory education was delegated to children ages between 05-16 years as a fundamental right. The provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa took different steps to achieve different sectoral reforms, including curriculum reforms. The Elementary and Secondary Education Department (E & SED) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was a key department that played a pivotal role in effectively formulating and implementing the curriculum reforms in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The Elementary and Secondary Education Department transformed itself and took additional responsibilities to follow the 18th Constitutional Amendment. Thus, it was made possible to enhance the pace to cope with national and international objectives towards the achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), given the recognition of the right to free and compulsory education and the implementation of the EFA (Education for All) framework. The Provincial government was empowered to produce and implement curriculum reforms in the province in accordance with persistent deficiencies and in particular areas that needed immediate remedial action in the formulation of curriculum reforms. The provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had undergone broader revolutionary curriculum reforms during 2013-2018. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province was planned to go a long way in enhancing literacy levels and ensuring modern education for every learner. Hence, the parents aspired to send their children to government schools (Gouleta, [2015](#)).

The Study Context

Under the invoke of the 18th Amendment in 2010, the autonomy and power to run educational matters were transferred to all provincial governments of Pakistan. The Awami National Party (ANP), which led the provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa prior to 2013, the ANP government passed an Act in 2008 to introduce the local language, Pashto, as a compulsory subject in all public schools of the province. It was also decided that the medium of instruction in public schools would be the Pashto mother language (Shah, [2012](#)). In 2013, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), after coming into power, declared an educational emergency in the province and introduced different educational reforms at the school level, including changes in textbooks and changes in the examination system.

The provincial government, from 2013 to 2018, also reformed the school's curriculum with revised textbooks as a part of its educational reform initiative (Hina & Ajmal, [2016](#)). The curriculum wing of the provincial government added some new topics in the science subjects, including math, physics, biology, and chemistry. An effective curriculum empowers students, teachers, school leaders, and citizens of society with a measurable plan and delivers quality education. It defines the learning achievements, standards, and key skills the students need to achieve before they can move to the next level. The curriculum was revised to contain pictorial and colorful textbooks, which make it easy for students to understand the lessons (Soomro & Tanveer, 2017). The medium of instruction was also changed to the English language in public schools in order to compete with students of elite private schools and reduce the learning gaps (Shah, [2012](#)).

Review of Literature

The aim of education has evolved according to the needs of society over the years (Taneri, [2016](#)). Generally, education policies and reforms were directed and driven by the human capital approach. Human Capital Theory promoted education to a key influential role in boosting economic growth and societal development (Gillies, [2011](#)). The general purpose was to contribute to economic development and to improve the living standard of the people through improvement in the quality of education and fostering skills that meet the demands of a competitive global economy. Each society wants to react to the current needs of the period through its education system (Amanchukwu & Daminabo, [2014](#)).

The world has increasingly become complex, and new challenges and demands have been created for the education system worldwide. Technological advancements and globalization have intensified the need for educational reforms particularly focused on innovation, sustainability, and inclusivity; for instance, most countries have integrated themes such as gender equality, digital literacy, and environmental awareness to prepare their students for contemporary challenges (UNICEF, [2016](#)). These critical transformations in the educational world emphasize the



importance of critical thinking, problem-solving, and essential digital literacy skills for learners (Darling-Hammond, [2015](#)). Pakistan faced similar pressures to compete with modern technology and global standards to aim and align the curriculum with global standards while taking into account local needs (Naz, 2016). In Pakistan, the curriculum has remained the center of discussion, particularly after the delegation of authorities to provincial governments under the 18th Amendment.

Since the beginning of Pakistan, several different governments in the past attempted to implement educational reforms in schools, and it remained a focal point for politicians, educationists, and policymakers for both federal and provincial governments (Ahmad et al., [2014](#)).

The more pressing challenge for policymakers that can be addressed on an immediate basis is content; the content eventually means what the school textbooks imply. The one topic more desperately needs attention is that the material contained in the textbooks does justice to current standards and guidelines for the curriculum (Gouleta, [2015](#)). Government-published textbooks should be invaluable tools at the service of teachers whose responsibility is to make students learn and understand different topics for different subjects according to the standard of curriculum. The first step towards improving the quality of content taught to children was to issue competitive contracts for textbooks overseen by a government-formed technical committee. This was a critical first step towards enabling children and teachers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to have access to the modern and sophisticated learning instruments they deserve. The curriculum development authority remained with the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa transformed the curriculum into the English medium of instruction. The parents preferred to admit their children to private schools because parents expressed their opinions about admitting their children to schools where the medium of instruction is in English. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government changed the medium of instruction so that children were able to compete globally. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government included the English content in textbooks starting from class 1 about 3 years back. Every year, textbooks for class levels up to 4 have been translated into English and taught by government schools. It is necessary to know the efficient content of policy that such fundamental change is being adopted by children and even teachers and how teachers handle such situations to change the medium of instruction to English (Mustafa, [2012](#)).

The E & SED and provincial IT Board with mutual cooperation developed programming courses in IT labs for class 7 to 9 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government schools. Initially the program has been installed in 60 government school labs of 14 districts initially. The program comprises the knowledge about the essentials of information and technology (I-SAPS, [2019](#)).

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the curriculum reforms made at the public schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa between 2013 and 2018. This qualitative approach is appropriate for understanding the experiences, perceptions, and opinions of teachers about these reforms. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has a total area of 74,521 Sq (Ullah et al., [2020](#)). This small-scale study covers one district, Abbottabad of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a region well known for its educational landscape and diversified demographic. The study focused on a wider question: What curriculum reforms were made and implemented in public schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa? This study is qualitative in nature, and a systematic approach is used to determine the implementation of curriculum reforms. The data was collected from 40 female schoolteachers to undertake the study. The school teachers were selected with the help of a purposive sampling technique (Creswell & Poth, [2018](#)). Only those teachers who were willing to participate in the study and were directly involved in teaching were selected for the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and participants were briefed about the study. The semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions was used as the tool for data collection to allow respondents to express their views comprehensively. The data was collected from face-to-face, in-depth qualitative interviews. Each interview lasts about an hour.

The data collected from schoolteachers of public schools through an interview guide was analyzed using a thematic approach. The interview guide was chosen as the preferred method of data collection, it was aimed at



discovering curriculum reforms and their relevant implementation in public schools of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. All interviews were performed using an open-ended questionnaire. The interviews were recorded first and then transcribed in prose and analyzed to identify the recurring themes and patterns related to the research objective. Thematic research was used for the interpretation of qualitative data obtained through an interview guide with open-ended questions (Creswell & Poth, [2018](#)).

The study was based on small sample size and limited to one district Abbottabad. The study was limited to female respondents and therefore does not represent the opinions of male teachers. It is important to mention that it was not possible for female researchers to interview male teachers for an hour in the cultural context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Findings and Discussion

The collected data was analyzed, interpreted, and presented through three main themes.

School Teachers' Opinion on Assessment of Learners' Outcome

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa introduced critical curriculum reforms as a part of comprehensive educational advancements. The curriculum of an education system provides a foundation for the entire learning process and parallel shapes a framework for the assessment of learning outcomes. The respondents were asked to express their views on curriculum reforms. The respondents consistently appreciated the implementation of recent curriculum reforms in the education system of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The respondents referred to various curriculum reforms and particularly mentioned that the assessment of learners' outcomes was made according to the latest developed curriculum to enhance the learners' outcome by removing the element of rote memorization, the focus shifted on assessing critical thinking, problem-solving, and practical application of knowledge and conceptual learning process were introduced in schools of KP (Gouleta, [2015](#)). This helped remove the rote memorization elements from the examination system in KP schools. The teachers emphasized that the new examination system was focused on testing the subject knowledge of learners through different assessment techniques and in public schools. The curriculum was revised to include outcome-based education (OBE), and learning outcomes were clearly defined for each level/grade and subject, providing a structured framework for assessment and teaching. The respondents argued that a significant improvement was noted in understanding the core concepts, as assessments are now better aligned with the learning objectives of the curriculum (Hamidi et al., [2024](#)).

The assessments were designed to assess the applicability of knowledge rather than keeping in view the traditional testing techniques; the assessments weren't carrying the traditional set of questions; rather, it was a mixture of questions. They carried self-designed questions and a traditional set of questions, and teachers commonly believed that self-designed questions were preferred over traditional assessment techniques. The teachers were encouraged to design self-designed questions to assess the learner's ability; the ultimate purpose was to assess the learner's outcome under the new examination system. The assessments were taken periodically to assess the learner's outcome by the end of each chapter or topic. The teachers express their opinion in favor of the importance of going beyond rote memorization, which was previously dominated in the educational settings of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Naz et al., [2021](#)). The respondents highlighted that assessments of learners now included open-ended questions and practical questions that were used to test critical and problem-solving skills. These reforms focus on preparing learners for real-world challenges and higher education requirements to compete in a global educational context. The assessment of students on Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) of class 2 and class 5 is a universal assessment conducted by BISE in all public sector schools (Government of KP, [2018](#)), whereas non-BISE assessments under School Quality Management Initiative (SQMI) conducted to provide feedback for improvement of student's performance to ensure continuous improvement in learning outcomes (UNICEF, [2016](#)). These assessments are conducted in advance to assess the knowledge retention of learners as well as teaching techniques. The improved learning outcomes associated with the testament of curriculum reforms in KP during this period (Naz et al., [2021](#)).



KP has invested in the implementation of universal and sample-based assessments for students of grades 2, 5, and 8 levels, as previously, there were no regular assessments at the primary level. Significant efforts were made to ensure the design of assessments was of high quality and that the assessment data was used to make informed decisions at the district and provincial levels. The elementary and secondary education department (E & SED) of KP foreseen that improvement in the assessment system can drive the success of its reform agenda at various levels (I-SAPS, [2019](#)).

School Teachers' Opinion on Medium of Instructions

In the shift of the medium of instruction to English in KP from 2013 to 2018, several teachers recognized the benefits but also highlighted the significant challenges. This educational reform was necessary to align with global educational standards and future advancement in studies (Ullah et al., [2020](#)). Most of the teachers agreed that English proficiency is an important element for acquiring higher education and competing in the global environment (Naz et al., [2021](#)). The teachers supported the reform that the English medium of instruction improved overall students' academic performance and made them adaptable in a growing world. This change was welcomed by some teachers, as the advantages of English proficiency are critical for students' professional and academic futures. Teachers also believed that aligning government schools with private schools eliminates discrimination and maximizes opportunities for students from rural and underprivileged backgrounds.

The teachers also expressed their concerns regarding the practical implications of this change in the medium of instruction, which was a lack of English proficiency among both educators and students. The teachers in rural and underserved areas of KP reported challenging for them to explain complex terminologies in English. In teachers' opinion, this rapid shift might lead to generating understanding gaps and create significant challenges that weaken the effectiveness of new mediums of instruction, particularly in rural and far-flung areas where both teachers and students lack language proficiency (Buttah, [2020](#)). The teachers argued that the reform was implemented without sufficient training and development of skills required for teaching a second language and didn't keep pace with the demands of the new curriculum (Ullah et al., [2020](#)). The textbooks were translated into English language without considering the linguistic background of students, especially early-grade learners, who struggled significantly. The students who were previously taught Urdu or Pashto faced challenges in understanding lessons, which affected their learning outcomes. Most of the respondents appreciated that such curriculum reforms aim to reduce inequalities between private and public education, and teachers suggested that teaching and programs in bilingual eased the shift and allowed the students to gradually build an understanding of core subjects and English proficiency (Naz et al., [2021](#)). In 2015, a major push was made to translate books into English, as previously, these books were in the native language. The KP government was aiming to provide English medium textbooks across all subjects from grade 1 onwards; the transition was phased over many years, and the textbooks for classes up to grade 4 were fully translated into English language and taught in public schools. In the teacher's opinion, the reforms for change in the medium of instruction to English implemented in 2018, particularly in Science and Mathematics textbooks, were translated into English (Government of KP, [2018](#)).

School Teachers' Opinion on Changes in School Curricula and Textbooks

The curriculum refers to a set of academic courses and a variety of content taught in schools, colleges, and universities to achieve certain educational objectives and outcomes for the students (Meyer, [2018](#)). In other words, the curriculum is the body of knowledge that is transmitted to students. The power war on the pages of textbooks and the politics of curriculum is not new (Apple, [2014](#)). The school's knowledge is created, developed, approved, and delivered with underlying hegemonic interests and objectives. The curriculum reforms in Pakistan are no exception; since the inception of Pakistan in 1947, the curriculum in schools has remained a political ideology. The changes in curriculum could not achieve the desired results and remain subject to change.

In 2013, the federal government guidelines were largely adhered for the curriculum in KP schools with emphasize on Urdu and regional languages, along with basic English instructions in science subjects. The provincial



textbook board was responsible for development and distribution of textbooks, in teachers' opinion this was mainly criticized for limited inclusivity and lack of focus, due to outdated content.

In 2018, the KP government undertook educational reforms to revolutionize an improved curriculum with advanced educational standards. These reforms were made with the aim of enhancing critical thinking, promoting inclusivity, removing the rote memorization elements, and incorporating new themes such as environmental awareness and gender equality. These changes were introduced in textbooks with a priority on English medium content in science and mathematics textbooks to align with national trends. The revised curriculum was largely appreciated with the inclusion of modern themes such as environmental awareness and gender equality (Ullah et al., [2020](#)).

The teachers provided their opinions that the quality of textbooks improved with modern concepts and compelled learners to think critically, and revised textbooks in terms of design with integration of real-world examples and colorful illustrations of different topics related to technology, social awareness, and activities that made lessons more interactive and engaging for students. In teachers' opinion, the revised textbooks were essential for students to compete with the global world, and they believed that these revised curricula played a critical role in student engagement and enhanced learning experience. The textbooks were developed with an emphasis on Islamization.

A few teachers were of the opinion that rapid implementation of revised textbooks increased academic pressure on students, the change of medium of instruction in textbooks of science and mathematics posed difficulties for both students and teachers in rural and underdeveloped areas in KP, lack of training to teachers on revised textbooks impacted negatively on learning outcomes, the teachers were of the opinion that implementation of reforms made in phases and teaching aids to support diverse learning needs (Meyer, [2018](#)).

Conclusion

Our analysis of the field data suggests that the majority of respondents spoke very highly of that substantial educational reforms in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa implemented between 2013 and 2018 represent significant efforts to raise standards of education, enhance learning outcomes, and with purpose to align public education with global standards. The data revealed that respondents were very positive about the results of curriculum reforms. The study substantiates that the English language adopted as a medium of instruction, revised textbooks, and implementation of outcome-based education demonstrate a commitment to innovation and modernization in educational standards. In this study, a mixed bag of responses from teachers was observed regarding these reforms. The results also exposed that several teachers appreciated the curriculum reforms in the context of enhanced focus on critical thinking, updated content, and inclusivity, but also highlighted challenges such as insufficient teacher training and the linguistic background of students posed barriers to effective implementation of reforms. Despite these obstacles, the reforms contributed to addressing the rote learning processes and alignment of public education standards with global best practices; this demonstrated that the educational policy of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa resolved to improve the educational outcomes.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings and conclusion of the study, this article recommends that quality and overall standard of education can be improved if our educational system has given proper attention. In order to address these issues, the following measures need to be taken.

- i. It is recommended that revision of textbooks takes places for best interest of the people of Pakistan without any political biased.
- ii. Teachers need to be trained professionally according to revised curriculum before they supposed to teach in classrooms as the success of curriculum reforms largely depends upon teachers.

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