



## HISTORICAL LANDMARKS AND TURNING POINTS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATIONAL REFORMS IN SINDH: A POLICY TRAJECTORY ANALYSIS

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### Abstract

*This paper discusses the historical development of educational reforms in Sindh, based on an analysis of the policy trajectory, with key milestones and turning points from the colonial inheritance to the current governance reforms. The analysis mentions key steps of reform, such as post-independence growth, 1972 nationalization reforms, the Sindh Education Reform Program (SERP), post-18th Amendment provincialization, and the Sindh Education Sector Plan (SESP) 2014 & 2018. All these reforms influenced education access, management, and accountability systems within the province (Government of Sindh, 2014; World Bank, 2012).*

*Thematic analysis of policy reports, legal acts, sector plans, and donor documents was used to employ a qualitative historical-documentary design. The results show that the reforms in Sindh had three general stages: expansion of the reforms, restructuring, and accountability in governance. The most significant turning points were the 1972 reforms, SERP, and SESP that institutionalized the merit-based recruitment, free provision of textbooks, school monitoring, and mechanisms of governance at the district level (IIEP-UNESCO, 2018; World Bank, 2015).*

*The paper summarizes that Sindh education reforms have been increasingly moving away from quantitative growth to evidence-based governance and service delivery enhancement.*

**Keywords:** *Educational reforms, Sindh, policy trajectory, SERP, SESP, governance, and historical milestones*

### Introduction

The Sindh education reform is an interplay of political transformation, administrative restructuring, and experimentation with policies. In the past, the province inherited a colonial education model that was meant to be used to produce bureaucratic literacy and access at a limited scale. After the independence of Pakistan, reforms in education were initially aimed at broadening the institutions and centralizing control (Imtiaz, et al., 2025; Amin, et al., 2024; Imtiaz, Malik & Khan, 2024). The key historical event was the creation of the National Education Policy in 1972, which not only brought about nationalization but also tried to make schooling universal. The phase greatly opened up the role of the people in the education sector, but it also augmented bureaucratic centralization (Amin, Said & Butt, 2025; Shah, Amin & Khan, 2025; Dash, et al., 2025). The other significant change was the introduction of the Sindh Education Reform Program (SERP) in 2009, which initiated the process of governance-oriented reforms. SERP boosted the enrolment of 600,000 children, hired 13,500 merit-based teachers, and delivered free textbooks (World Bank, 2012).

Following the 18th Constitutional Amendment (2010), education has become a provincial matter fully, which enabled Sindh to develop its first sector-wide plan. The SESP 2014/2018 was a historic milestone to align provincial reforms with Article 25-A and the Sindh Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2013 (Government of Sindh, 2014).

### Objectives of the Study

1. To follow the historical development of the educational reforms in Sindh.
2. To single out key policy milestones and milestones.

3. To examine the policy direction of expansion to governance reforms.
4. To make inferences about the educational policy in Sindh in the future.

**Research Questions**

1. Which are the key historical events of educational reforms in Sindh?
2. What were the turning points that altered the priorities in reform?
3. What are the transformations of reforms in the face of expansion into governance accountability?
4. What are the lessons that can be extracted to future education reforms?

**Literature Review**

The Sindh education reform literature portrays a progressive change in state-based expansion to a systemic change based on governance. The earliest attempts at reform in Pakistan and especially the National Education Policy of 1972, are generally regarded as the earliest significant turning point in the history of expanding state participation in the education sector by nationalizing schools and universalizing access to secondary schooling (Amin, 2025; Soma, et al., 2025; Amin, Daudpota & Khan, 2025). This step made access and institutional reach more accessible, however, scholars claim that it also brought about an element of over-centralization, inflexibility in bureaucracies, and loss of autonomy on the school level, which subsequently impacted the efficiency of implementation. It is these historical reforms that formed the institutional basis on which subsequent provincial reforms in Sindh were to be founded.

The post-2000 era saw the reform discussion in Sindh shift away towards expansion to quality improvement and accountability in governance. One of the biggest changes to this direction was the Sindh Education Reform Program (SERP), which involved the establishment of merit based teacher recruitment, open-ended funding, school-specific grants, free distribution of textbooks and reinforced monitoring (Azhar & Imran, 2024). According to literature, SERP was a paradigm shift as it connected financial disbursement with quantifiable performance indicators and governance results (Ahmed, Ahmed & Buriro, 2023). The program was designed as results-based which turned out as a significant lesson in subsequent reforms, especially in tackling the issues of teacher absenteeism, politics and poor capacity of districts (Government of Sindh, 2014).

With the 18th Constitutional Amendment (2010), education became a provincial topic, making a new epoch of independent policy planning in Sindh. This constitutional transformation allowed the province to come up with its first detailed Sindh Education Sector Plan (SESP) 2014-2018 that is widely covered in the literature as a breakthrough in provincial education governance (Khan, Hussain & Ahmad, 2023). The SESP ensured that priorities of the reform were consistent with constitutional responsibility as outlined in Article 25-A such as equitable access, better learning outcomes, curriculum reforms, teacher development, better infrastructure, and accountability systems. This plan is called the first unified sector-wide plan that brought together scattered reform efforts into a long-term strategic roadmap by academics and international agencies (Government of Sindh, 2014; International Institute of Educational Planning [IIEP], 2018).

Recent researches further point to the transformation of reforms to curriculum modernization, digital governance and smart learning systems. Studies of curriculum changes in the Sindh reveal that the change in policy has been shifting towards the alignment of school curricula to the current social, economic, and technological demands (Imran, Zaidi, & Khanzada, 2023). This involves the readiness of teachers, reformed evaluation systems and learning outcomes that are based on competency (Imran, et al., 2023). Simultaneously, the policy continuity in



such areas as inclusive access, quality of learning, and governance management as evidenced by the continuation of SESP2019-2024 proves that the reform path in Sindh has shifted towards institutional sustainability and evidence-based planning (Hussain et al., 2022; Government of Sindh, 2019).

In general, the literature indicates that the reforms in the education system in Sindh have been going through three broad phases in the development of access expansion, systemic restructuring and governance modernization (Oad, et al., 2024; Imran & Akhtar, 2023). The accrued facts have shown that effective reforms were those that were buttressed by a good political ownership, capacity to implement the reforms at the district level, clear teacher control and persistence sector planning (Imran, Zaidi, & Rehan, 2024). This paper develops on the current body of knowledge by bringing together these historical milestones of reforms in the form of a policy trajectory, which would allow us to comprehend how historical turning points have pertained to the current and future educational policy lines in Sindh.

### **Research Methodology**

The research design that was used in this study was a historical-documentary qualitative research design. The historical approach was chosen, as the task demanded a tracking of reforms at various periods of politics and administration. The sources of the documentary were the following:

Sindh Education Sector Plan 2014, 2018.

SERP report and SERP II report.

### **Policy documents of World Bank.**

- IIEP-UNESCO planning reports
- Legal frameworks of Sindh education.
- historical education policies

### **Analytical Framework**

An analysis framework called policy trajectories was used to identify:

- Continuity
- Disruption
- Policy shifts
- Reform acceleration
- Governance transitions

### **Data collection and data analysis.**

#### **Data Collection**

Data was collected in terms of official documents and policies, i.e.:

- SESP 2014–2018 (Government of Sindh, 2014)
- SERP reports (World Bank, 2012, 2015)
- IIEP review (IIEP-UNESCO, 2018)

#### **Data Analysis**

The following was done under thematic analysis:

- Access reforms
- Teacher reforms
- Governance reforms
- Accountability systems
- Legal reforms
- Sector planning

Themes were prepared chronologically to be in a position to trace the line of policy.

## **Discussion**

The Sindh process of educational reform can be seen as a complex process of development of expansion-based policy intervention to governance-based systemic modernization (Imran, Sultana, & Ahmed, 2023). The critical examination of the milestones of the reform indicates that every significant stage was a reaction to certain socio-political pressure, institutional shortcomings, and the transformation of the constitutional order. Instead of analysing reforms as individual phenomena, the policy trajectory perspective contributes to a better understanding of how consecutive interventions were based on previous frameworks, addressed previous shortcomings, and progressively aimed at the renewal of the quantitative access towards qualitative accountability. It is shown that the development of educational reforms in Sindh could be most effectively explained in terms of four major turning points, namely, the 1972 reforms of nationalization, the reforms of government-centric SERP, the period of devolution after the 18th Amendment, and the consolidation in the form of the Sindh Education Sector Plan (SESP) (Government of Sindh, (Sindh Education Department)

The first landmark on this path is the 1972 reforms in education. These reforms had historical importance as they helped to turn the mixed institutional landscape in education into a state-dominated system of public services (Amin, 2025). Nationalization saw the state take over many of the existing privately run institutions, and it also expressed its objective of universal and free secondary-level education. This became one of the fundamental changes to the philosophy of governance of Sindh education since it focused on equality of access and state responsibility. The egalitarian and socialist ideals were a major force in the reform discourse of this era and were aimed at minimizing the gap in access to education based on class. This transition in the context of Sindh increased the scope of schooling and allowed most lower-income families to receive formal education. Nevertheless, the literature suggests an equally significant contradiction: as access improved, the centralized bureaucratic control diminished the institutional autonomy, local innovation, and created inflexible administrative levels that subsequently caused the lack of responsiveness at the school level (Muzaffar et al., 2022).

Such a contradiction is significant as it shows that early Sindh reforms were mainly preoccupied with the politics of provision as opposed to the quality of government. The expanded role of the state led to more school places, more teachers, and more acceptance by citizens, but a lack of strong monitoring mechanisms and safeguards permitted inefficiencies to build up over time. The discussion thus indicates that the 1972 turning point is not to be considered as an expansion point, but also as the commencement of the governance issues that were consequently to be addressed by the subsequent reforms. It, in this sense, developed the institutional floor through which new reforms of accountability developed.

The second significant milestone came with the Sindh Education Reform Program (SERP) that brought a complete paradigm shift in the educational policy. In contrast to the previous reforms, which focused on growth in the system, SERP came up with a performance-based, transparent, and measurable-output model of governance (Phulpoto, Oad, & Imran, 2024; Oad, Zaidi, & Phulpoto, 2023). This was revolutionary as it shifted the rationality of reform from state-provision to state-stewardship and results-based management. Recruitment of about 13,500 teachers on merit, supply of free textbooks to millions of students, stipend scheme to girls, and empowering School Management Committees were all new accountability structures in the education sector of Sindh (World Bank, 2012). (World Bank)

The discussion of SERP emphasizes its significance as a solution to structural issues that have existed over the years, especially teacher absenteeism, politicization of appointments, ineffective community-building, and unequal distribution of resources. Meritocracy was a



direct challenge to the patronage-based teacher induction and practices that had caused a lack of quality and legitimacy in the state school system. On the same note, timely delivery was institutionalized by the textbook reform mechanism, which was a major implementation gap that had caused learning cycles to break down in the past. Gender disparities came to be seen as a structural barrier to secondary school attendance in Sindh in the stipend program for girls, as it introduced a clear equity prism. All these interventions together reshaped the priorities in reform, not only with expansion but also effectiveness in service delivery and broad inclusivity. One of the most significant lessons that are left after this discussion is that SERP was not a project but a governance philosophy change. SERP prepared the groundwork for evidence-based educational administration by connecting policy, financing, and outputs and enhancing the management systems at the district level. The policy value of this turning point is that it shows that the reforms were more sustainable when they were associated with data, incentives, and community forms than when they were based on the general ideological proclamations. This is why a great deal of subsequent reform in Sindh, such as sector planning or digital monitoring, applied the same rationale of quantifiable governance.

The third big turning point and possibly the most constitutionally transformative period in the history of education in Sindh is the 18th Constitutional Amendment (2010). The re-establishment of education as a provincial rather than a federal issue essentially reorganised the policy centre of influence (Hafeez, Iqbal, & Imran, 2021). To Sindh, this was not an administrative handover but a strategic perspective of crafting reforms that incorporated local realities and district inequalities, linguistic variety, and regionally specific governance requirements. The discussion of this step suggests that devolution enhanced the policy autonomy of the province, which enabled it to harmonize the educational reforms with the legal requirements of Article 25-A and the Sindh Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education framework. (jdss.org.pk)

Nonetheless, the discussion also shows that devolution brought about a new set of challenges. The province acquired decision-making authority, but at the same time, there was an uneven implementation capacity at the district level. There were numerous districts that were deficient in institutional capacity, planning skills, and financial management tools to change provincial policy into practical school-level achievement. This posed a conflict between policy independence and readiness to implement. The importance of this turning point, then, is that decentralization in itself is not sufficient to lead to improvement unless there are capacity-building, well-defined lines of accountability, and effective district governance systems. It has been stressed in the literature of Sindh after devolution that provincial autonomy can only be effective based on the working power of the district education systems (jdss.org.pk).

The fourth important turning point is the development of the Sindh Education Sector Plan (SESP) 2014-2018, which is possible to consider as the policy consolidation stage of the reform direction of Sindh education. SESP is historically important as it changed disjointed reform efforts into a strategic roadmap of the sector. Systematic implementation of reforms in Sindh was the earliest to be introduced to typical pillars of access, quality, governance, teacher growth, and infrastructure enhancement. This was a policy system maturation whereby the system was no longer episodic but had long-term planning.

Discussion refers to the institutional coherence as the most important contribution made by SESP. The old reforms employed to address an individual problem, such as the recruitment of teachers or the provision of textbooks. Rather, SESP took all these problems and integrated them into a comprehensive planning system that was linked with measurable actions and periodic review procedures. This increased the political cycle sustainability of reforms and



effectiveness of SEMIS, district monitoring, and policy review units in evidence-based planning. (Sindh Education Department)

The other important dimension that has emerged out of this discussion is that Sindh is slowly moving towards digital governance and data systems in its reforms. The expansion of SEMIS, biometric attendance, school mapping, and digital monitoring devices marks the most recent phase of the reform process in which the educational governance becomes increasingly more data-driven. This move can be regarded as an expansion of the reasoning of accountability of SERP, with even more aggressive mediation of technology. These changes are significant in that they may aid in minimizing the information asymmetry, better allocating the resources, and making it easy to track them in real-time. The discussion, however, cautions that technological reforms cannot entirely substitute human capacity, institutional ethics, and continuity in policies. In all four turning points, the pattern is the same: reforms in Sindh became progressively effective on the move to system design, on the move to expansion targets to system design, on the move to centralized control to strategic decentralization with accountability. Such a positive evolution indicates that the course of reform is not linear but progressive. The responses to the inherited weaknesses and the establishment of the institutional conditions of the next stage were all the turning points.

The bigger argument in this discussion is that the historical process of educational reforms in Sindh may be said to be representative of the larger historical institutionalism, where past policy choices determine the degree of future choices. The reforms of 1972 were centralized in nature, which would become governance deficits that would be addressed by SERP. SERP concentrated on the results, and thus the province was prepared to plan following devolution. Its turn was devolution, which permitted SESP to be a provincial roadmap. This accruing rationale highlights the significance of institutional memory and continuity of policies during reforms in education.

In conclusion, this discussion indicates that the educational reform in Sindh is founded on preserving the strengths of every turning point in history and eradicating the historical gaps in the quality of learning, the district capacity, teacher professional development, and political continuity. The history of reforms in the province indicates that the most effective interventions were well-structured in terms of implementation, community participation, and effective data collection. Reforms in the future should hence continue on this historical path of more governance reforms at the district and school levels, instead of re-entering short-term governance expansionism cycles.

To conclude, the discussion establishes that the educational reforms that occurred in the past in Sindh are not historical processes, but policy moments that shifted the definition of educational governance in the province. Turning points, expansion and nationalization, accountability, devolution, and sector planning led to the creation of a better strategic, evidence-based, responsive education system. This historical action plan can be utilized to give valuable lessons that can be learned by the policy makers who wish to embark on a sustainable reform agenda in the future education sector in Sindh.

### **Findings**

The results of this paper demonstrate that educational reforms in Sindh had a progressive trend of development in history and three general stages: expansion, systemic restructuring and accountability in governance. The initial stage was more expansion based in which the reforms were directed at providing more people access to schooling by the state, especially in the 1972 nationalization reforms. This stage greatly expanded the provision of education and the central role of the state in the administration of education was established. Nevertheless, the results



also show that access was improved, but the reform also resulted in long-term governance, as it saw too much bureaucratic centralization, lack of local autonomy, and decision-making on school level. These initial structural restraints were subsequently used as the foundation of later reforms that were motivated by accountability.

The second crucial discovery is that the Sindh Education Reform Program (SERP) became the most significant moment in the process of educational governance modernization of Sindh. The research uncovered that SERP changed the emphasis of the policy to expansion to results based management, transparency, and measurable outcomes of service delivery. The major reforms, including the introduction of merit in recruitment, free distribution of textbooks, girls stipends, school-specific grants, and empowered School Management Committees, changed the culture of the governance of the education sector. Such interventions had a direct impact on chronic problems like absenteeism of the teachers, politicized appointments, late deliverance of resources, and unfair participation. Consequently, SERP created a sustainable accountability model, which affected subsequent provincial changes (World Bank, 2012).

The other significant observation is that the 18th Constitutional Amendment (2010) was a game changer constitutional development that reconfigured the reform environment in Sindh. The amendment allowed Sindh to develop context-specific policies and sector-wide reform framework by devolving education to provincial level. The results indicate that this move enhanced provincial ownership and allowed the province to make reforms that were responsive to local needs, constitutional requirements, and district inequalities. The research, however, also discovered that the success of this devolution relied heavily on administrative capacity at the district level which was still lopsided in Sindh. Therefore, as policy autonomy rose with devolution, the performance of the implementation depended on the strength of local governance.

The results also define the Sindh Education Sector Plan (SESP) 2014 2018 as the first with the consolidation of the policy into all segments of the educational life of the province. This sector plan brought together the disjointed reform efforts on a consistent roadmap that aimed at access, quality, teacher development, infrastructure, and accountability. The research established that SESP had a significant positive effect on the continuity of the reforms by providing quantifiable indicators, targets across sectors, and mechanisms for reviewing the institutions. This was a shift in short term piece-meal reforms to long-term, strategic educational planning. The reinforcement of SEMIS, biometric attendance, school mapping, and data-driven monitoring systems became key milestones of this phase that proved the change towards evidence-based governance and digital accountability.

By and large, the results indicate that the most effective educational reforms in Sindh were the ones that incorporated political determination, open systems of governance, management of teachers on merit, and good data structures. The historical evidence supports the fact that reforms were more and more effective as they were transformed into ideological expansion, turning into structured governance modernization. The findings highlight the significance of continuity in policies, capacity building in districts, and institutional memory in the maintenance of future educational reforms in Sindh.

### **Conclusion**

To sum up, the history of educational reforms in Sindh is marked by a dynamic, cumulative policy process due to the development of the institutional base, the reorganization of governance, the constitutional devolution, and the plan of strategic sectors. The paper shows that reform in the education sector in Sindh has not been a chain of individual policy instances; it has been developed in intertwined turning points that together changed the educational



landscape of the province. The nationalization reforms of 1972 determined the dominance of the state in the education provision, and the Sindh Education Reform Program (SERP) brought the governance-based paradigm based on transparency, merit, and quantifiable results of education. The 18th Constitutional Amendment also increased provincial autonomy, and Sindh was able to develop context-sensitive reforms and align its educational priorities with local realities and constitutional responsibilities. The institutionally codified reform momentum was the Sindh Education Sector Plan (SESP) 2014/18 that signified the shift towards non-almost interventions but evidence-based, sector-wide planning.

This paper thus concludes that the most radical reforms in Sindh were those that transcended the expansion of access to systemic accountability, teacher quality, district governance, and data-driven decision-making. One important lesson that can be made out of this analysis of the policy trajectory is that every historical turning point created the institutional conditions that the next step of reform required, which demonstrates the significance of historical continuity and the learning of policy in the development of education. Simultaneously, the ongoing issues of implementation discrepancies, district-wide capacity, political instability, and quality of learning continue to be burning issues. Thus, the sustainability of Sindh educational reforms in the future is tied to enhancing the institutional memory, maintaining effective governance mechanisms, and advancing reform efforts on learning outcomes and local implementation capacity. Finally, the historical markers found in this paper offer a valuable evidence base on the way in which previous reforms are still influencing current education realities and future policy options in Sindh.

### Recommendations

1. Develop a 10-year roadmap to education reform.
2. Enhance autonomy in education at the district level.
3. Policy review and learning cells of the past.
4. Expand SEMIS, data-driven planning.
5. Continue hiring of teachers on merit basis.
6. Focus on other learning outcomes other than enrolment growth.

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