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**RESEARCH PAPER****Navigating Pakistan's Educational Policy Landscape in Pursuit of Sustainable Development Goal 4: A view of Stakeholders****Dr. Hina Fazil\*<sup>1</sup> Nadeem Ahmad<sup>2</sup>**

1. Assistant Professor, Institute of Special Education University of the Punjab, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

2. PhD Scholar, Institute of Special Education University of the Punjab, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

**Corresponding Author**

hinafazil.dse@pu.edu.pk

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**ABSTRACT**

This study aimed to qualitatively assess educational policies in Pakistan in the context of achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). The research used in-depth interviews with a diverse group of participants, including educators, officials, and stakeholders from both public and private education sectors. A semi-structured interview protocol was designed to investigate legal aspects of inclusion, equitable quality education, and lifelong learning experiences related to SDG-4 in Pakistan. The study included 15 purposively selected respondents, and their interviews were recorded and transcribed. The findings revealed barriers to SDG 4 achievement, such as governance issues, low stakeholder participation, and challenges in monitoring and budget allocation. The study recommends prioritizing capacity building and fostering stakeholder ownership to effectively implement SDG 4 at the federal and provincial levels in Pakistan's education system.

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**KEYWORDS**

Educational Policies, Equality, Inclusivity, Pakistan, Quality Education, Sustainable Development Goal 4

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**Introduction**

People Sustainable development encapsulates a multifaceted vision for the future, where equitable education for children with disabilities is an integral element. In the pursuit of sustainable development, it is crucial to ensure that all children, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, have equal access to quality education (Ahmad, & Fazil, 2023). This commitment to inclusivity not only fosters social justice but also empowers marginalized individuals to become active contributors to their communities and economies. By providing equitable education for children with disabilities, we not only fulfill a fundamental human right but also create a more inclusive society where diversity is embraced and everyone has the opportunity to reach their full potential. Sustainable development is not just about economic progress and environmental stewardship but also about building a world where every child, regardless of their circumstances, can aspire to a brighter and more prosperous future (Walid, & Luetz, 2018).

Education is the first and foremost right of every child and a foundation of sustainability (Seifi, Razmkhah, & Pletnev, 2021). The provision of high-quality education can surely open new avenues of learning and maximize potential. Well-educated children always play a significant role in building equitable, robust, and affluent societies (Mapotse, 2020). Pakistan has made commitments to achieve SDGs and ensure equitable education to all children through its national policies. To meet these commitments, it must work on bringing out-of-school children into schools strengthen every aspect of its education system, and go beyond the issues of shortage of resources, accessibility, and quality of education.

A child's learning and grooming largely depend upon educational policies and inclusivity. The Constitution of Pakistan recognizes the significance of basic education (Khushik, & Diemer, 2018). Article 25 (a) indicates that the state is responsible for the provision of compulsory and free-of-cost education to all children from age 5 to 16 years (Tarar, Khan & Abbas, 2021). It declares the state responsible for introducing a system to fulfill the educational needs of children across the country. Children with disabilities are the most sidelined part of the population in Pakistan (Singal, 2016). SDG 4 explicitly emphasizes the right to education and inclusion of children with disabilities. Upholding the rights and provision of education can certainly play its part in alleviating poverty and minimizing the risk of disability (Singal, et, al., 2020).

### **Literature Review**

Educational policies play a pivotal role in enhancing the quality of education. Encouraging education not only leads to a decrease in unemployment and illiteracy rates but also fosters positive socio-economic outcomes (Schultz, 2022). Numerous studies have scrutinized Pakistan's education policy documents, five-year plans, reforms, projects, and programs. In the early 1960s, the World Bank initiated a program for developing nations with a primary focus on building human capital to alleviate poverty and bolster healthcare systems. This initiative also aimed to eliminate gender disparities, promote social equity, and ensure peace and political stability through education (Ali, 2016). The interconnection between education and policy is prominently observed across educational institutions, including schools, colleges, and universities.

Kalsoom, Qureshi, and Khanam (2018) conducted research on "Building Knowledge Competencies" for countries like Pakistan, emphasizing the role of quality higher education in fostering sustainable development. They assert that nurturing a skilled workforce and achieving sustainable progress through education is pivotal in driving a nation's development. Zaidiab, Mirza, Houa, and Ashraf (2019) emphasized the primary priorities of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including climate change mitigation, high-quality education, economic development, and global health. Consequently, developing countries must successfully implement sustainable procurement practices, incorporating cutting-edge technology and promoting top-tier education to reduce costs related to healthcare, energy, and environmental concerns while securing a prosperous future for generations to come.

Numerous publications scrutinize documents related to Pakistan's educational policies, encompassing aspects like five-year plans, reforms, and programs. While the federal government actively supports and promotes curriculum development, the attention devoted to education by Pakistan's national and provincial governments remains limited. Over the past few decades, Pakistan's educational system has undergone continuous enhancements, ultimately contributing to the overall development of the nation (Ashraf & Ismat, 2016). Many individuals perceive the process of formulating educational policies as highly politically biased. An essential determinant of educational outcomes is the policymaking framework and the methodology employed in crafting these policies. Regulation plays a pivotal role in shaping the nation's context and society. Multiple factors, including natural, fiscal, political, economic, cultural, geographical, global, and historical contexts, exert influence on the policymaking process (Hameed-ur-Rehman & Sewani, 2013).

The researchers have undertaken a meticulous and critical evaluation of Pakistan's educational policies in an earnest effort to identify the challenges and existing gaps within the system. Their objective is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the intricate

policy dynamics that govern the nation's educational landscape. By scrutinizing the policies through the lens of the study, they aspire to unearth valuable insights that transcend mere critique. These insights are intended to catalyze positive change, offering actionable recommendations and innovative solutions that can propel Pakistan towards the realization of Sustainable Development Goal 4, fostering a more inclusive, equitable, and high-quality educational system for the benefit of all its citizens.

### **The Pakistan Educational Conference 1947**

The Pakistan Educational Conference of 1947 was a significant event in the early days of Pakistan's history as an independent nation. The conference aimed to address several crucial aspects of education in the newly formed country. Here is an elaboration of its key objectives:

**Equitable Distribution of Education:** One of the primary objectives of the Pakistan Educational Conference in 1947 was to promote the equitable distribution of education among all segments of the population. At that time, Pakistan was grappling with significant socio-economic disparities, and the conference recognized the importance of ensuring that education reached every corner of the country, regardless of geographical location or social background. This commitment to equitable access to education was seen as a means to empower all citizens and reduce inequalities (Muzaffar, Hussain, Javaid, Khan, & Rahim, 2020; Ashraf, & Ismat, 2016).

**Integration of Social and Spiritual Education:** Another important aspect highlighted by the conference was the integration of social and spiritual education. This concept emphasized the need to provide education that not only focused on academic knowledge but also instilled values, ethics, and a sense of responsibility towards society and spirituality. It sought to produce well-rounded individuals who could contribute positively to both their communities and their spiritual development (Ahsan, 2003).

**Promotion of Physical Education:** The conference recognized the significance of physical education as an integral part of a holistic educational system. It aimed to encourage the inclusion of physical education in schools to promote the health and well-being of students. Physical education was seen as a means to develop not only physical fitness but also discipline, teamwork, and character (Muzaffar, 2016).

**Equitable Student Provision in Secondary Schools:** Ensuring that students had equal opportunities for education at the secondary level was another key concern. The conference emphasized the need to expand secondary education facilities and opportunities, particularly in underserved areas, to accommodate the growing student population and to prevent educational disparities. The Pakistan Educational Conference of 1947 sought to establish a comprehensive and inclusive educational framework for the newly formed nation. It aimed to address issues of access, values, physical well-being, and secondary education provision to create a more equitable and holistic educational system that would contribute to the development of Pakistan as a whole (Amir, Sharf, & Khan, 2020).

### **The Commission on National Education 1959**

The Commission on National Education in 1959 played a pivotal role in addressing the challenges and shortcomings of Pakistan's educational system. It aimed to strengthen the educational framework of the country, which had been the subject of various reform efforts since Pakistan's inception in 1947. However, despite these efforts, none of the

educational programs initiated during this period had been fully embraced or completed (Khalid, et, al., 2023).

One of the significant hindrances to the successful implementation of these educational programs was the unstable political environment in Pakistan. The country had experienced a series of political upheavals, including frequent changes in leadership and the imposition of martial law. As a result, no elected administration had managed to complete its full term in office during this period. This political instability had a profound impact on the continuity and effectiveness of educational initiatives (Faizi, Bibi, & Khan, 2020).

This commission was confronted with the complex task of addressing the shortcomings of Pakistan's educational system. While various educational programs had been initiated since 1947, the inability to fully embrace and complete these initiatives was largely attributed to the unstable political environment characterized by frequent changes in leadership and the imposition of martial law. These factors significantly impeded the development of a robust and consistent educational system in Pakistan during this period.

### **The New Education Policy 1970**

The new education policy of 1970 underscored the transformative role of education in driving social change and fostering overall societal growth. It recognized education as a potent catalyst that facilitates equal access to educational opportunities, thereby contributing to the establishment of a democratic social order (Amir, Sharf, & Khan, 2020). A key aspect of this policy was the imperative to establish a secondary education system that ensured equitable distribution of support services and faculty resources across all schools. This commitment not only presented a remarkable opportunity to lead the nation but also signaled a dedication to promoting numerous social welfare initiatives and effecting positive environmental adjustments. Central to this policy was the principle that the respect accorded to educators within society and educational institutions should be accessible to all children based on their merit (Suhag, & Khan, 2020).

### **The Education Policy 1972-1980**

The education policy of 1972-1980 was a pivotal initiative in Pakistan's educational landscape, with a core focus on promoting inclusivity and equal access to education. One of its fundamental objectives was to address the educational disparities that had marginalized underprivileged adults. The policy sought to provide special services and support to uplift these individuals, ensuring that educational opportunities were extended equitably to all segments of society (Miles, & Singal, 2010). In doing so, it aimed to break down barriers that had historically hindered certain groups from accessing quality education. Moreover, the policy recognized the significance of gender equality in education, emphasizing the need to provide equal educational chances for both sexes. This marked a significant step towards empowering women and girls and reducing gender-based disparities in education.

An essential aspect of the policy was its call for active engagement and participation from multiple stakeholders within the education system. It recognized that the responsibility for nurturing a conducive learning environment extended beyond teachers and students to include parents and the broader public. The policy advocated for the cultivation of a sense of shared responsibility, safety, and mutual respect between teachers and students, fostering an atmosphere conducive to effective learning. Furthermore, the policy highlighted the potential for national progress and leadership if Pakistan were to

invest in a multitude of social welfare initiatives and create an educational setting that was welcoming and accommodating to all pupils. In essence, it recognized that a well-rounded and inclusive education system was not only a means of individual empowerment but also a catalyst for societal development and progress (Heyneman, 2003).

### **The National Educational Conference 1977**

The National Educational Conference of 1977 marked a significant turning point in Pakistan's educational landscape with a focus on promoting gender equality and fostering an environment of inclusivity. One of its prominent objectives was to break down traditional gender-based distinctions in education. The conference advocated for a fundamental shift by ensuring that boys and girls attended the same schools without any differentiation. This progressive approach aimed to eliminate gender-related disparities in education, providing equal opportunities for both sexes to access quality learning (Shah, Ahmad, & Khan, 2019). By advocating for co-education and equal access to educational facilities for boys and girls nationwide, the conference sought to challenge societal norms and create an educational system that upheld gender equity.

Furthermore, the national educational conference recognized the pivotal role of teachers and students in shaping the educational landscape. It emphasized that these individuals were not only privileged members of society but also the architects of tomorrow's educational institutions. The conference underscored the importance of modeling discipline and values through the conduct of teachers and students, emphasizing their influential role in setting examples for the broader society (Suhag, & Khan, 2020). This approach highlighted the need for a holistic education that not only imparted academic knowledge but also instilled moral and ethical values. By entrusting teachers and students with the responsibility of leading by example, the conference aimed to cultivate a sense of responsibility, leadership, and commitment within the educational community, envisioning them as key drivers of positive societal change.

### **The National Education Policy and Implementation Program 1979**

The national education policy and implementation program of 1979 represented a significant step forward in Pakistan's commitment to inclusive and quality education, with a strong emphasis on gender equality. One of its central tenets was to ensure equal educational opportunities for everyone, regardless of gender (Suhag, & Khan, 2020). This marked a crucial departure from historical norms, where gender-based disparities in education were prevalent. The policy sought to break down these barriers by fostering an educational environment that treated both boys and girls equitably. By providing equal access to education for all, it aimed to create a more just and inclusive society where gender would not be a determinant of educational opportunities.

The program also underscored the importance of cultivating a positive and respectful learning environment within schools. It emphasized that instructors and fellow students should value and respect the thoughts, voices, and ideas of all students. This approach aimed to nurture an atmosphere of open dialogue, where students felt empowered to express themselves freely and engage in meaningful discussions. Additionally, the program recognized the critical role of in-service training for teachers, enabling them to become more innovative and creative in their teaching methods. It highlighted the need to create a nurturing and supportive climate within schools to maintain and enhance these relationships. Moreover, the policy emphasized the significance of appreciating the contributions of students, parents, and other stakeholders

in the educational process, reinforcing the idea that a collaborative effort was essential for improving the overall quality of education (Shah, Ahmad, & Khan, 2019).

### **The National Education Policy 1992**

The national education policy of 1992 represented a significant shift in Pakistan's approach to education, emphasizing inclusivity, equal learning opportunities, and addressing disparities. A central tenet of this policy was the belief that all students, without exception or justification, could become competent learners. It recognized that schools had a crucial role in ensuring that equal learning opportunities were provided to all students. This marked a departure from previous educational norms, which often perpetuated disparities based on factors such as color, language, income, abilities, and gender. The policy aimed to rectify these inequities by emphasizing the need for schools to restructure their operations to support equal learning for all students (Perveen, & Aziz, 2021).

The policy also acknowledged the importance of addressing disparities related to various aspects of diversity, such as color, language, income, abilities, and gender. However, it notably omitted a discussion on how teachers themselves were not always afforded the same level of respect and honor as other members of society, particularly due to gender biases. Nevertheless, school administrators were encouraged to take proactive measures to create inclusive educational environments where all students had equal access to educational support (Perveen, & Aziz, 2021). This was to be achieved through the reorganization of personnel and the use of disaggregated data to assess student progress. The policy also recognized the significance of developing disability education strategies to better support students from different groups with diverse needs. Overall, the National Education Policy of 1992 prioritized inclusivity and the elimination of disparities as essential elements of Pakistan's educational framework.

### **The National Education Policy 1998-2010**

The national education policy of 1998-2010 reflected a broader societal awareness of the critical connections between education, equity, freedom, democracy, and civil rights. It acknowledged that inequalities and interpersonal issues had given rise to various forms of unfairness within society. An essential aspect addressed by this policy was the relationship between economic development and gender inequality. It recognized that gender disparities in education and economic opportunities were interconnected and that bridging this gap was crucial for poverty reduction and sustainable economic growth. Economists widely agreed that empowering and educating women was not only a matter of gender equality but also a fundamental driver of economic development (Ahmad, & Hussain, 2014).

A significant focus of this policy was the recognition that illiterate mothers faced challenges in providing equal educational opportunities for their children, regardless of gender. To address this, the policy aimed to ensure kindergarten access for all children who aspired to pursue higher education. Achieving this required the construction of classrooms equipped with equitable resources and equal opportunities for all students (Ahmad, & Hussain, 2014). To facilitate this, the policy advocated for staff restructuring and the implementation of mechanisms to monitor student progress through disaggregated school representatives. Furthermore, the policy sought to enhance teacher skills and the overall effectiveness of instructor services, emphasizing the pivotal role of educators in delivering quality education. In essence, the National Education Policy of 1998-2010 aimed to create a more equitable and inclusive educational system that would contribute to social development, economic progress, and gender equality.

### **The Education Sector Reform 2001-2005**

The education sector reform of 2001-2005 represented a significant stride in Pakistan's commitment to fostering a more inclusive and equitable education system. At its core, this reform emphasized the elimination of disparities in growth opportunities between men and women. It recognized that gender equality was not merely a matter of social justice but a fundamental prerequisite for achieving comprehensive educational development and societal progress (Ahmad, & Hussain, 2014). By ensuring that both men and women had equal access to educational resources, opportunities, and benefits, the reform aimed to level the playing field and create a more just and inclusive educational landscape.

The reform was guided by three interlinked objectives: improving learning opportunities, advancing equity, and addressing gender gaps in education at all levels. These objectives were seen as mutually reinforcing elements of a comprehensive strategy to transform the education sector. First and foremost, the reform sought to enhance learning opportunities for all students, irrespective of their gender or socio-economic background. It recognized that improving the quality of education and expanding access were essential for nurturing a skilled and empowered citizenry (Ahmad, & Hussain, 2014). Secondly, the reform aimed to advance equity, aiming to reduce disparities in educational outcomes and access to resources among different groups and regions within Pakistan. Finally, addressing gender gaps was a central focus, acknowledging the importance of closing the gender divide in education to achieve social and economic development. Overall, the Education Sector Reform of 2001-2005 was a significant step towards building a more inclusive, equitable, and gender-sensitive educational system in Pakistan.

### **The National Education Policy 2009**

The national education policy of 2009 was a comprehensive and forward-looking framework that aimed to address several critical aspects of Pakistan's educational system. At its core, the policy focused on equalizing access to education by providing targeted services to various segments of society, including both boys and girls, marginalized and underprivileged communities, as well as disadvantaged children and adults (Perveen, & Aziz, 2021). This commitment to inclusivity recognized that education was a fundamental right for all individuals, regardless of their background or circumstances. By extending educational opportunities to these underserved populations, the policy sought to bridge the gaps in access and ensure that education became a pathway to empowerment and socio-economic mobility.

A significant emphasis of the policy was the creation of a community devoid of prejudice, where every individual was treated equitably and had the opportunity to benefit equally. It promoted values such as cooperation, fairness, and respect for human rights, fostering a sense of global brotherhood and coexistence. These values were considered essential for building a just and harmonious society, where individuals from diverse backgrounds could coexist peacefully and contribute to the nation's progress (Khizar, Anwar, & Malik, 2019). Additionally, the policy sought to improve school standards and make education accessible to all. It called for the standardization and institutionalization of the national professional standards for teachers, ensuring that teacher training programs, certification processes, and accrediting procedures adhered to these high standards. The introduction of a continuous professional development program for secondary and other levels of teachers, both in formal and informal education settings, aimed to enhance the skills and competencies of educators, ultimately benefiting students and the quality of education in Pakistan (Khizar, Anwar, & Malik, 2019).

## **The National Education Policy 2017-2025**

The national education policy of 2017-2025 placed a significant emphasis on promoting gender equity and justice in education, with a particular focus on ensuring that all females receive secondary education with respect and fairness. Recognizing the importance of gender equality in education, the policy aimed to bridge the gender gap in access to quality education, particularly at the secondary level (Shah, Ahmad, & Khan, 2019). This commitment was in alignment with Article 25-A of the Pakistani constitution, which mandates the provision of free and compulsory education to all children aged 5 to 16. By advocating for equal opportunities for female students, the NEP aimed to create a more inclusive and just educational environment where gender would not be a barrier to accessing quality learning.

To uphold the principles of social justice, the NEP underscored the government's responsibility to ensure equality and justice in secondary education (Shah, Ahmad, & Khan, 2019). This commitment encompassed various aspects, including the adoption of international curriculum standards, the provision of qualified teacher training materials, and the establishment of an effective evaluation structure. Additionally, the policy emphasized the importance of instructional supplies, such as posters, audio-visual aids, maps, teaching kits, and educational CDs, which were provided to schools to enhance students' learning experiences. Ensuring the effective utilization of these resources was deemed crucial in elevating the overall quality of education. Moreover, the policy recognized that schools fostering the academic, emotional, and physical development of all students, regardless of their background or circumstances, would contribute to the preparation of individuals who are better equipped to become productive members of society (Majoka, & Khan, 2017). In essence, the NEP of 2017-2025 aimed to create a more equitable and inclusive educational landscape where every student, regardless of gender, had the opportunity to thrive and contribute to the nation's development.

## **Methodology**

The research design employed in this study was primarily qualitative, centered around the use of in-depth interviews as the primary data collection method. This approach was chosen due to the specific focus of the research, which primarily involved document analysis to review educational policies concerning the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in the context of Pakistan. In-depth interviews were instrumental in providing a deeper and richer understanding of the nuances, challenges, and perspectives associated with the implementation of these policies. By engaging with key stakeholders, including government officials, educational experts, and representatives from various sectors, the researchers were able to gather valuable qualitative insights that complemented the document analysis. This qualitative approach allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the policy landscape, shedding light on both the content of the policies and the real-world challenges faced in their execution, ultimately contributing to a more holistic assessment of Pakistan's progress toward SDG Goal 4.

## **Population of the Study**

The study's population was intentionally diverse and encompassed key stakeholders within Pakistan's educational landscape. It comprised head teachers, who are responsible for the day-to-day management of schools; stakeholders of special education, whose perspectives are vital for inclusive policy assessment; District Education Officers (DEOs), responsible for district-level educational administration; and Directors of the Curriculum department, pivotal in shaping educational content. This comprehensive



population allowed for a holistic exploration of educational policies and their alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 4 in Pakistan.

### **Sample of the Study**

Sampling is a critical methodological component in research, as it allows for the selection of a subset of individuals from a larger population, ensuring that this subset adequately represents the broader group from which it is drawn. The researchers selected 15 respondents purposively to capture a diverse range of insights and experiences related to educational policies and their alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG Goal 4) in Pakistan. This sample included a variety of stakeholders, such as school heads who offer a school-level perspective, special education teachers who bring expertise in inclusive education, and District Education Officers (DEOs) and Directors of Curriculum committee members, who contribute insights from regional and curriculum development standpoints. By including these diverse categories of respondents, the study ensured a well-rounded representation of perspectives, enhancing the depth and richness of the data collected and facilitating a more comprehensive analysis of the challenges and opportunities within the educational policy landscape.

### **Data Collection Instrument**

The researchers developed a semi-structured interview protocol after an extensive literature review. Rigorous validation by two subject matter experts ensured the interview's reliability and relevance. This interview was strategically crafted to delve into the assessment of educational policies in alignment with the pursuit of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in Pakistan, with a specific focus on the existing conditions at both the institutional and administrative levels. The interview format was deliberately open-ended, providing participants with the freedom to openly share their insights and perspectives on the subject matter, facilitating a comprehensive exploration of the topic.

### **Results**

In this section, the researchers delve into the critical process of data analysis and interpretation concerning the examination of educational policies in Pakistan about the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4. The data for this analysis was meticulously collected through in-depth interviews, which served as a rich source of qualitative information. Our objective was to comprehensively analyze and interpret this data to gain valuable insights into the alignment, effectiveness, and challenges of Pakistan's educational policies in the context of SDG 4. Through a rigorous analytical approach, we aim to uncover patterns, themes, and key findings that shed light on the current state of educational policies and their implications for the pursuit of quality and inclusive education in Pakistan. This phase of the study is crucial in providing a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between policies, their implementation, and the broader educational landscape in the country.

**Theme 1.** Respondents in the study highlighted several legislative measures undertaken by the government to work towards achieving SDG 4, which encompasses goals for quality, inclusive, and equitable education. These measures included the formulation of educational policies and constitutional amendments aimed at improving the educational landscape in Pakistan. However, their responses also underscored the existence of critical gaps in the effective implementation of these policies. These gaps were attributed to factors such as inadequate communication channels, insufficient management mechanisms, and a noticeable leadership vacuum within the education sector. This

illuminates the complexity of translating legislative efforts into tangible outcomes, highlighting the need for enhanced governance, coordination, and communication strategies to bridge the divide between policy formulation and successful implementation, ultimately advancing the country's progress toward SDG 4.

**Theme 2.** The respondents in the study brought attention to several constitutional articles, specifically Article 25, Article 25A, and Article 37, which hold paramount significance in ensuring equitable access to education for all citizens of Pakistan, irrespective of their racial, religious, or sociocultural backgrounds. Article 25 underscores the principle of equality before the law and prohibits discrimination on various grounds, including religion, race, and sex, emphasizing the importance of providing equal opportunities in all spheres of life, including education. Article 25A, introduced through the 18th Amendment to the Constitution in 2010, is particularly noteworthy, as it explicitly enshrines the right to free and compulsory education for children aged 5 to 16, emphasizing the government's responsibility in guaranteeing this fundamental right. Additionally, Article 37 underscores the state's commitment to promote social welfare and the well-being of its citizens, including the provision of educational facilities. These constitutional provisions collectively reflect Pakistan's commitment to upholding the principles of equality and inclusivity in its educational system, aligning with the aspirations of Sustainable Development Goal 4.

**Theme 3.** The respondents in the study shed light on the formidable challenges that have hindered the effective implementation of educational policies and constitutional provisions aimed at ensuring equal access to education in Pakistan. Among these challenges, poor communication emerged as a significant barrier, where inadequate dissemination of policy information and updates led to a lack of awareness and understanding among stakeholders. Weak management within the education system was another prominent issue, with respondents citing problems related to administrative inefficiencies, resource allocation, and coordination, all of which contributed to policy execution difficulties. Additionally, a leadership vacuum within the education sector was identified, suggesting a need for strong, visionary leadership to drive policy implementation and address the complex issues plaguing Pakistan's educational landscape. These challenges collectively underscore the importance of addressing not only policy formulation but also the critical aspects of communication, management, and leadership to bridge the gap between policy intent and practical results in the pursuit of equitable education and the objectives of Sustainable Development Goal 4.

**Theme 4.** As per the feedback provided by the respondents, The governance structures and mechanisms in place for monitoring and evaluating educational policies, with a primary focus on accountability, present a mixed landscape in Pakistan. Regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be in place to assess progress and adjust strategies as needed. Ultimately, a commitment to long-term, sustainable development of the educational system is essential to bring Pakistan closer to the successful realization of SDG 4 and ensure equitable, inclusive, and high-quality education for all. There are established bodies and frameworks responsible for overseeing educational policies and their implementation, such as the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, provincial education departments, and regulatory bodies like the Higher Education Commission. These entities play a crucial role in policy formulation and implementation. However, the effectiveness of these structures in terms of accountability varies across regions and institutions. In some cases, there are challenges related to transparency, data collection, and the enforcement of accountability measures. Additionally, civil society organizations, educators, and other stakeholders also contribute to the monitoring and

evaluation process. Overall, while there is a framework in place, there is room for improvement in ensuring greater transparency, stronger enforcement of accountability measures, and increased involvement of various stakeholders to enhance the overall governance of educational policies in Pakistan.

**Theme 5.** The respondents stated that the level of engagement and participation of stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and civil society, in shaping educational policies in Pakistan has shown some improvements but remains somewhat limited. Teachers and educators, who are at the forefront of the education system, have gradually gained more opportunities to voice their concerns and insights. Teacher unions and associations have played a role in advocating for better working conditions, curriculum improvements, and pedagogical reforms. However, there is still room for more meaningful teacher involvement in policy formulation and decision-making processes. There is a growing recognition of the importance of stakeholder engagement, including teachers, parents, and civil society, in shaping educational policies. There is still progress to be made in strengthening their roles and ensuring that their voices are effectively incorporated into the policymaking process.

**Theme 6** The respondents believed that to propel Pakistan closer to the successful realization of SDG 4 in its educational landscape, a multifaceted approach involving various strategies and initiatives is imperative. First and foremost, there needs to be a significant increase in public investment in education to address infrastructure deficiencies, ensure adequate teacher training, and provide learning resources. Simultaneously, efforts should focus on enhancing the quality of education by revising curricula to align with contemporary needs, promoting research and innovation in teaching methods, and strengthening teacher accountability. Inclusivity should be a paramount consideration, with targeted policies to address gender disparities and ensure access to education for marginalized communities. Leveraging technology can also play a pivotal role, especially in remote areas, to bridge the digital divide and provide quality education opportunities.

Furthermore, fostering partnerships with international organizations and donors can help mobilize resources and expertise to support educational initiatives. Collaboration between the government, civil society, and private sector stakeholders is vital for a coordinated approach to tackle the challenges in Pakistan's educational landscape.

## **Findings**

1. The government has indeed taken legislative measures to work towards achieving the goals outlined in Sustainable Development Goal 4, which emphasizes quality, inclusive, and equitable education for all. These measures typically involve the formulation and implementation of educational policies, constitutional amendments, and the allocation of resources to support educational initiatives. However, despite these legislative efforts, there are substantial challenges in effectively implementing these policies on the ground.
2. Challenges in implementing legislative measures aimed at achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 include poor communication, weak management, and a leadership vacuum. These issues can significantly hinder the effective execution of educational policies and initiatives.
3. Enhancing school infrastructure in Pakistan is imperative for realizing SDG4. As per the respondents, the majority of schools in the country lack proper facilities and

fail to adequately cater to the diverse educational needs of students. This study underscores the necessity for the government to allocate resources and invest in upgrading school infrastructure to guarantee that every student can access and benefit from a high-quality education.

4. There is a need to develop a curriculum that accommodates the unique requirements of children, fostering an inclusive learning environment.
5. The government has initiated efforts towards establishing an inclusive education system, yet there are implementation challenges. Respondents pointed out the government's establishment of two inclusive setups in South Punjab, which, unfortunately, did not yield the anticipated results.
6. Nonetheless, the research highlights that there is a requirement for the government to take additional measures to create an inclusive education system that guarantees access to education for all, regardless of their socio-cultural values, ethnic backgrounds, or disabilities.
7. While the government acknowledges the importance of supporting students with special needs, the practicalities of enrolling them in schools present considerable challenges.
8. The government of Pakistan provides stipends, uniforms, shoes, and transportation services to students with disabilities, in addition to reserving a three percent quota for disabled individuals in recruitment processes. Nonetheless, the respondents highlighted that a significant number of disabled individuals do not attend school due to various reasons, and they noted that the government's efforts to actively reach out and enroll them in educational institutions are insufficient.

## **Discussion**

The central aim of this study was to conduct a comprehensive review of Pakistan's educational policies in the context of their alignment with the ambitious Sustainable Development Goal 4 for the year 2030. SDG 4 envisions an educational landscape where inclusion, equitable access to high-quality education, and lifelong learning opportunities are extended to all students, irrespective of their creed, religion, ethnicity, language, or racial background. Pakistan, as a proactive participant in the SDGs 2030 framework, is fervently engaged in the process of formulating and implementing legislative measures to bring its education system in line with these global goals. This concerted effort signifies Pakistan's commitment to enhancing the educational experiences of all its students. However, the study has illuminated a range of critical shortcomings in the implementation of educational policies within Pakistan. These include deficiencies in the communication infrastructure, issues with management integrity, inadequacies in quality control measures, financial and budgetary constraints, prevailing societal attitudes, an inefficient bureaucratic structure, a deficit in political will, leadership inadequacies, and governance challenges.

## **Conclusion**

The study concluded that the educational policies of Pakistan provide valuable insights into the complex challenges and opportunities within its educational system. The study also concluded that Pakistan has made strides in expanding access to education, yet

significant hurdles remain in achieving the quality, inclusivity, and equity envisioned by SDG 4.

Furthermore, the study concluded that critical evaluation of existing policies highlights the need for a more transparent, accountable, and collaborative governance framework that actively involves all stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and civil society. Hence, to realize the aspirations of SDG 4, Pakistan must prioritize increased investment in education, curriculum reforms, teacher development, and technological integration, especially in underserved regions.

The study concluded that the successful realization of SDG 4 requires a concerted effort from all sectors, emphasizing the importance of education as a cornerstone for sustainable development, economic growth, and social progress in Pakistan. Therefore, the current government needs to recognize these impediments promptly and engage in a collaborative and consensus-driven approach to overcome them. By doing so, Pakistan can create an educational system that is not only aligned with SDG 4 but also resilient in the face of political and economic challenges, ultimately ensuring a brighter future for its students and the nation as a whole.

### **Recommendations**

1. The government may invest in improving communication systems within the education sector. This includes better dissemination of policy information, updates, and guidelines to all stakeholders, ensuring that everyone is well-informed about educational initiatives and reforms.
2. Department of Special Education may implement robust quality control mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of educational institutes. Regular assessments of curriculum, teaching methods, and student outcomes may be conducted to ensure that the education system aligns with the goals of SDG 4.
3. Department of Special Education may prioritize comprehensive teacher training programs that equip educators with the skills needed to support diverse learning needs, including those of students with disabilities. This may be coupled with ongoing professional development opportunities to keep teachers updated with best practices.
4. Govt. of Punjab may allocate sufficient financial resources to the education sector and ensure that budgetary allocations are effectively utilized. Transparent financial planning and accountability mechanisms are crucial for funding educational initiatives and infrastructure improvements.
5. Stakeholders and Policymakers may promote inclusive educational policies that actively encourage the enrollment of students from diverse backgrounds, including those with disabilities. Conduct awareness campaigns to change societal attitudes and foster an inclusive culture within communities.
6. Govt. of Pakistan may streamline bureaucratic processes within the education sector to reduce administrative inefficiencies and promote effective policy implementation. Simplifying administrative procedures can lead to more efficient resource allocation and decision-making.

7. Govt. of Pakistan may encourage political commitment at all levels to prioritize education as a fundamental right and a key driver of national development. Policymakers should prioritize education reforms and allocate the necessary resources accordingly.
8. Ministry of Education may invest in leadership development programs for educational administrators and school principals. Strong, visionary leadership is essential for effective policy implementation and the overall improvement of the education system.
9. Govt. of Pakistan may develop strategies to mitigate the impact of political and economic instability on education policy implementation. This could involve creating contingency plans, diversifying funding sources, and building resilience within the education system.

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