



Research Article

Enhancement of Access to Primary Education under Implementation of School Education Sector Plan & Roadmap for Sindh 2019-2024 : Perceptions of Head Master's District Umerkot, Sindh

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the status of implementation of the School Education Sector Plan & Roadmap for Sindh 2019-2024 and its relevance for enhancing access to education at the primary level education through the perception of school headmasters of the selected district. The study employed a qualitative research method. Within qualitative research, a phenomenological approach was employed. The findings revealed that certain activities seemed lacking implementation viz, a baseline survey of out-of-school children, clustering of schools, continuous professional development training, whereas, majority of them, entailing enrolment campaigns for school-age children registration transport facilities and infrastructure ECE and upgradation stayed there executed. Recruitment, training of newly recruited teachers, and alternative arrangements of education in emergency seemed outstanding achievements of the sector plan in opening closed schools and continuing education in emergency, partly supplementing enhancement of access to education, whereas the COVID-19 pandemic appeared to be a daunting challenge, affecting the education sector as whole. Spirit of ownership follow-up and monitoring aspects of the implementation activities were found to be the major gaps in the plan implementation. The study recommended grassroots stakeholders' involvement in the development and execution of sector plans, district and taluka-level implementation and monitoring mechanisms.

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INTRODUCTION

Access to Education appears to be one of the major education issues worldwide, particularly in developing countries like Pakistan (Siddiqui, 2016). Access to education, ensuring that all children,

especially the most disadvantaged, attend, stay and learn in school is a major problem for Pakistan. Every Pakistani Government has long declared the provision of universal free basic and secondary education as one of its goals Ahmad et al., (2014). As per Article 25–A of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the provision of free and mandatory education to children between the ages of five and sixteen has been considered a fundamental requirement (Kapoor, 2021). Although with the passage of time, Pakistan seems to have attained substantial gains in overall school enrolment, it still confronts enormous obstacles in providing children basic level education. An estimated 22.8 million children between the ages

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of 5 and 16 are not attending school, that is, 44% of this age group's total population. Pakistan has the second-highest percentage of out-of-school children (OOSC) in the world. The situation in the Sindh province seems not so better in respect of the number of out of school children, as an estimated 6.2 million school-age children still have no access to be in school (Ashraf & Ismat, 2016).

Statistics become more dismal when taken in break-up of rural/ urban, male/ female and advantaged and disadvantaged strata. According to ASER-Pakistan 2019, the proportion of 6–16-year-olds who are not in school, is considerably greater in rural areas (16.7%), as compared to urban areas (5.6%). At every level, more girls than boys drop out of school. Of 52% of the poorest children in Sindh, 58% of them being girls, do not attend school, while, in Balochistan, 78% of girls do not attend school (Akhtar, et al., 2022). Since its inception, nearly all education policies and plans of Pakistan focused on access at length and the goals, objectives and targets of the policies and plans put primary-level education on priority. The first Education Conference 1947 enshrined target of universalization of primary education within the next 20 years to be the topmost priority of the policy. The National Education Policy (2009) has also indicated low participation and narrow base of the sector; and poor quality of the provision of educational facilities to be the most pressing problems of the education sector. (Ali et al., 2010). Pursuant to guidelines of different education policies and plans, the government of Pakistan has taken a number of initiatives to enhance enrolment and retention at the primary level; entailing free textbook provision, improved national curricula, updated quality textbooks, recruitment of graduate teachers at primary level and award of stipends to girl students.

Despite these policy reforms, the set target was never met even after a lapse of 76 years. However, efforts have remained underway to enhance access to education to realize the dream of universalization of primary education as one of the prominent part and parcel of each and every education policy and plan. The 18th Amendment in the Constitution of Pakistan, made education a provincial subject. Devolving policy and planning to the province level, opened avenues for the provinces to develop their own policies and plans for overcoming educational gaps entailing access, quality and governance, the major thematic areas of education. Since 2014, almost all provinces prepared their education sector plans with the support of national and international development

partners envisaging a well thoughtout educational aims, goals and objectives with certain measurable key indicators and targets (UNESCO, 2021).

Enhanced access, improved quality and strengthened governance in education sector stand as core purposes of the provincial level education sector plans. In line with provision of autonomy, education is a provincial subject and realizing gravity of the situation and dismal educational indicators, Education Department, Government of Sindh responded by developing well documented, data-driven and evidence-based first ever Sindh Education Sector Plan 2014-2018, taking the relevant stakeholders on board. This maiden exercise remained significant in identifying number of issues and gaps in the education scenario, mainly access, poor quality, lack of policies and standards at pre-primary, non-formal education, teacher transfer and posting, monitoring and evaluation, assessment and recruitment of school leaders and taluka and district education managers (Faizi, et al., 2020).

Since ending of SESP 2014-2018, the journey of education planning has not stopped, a second education plan titled School Education Sector Plan & Roadmap for Sindh 2019-2024 was put in place. The long-term vision to which the plan was to contribute was to ensure inclusive and equitable access to education through a variety of formal and non-formal educational modalities; creating child-friendly, learning environments to guarantee effective learning outcomes and ensure strong accountability mechanisms, sufficient funding, and strong capacities at all levels with strong political will, to improve effective governance in the education sector. In order to ensure effective implementation of the SESP&R 2019-2024 a well-settled mechanism was developed encompassing an implementation plan with target-oriented activities, actions and initiatives to achieve objectives of enhanced access, quality and governance in the education sector of the province.

The policy and planning history of Pakista show not-so-promising outcomes in terms of implementation. Implementation of education policies and plans has persisted as one of the most challenging factors in Pakistan and its provinces. Several elements play a key role in the failure to meet education policies and plan goals amongst them formulation of policy that ignores local educational demands seems dominant. Additionally, the uncertainty of the objectives also makes policy implementation difficult. Suhag and Khan (2020) analysing the National Educational Policies of Pakistan concluded that educational policies were formulated, not fully implemented and

failed to achieve objectives hence school programs execution stayed unfinished. The track record of Sindh, also shows not-so-convincing progress with respect to the implementation of education policies and plans. *Sohoo, et al., (2020)* analysing Sindh Education Sector Plans highlighted that the progress of the first sector plan seemed not up to the mark because of lack of proper implementations mechanism, financial crisis and ineffective governance for proper utilization of funds at grassroots level for this reason the government should provide special budget to schools for provision of specific education material and equipment, training of teachers, take proper attention towards differently able children and implementation of inclusive education (*Bugti & Kazimi, 2021*).

Access to education, one of the basic human rights reflected in the Constitution of Pakistan as well as The Sindh Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2013 still stand a far-reaching attainment for the province. No doubt efforts were made, still millions of school age children were out of school (*Akram & Yang, 2021; Akram, et al., 2020*). In the backdrop, this study was undertaken to observe the status by seeking perception of education stakeholders, Primary School Head Masters regarding implementation of SESP&R 2019-2024 which enshrined initiatives and enhance of access at primary level, bringing out of school children to school, creating conducive learning environment, campaigns for enrolment and retention, transport facilities, upgradation, teacher recruitment and teacher trainings and provision of temporary learning centres in emergency during 2019-2023. The insights inferred by the study would bring to light perception of stakeholders regarding the implementation of certain activities envisaged in the sector plan for enhancing access at primary level in the designated district.

Objectives of the Study

- To seek the perception of school leaders regarding the enhancement of education opportunities in the district during 2019-2023 implementation period of Sindh education sector plan.
- To observe the status of implementation of initiatives envisaged in the SESP&R 2019-2024 focused to extend primary level access in the district.
- In the light of study findings to put forward suggestions to address issues if any and to ensure effective execution of education sector plan initiatives, accordingly.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Access refers to availability or approval. Access is the ability or right to use or view something, according to *Hornby and Cowie (1977)*, the ability or right that each child has to sign up for and attend basic education classes can therefore be referred to as access to basic education. Getting a basic education involves more than simply getting through the first five years of school; it also involves raising contented children who are prepared to pick up the fundamentals of reading, mathematics, life skills, and how to study. Approaches, behaviours, and organizations all affect accessibility and availability Access includes making plans for the simple and quick availability of products and services. To guarantee simple derivation or enjoyment of accessibility to commodities and services that make them easily available, particular action is needed (*Thynne & Peters 2015*). The ability to obtain benefits from any resources, processes, institutions, things, symbols, and connections is referred to as access in the broadest meaning. The notion of access has been developed with an emphasis on the distribution, receiving, timing, and method of real benefits from certain items, such as connections, policies, or resources (*Ribot & Peluso 2003; Ali, 2006; Ali, 2011; Ali, et al., 2010*). Here, in this study, access is referred in terms of services which focus on provision of education at school level.

School Access in Different Frameworks

As a result of investigation of several studies from various angles, the significance of education for countries, communities, and people have been ascertained under different approaches as following.

Human Capital Approach

According to human capital theory, education and guidance are reserves that create productive human capital. Therefore, investment in terms of money, time and effort in education yields productive results (*Yaqoob et al., 2022*). A traditional perspective of education that was created in the 1950s and establishes a link with labour is the human capital approach (*St Cyr, 1980*). According to *Schultz (1968)*, education is an investment; to acquire knowledge and skills, which subsequently raises income and productivity at the both personal and national levels. Numerous studies on the subject of the value of children attending school for economic development were conducted in the early 1990s with findings

that countries with higher incomes have a higher percentage of children enrolled in school than do those with lower incomes. According to Barro (1991), higher primary and secondary school enrolment rates are substantially correlated with faster GDP per capita growth rates. Using years of schooling in cross-national data or nation-scale data, a growing number of research. Psacharopoulos (1994) suggested a return to education theory. Hanushek and Woessmann (2010) examined the relationships between the average number of years of schooling in 1960 and the annual rates of economic growth per capita from 1960 to 2000 and discovered that every additional year of education enhanced economic growth per capita by 0.58 percentage points (245).

Right-Based Approach

A number of treaties and conventions are connected to the conceptual framework of the rights-based approach to education. The UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960), the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (1966), and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1981), all came after the establishment of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. The goals of the rights-based approach to education are to guarantee all children the right to access to school, the right to quality education, and the right to respect within the learning environment, (UNESCO, 2021).

The Capability Approach

According to the capacity approach, humans are capable of functioning in both doing and being. Achieving functioning, such as getting an education and maintaining health, is the achievement of capabilities, and capability is the chance and opportunity to do so. The nature of education and its function as a tool are important aspects of the capacity approach. Compared to the human capital approach, it gives more thought to the purpose of education itself. According to Bakhshi et al., (2004), education plays a significant part in the capacity approach because it teaches people how to deal with new obstacles in daily life, how to complete common tasks in novel ways, how to start over, and how to coexist with others who have different perspectives.

Social Exclusion Framework

Social exclusion is a process and the outcome

of process, not a condition. Poverty is not the only indicator of social exclusion, yet, it also denotes social relations, social support, and civic engagement and may differ in social contexts. due to the fact that it is a socially embedded concept, either locally or culturally (Thynne & Peters, 2015; Lewin, 2009). Numerous studies examining school attendance in basic education scrutinized the factors that lead to non-enrolment, including poverty, gender, and child labour. In respect of extending access to education, a number of factors including poverty, social/cultural norms, gender inequality, resources, teacher quality and school infrastructure do play main role, accordingly.

Poverty, gender, and location are the primary causes of children's school dropouts and absences. Some explanations for why children have never attended school were that these could be due to a variety of socioeconomic factors, including the educational attainment of parents, family income, and the physical amenities of the school, which both improve instruction and learning and have an impact on student access. The main factors slowing down access to education are supply-side, demand-side, sociocultural, and economic constraints, as well as issues with government ability, governance, and funding (UNESCO, 2021). Compared to boys, girls are more vulnerable. The main reasons why schoolgirls drop out include poverty, ethnicity, orphanage, disability begging, and living in conflict or post-conflict situations (Stromquist, 2014). Children who are not in school lack life and social skills, have a low standard of living, and frequently engage in risky and criminal activities as a result of their poverty (Vayachuta et al. 2016).

Regarding access issues, the situation is dire in Pakistan for children who are not in school. In Pakistan, the main causes of students never attending school or leaving before finishing include lack of funds, children's interest, poverty, the distance to school, and homework at home. According to UNESCO (2021), low enrolment can also be caused by incompetent school management, low and inadequate budget allocations and distributions, low and inadequate supply of schools and teachers, and poor coordination between public and private partnerships. The distance to school, gender inequality, and poverty are other major issues. The education of children in Sindh is also largely hindered by a number of factors, entailing poverty, the influence of religion, income, migration and displacement, lack of expertise in the instructional language, caste, gender, ethnicity,

labour, natural disasters, disability, and school location (Bajwa, 2011).

METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitative in character. Qualitative research is grounded in constructivism, realism, and interpretivism (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). According to the school of constructivism, each person defines the social environment in consonance with his/her meaning and experiences (De Laine, 1997). Research is influenced by the researcher's values (Mertens, 2023). Constructivists use qualitative techniques like interviews and observations to inductively and holistically understand human experience. Within qualitative research phenomenological approach has been adopted as the study intended to get perceptions of the stakeholders regarding sector plan and its practical execution, accordingly It is essential for a researcher to know the lived experiences from the perspective of those who live in it in order to be effective (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The study also focused experiences of the school leaders who remained part of the activities and initiatives undertaken in accordance with priority programs of the School Education Sector Plan & Roadmap for Sindh 2019-2024. The instant study applied case study approach. Case study is an in-depth examination of a particular subject, such as a person, group, location, occasion, organization, or phenomena. Case studies are frequently used in social, educational, clinical, and business research, In view of appropriateness of the research methodology, the study was conducted taking first-hand stakeholders on board seeking their lived experiences regarding implementation of SESP&R oriented activities aimed to enhance access to education at primary level.

Sample

The target population of the study comprised of Head Masters of high enrolment government primary schools of district Umerkot. In qualitative research, the strategy of deliberate sampling is widely used to find and select instances with the most information while making the greatest use of the limited resources available (Galvin, 2005). The samples were selected through purposive sampling seeking views and opinions of the targeted stakeholders. Purposive sampling is employed when certain criteria are set for sampling. The criteria for the selection of Head Masters/ Mistresses were as under:

- The Head Master should belong to high enrolment school having primary level 100 or above.

- The Head Master should have above 4 years administrative experience.
- The Head Master should have served in the same school from 2019-2023.

Those meeting the above set criteria, 16 Head Masters 13 male and 3 females were selected as sample for the study.

Research Instruments

The study adopted two-pronged approach for collection of data, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews; amongst others, interview schedules stand out as one of the key methods of data collection in qualitative study. Semi-structured interviews technique for gathering data is based on asking questions inside a pre-established theme framework. Though the questions are not predetermined in terms of sequence or wording, (George, 2008). Interviews offer a huge potential to gain a deep understanding of people's perspectives regarding their social reality. In an interview participants disclose their emotions, motives, and meanings that enable researchers to collect rich and detailed data. The interview method was preferred as it focuses to seek research respondent's views regarding the phenomenon being analysed. The study being a case study, use of semi-structured questionnaire gave the researcher freedom to prepare the interview guide on the basis of reference of literature, analysis of documents and also provide space to the interviewee to bring to light more issues related to research problem.

Document Analysis

In order to have substantial set of queries regarding the phenomenon under study, a careful analysis of the sector plan related documents recording its progress in respect of access to education initiatives was carried out and on the basis of information gathered herein, triangulation of the data collection was made to validate the findings of the study not depending merely on interviews.

Research Procedure

The research participants, School leaders/Head Masters were contacted through telephonic calls two to three days in advance, to seek their consent and also send details of the area under study. Thus, meeting was held with all the participants at their ease, The interviews lasted for 30 to 40 minutes.

Data Analysis

The Analysis of the data was made through thematic analysis of the interviews and reference of the sector plan implementation reports. Researchers can establish themes patterns in the data they collect by using a technique termed thematic analysis. Being a sophisticated method thematic analysis, it makes it easier for the researcher to arrange, handle, and analyse qualitative data in a methodical manner. Reliability of the data analysed in themes was established through coding/labelling the topics, further making groups on similarity and overarching of themes best determine and describe data. Whereas validity is achieved by use of accurate operational definitions of the area under study, collecting data through more than single method for triangulation and placing aside one's personal prejudices and subjectivity.

RESULTS & FINDINGS

Theme 1: Education Sector Plan

All the participants seemed partially oriented with the education sector plan 2019-2024, however, had fair knowledge of developments taking place in the education scenario of the district. Variation existed in the opinion of the respondents regarding implementation of certain activities of the sector plan as the participant-4, expressing unawareness about transport facilities provision said, "I don't know whether there are transport facilities anywhere in the district for children and teachers pick and drop." Another respondent-11, Head Mistress said, "I have seen number of schools upgraded, renovated and provided certain facilities like furniture, learning material and good teachers posted there."

Theme 2: Out of School Children Baseline Survey

Majority of the participants, both male and female expressed serious concerns about this issue and emphasized reducing the number of out of school children on war-footing basis. The participant # 3 shared his concerns saying, "thousands of school age children are still found roaming in streets, out of school, either because of poverty, or community carelessness and indifference towards this social evil." I do realize the need of every child to be in school to build his/her future bright rather than waste beautiful days staying away from school". Confirming large number of schools going age children not in school, one of the Head Mistress, the participant # 7 recounted that, "as per my observation, nearly 50% school age children, mostly girls are out of schools

in district Umerkot. Substantial realization seemed there persisting regarding issue of out of school children and emphasis was given to address the issue urgently.

So, for the implementation status of baseline survey as reflected in SESP&R implementation plan is concerned, there stayed uniformity in views, nearly all negated conduct of such activity during 2019-2023 in the district. One of the female Head Mistresses opined, "There was no survey conducted on the part of education department in the district. I attended training sessions organized by an INGO, Community World Service Asia CWSA its team shared some facts about out of school children where it was told that above 50% girls of school age stay out of the schools in the district". This indicated one of the major implementation gaps of the sector plan was ignorance of activities in the district.

Theme 3: Enrolment and Retention Campaigns

All the participants agreed that the activities regarding increase of enrolment and retention of students were conducted in the district during 2019-2023 except 2020 and 2021 the COVID-19 pandemic years. One of the leading Head Masters serving in the high enrolment schools, said, "I myself-stayed active part of enrolment campaigns during 2019.2022 and 2023, giving details that in 2019 a mega enrolment event was inaugurated by Honourable Minister Education, Secretary Education and other officers of Education Department, development partners, civil society, teachers, students and community members Umerkot. This event proved effective in disseminating the message of enrolment to all the concerned." Another Head Master added regarding enrolment "as I belong to Umerkot so start with, the Enrolment Campaign commenced from the school of Umerkot city. A major event was organized where Honorable Minister Education and Secretary Education addressed the seminar, we attended it and took out a rally wherein message was communicated for enrolment of school age children to school. Enrolment of my own school increased from 70 to 298. This increase was result of joint efforts made in line enrolment campaigns."

One of the participants said that "though rallies do make a difference but on the ground level much more is required, as mainly these campaigns catered to district and taluka headquarters missing grassroot level. To him, stipend through Benazir Income Support Program has also shown positive results in persuading poor parents to get their children enrolled". However,

follow up and accountability remained elusive as one of the participants indicated that, “mostly focus stayed on organization of seminars and display of material, but follow up and supervision was largely unseen”. In view of the majority of participants, it was concluded that enrolment campaigns were organized right from district to taluka level with leadership and administrative ownership and things seemed well to the extent of mobilization and creating momentum. Whereas, lack of robust mechanism and framework existed as track record, month -wise, quarter -wise and year -wise progress found missing indicating follow up one of the major weak areas of enrolment campaigns.

Theme 4: Transport Facilities

All the Head Masters admitted that there was need of transport facilities to be provided to children and staff to bring them to school. One of the Head Masters remarked that, “provision of transport facilities is a welcome action, I do appreciate it. Recently I have heard through certain sources that transport facilities have started in Kaplor and other desert area schools that are proving beneficial in conveying both children and teachers to school,” As far as availability under sector plan implementation is concerned; the response of the majority of respondents with respect to the provision of transport facilities for children and teachers yielded mixed replies; those belonging to desert areas of taluka Umerkot said that the same was there seemed at a very minimal extent in few of the areas focusing middle, high and higher secondary schools whereas remaining talukas head masters either answered in the negative or replied that they are hearing of this development only now, that too in desert areas of the district. A Head Mistress said “to some extent transport facilities were provided, that too in the ending years, i.e. 2023 which need to be scaled up to all four talukas in all areas, focusing on points where girls’ enrolment is low”.

Based on opinion of the participants, it may be concluded that transport facilities were provided to very little extent in the ending years of the education sector plan in 2023, and merely in few desert areas. Its importance is well noted as seen from the answers recorded in the interviews, what is required is scaling up and making this facility a regular and permanent feature of our education system, for long lasting effects in enhancement of education access to all sections of society. Certain models in use are there in this district, offering well emulative example to follow and align transport facilities related strategies with the same learning successful lessons, accordingly.

Theme 5: Early Childhood Education

All the respondents acknowledged importance of Early Childhood Education to be laying strong foundation of a strong building, enhancing enrolment and supporting retention. One of the Head Masters highlighting ECE said, I have set up a classroom reserved for ECE in my school though separate room not provided however learning material and training for existing teachers were provided through government and non-government levels. One of the Head Mistresses sharing details about ECE level education said that “in my school ECE class exist with a separate classroom. teaching learning material and teacher trained by local area working INGO Community World Service Asia CWSA.” One of the participants pointed out a major flaw in context of Umerkot, that “ECE teachers were supposed to be posted in primary school but here ECE teachers are posted in secondary schools. These ECE teachers should be posted in ECE classroom schools rather wasted in secondary schools.” In the light of respondent’s opinion regarding ECE level education, its need, requirements, including teacher availability, separate classroom, furniture, setting, display and learning material, there seemed need of reforms implementation in execution of ECE curriculum, standards and assessment practices in the primary schools, accordingly.

Theme 6: Lack of Infrastructure/Missing Facilities for Child -Friendly Environment

All the participants stood agreed in terms of provision of infrastructure and basic facilities during School Education Sector Plan & Roadmap for Sindh 2019-2024. Most of the Head Masters confirmed rehabilitation, renovation, repair and maintenance in the schools, mainly primary schools, across district Umerkot. However, large number of schools stayed still lacked uplift. One of the respondents said that “repair, maintenance and rehabilitation work has been carried out in my school. “Classrooms are repaired, one separate classroom also constructed for Early Childhood Education and other improvements also took place in my school.” Another Head Master said that “my school has been provided 240 dual desks for seating, when seating facilities are improved, they help in attracting children to school, motivate parents for sending children to school. Other development work was also made in my school as building has been rehabilitated and now school presents satisfactory look with safe drinking water and electricity facilities, making difference in the environment of school and attracting children”.

A Head Mistress added, “in my school development work happened, an additional classroom constructed, and furniture provided to cater needs of children, however, when basic facilities get improve, children enrolment is increased. Still much are our requirements, however, overall, more or less furniture and rehabilitation work has taken place in the district.” One of the interviewees showing concerns for his school building, remarked that “rehabilitation works seemed to have taken place but on basis of pick and choose not merit as my school despite having extreme need and substantial enrolment remained ignored mainly on political considerations”. It may be concluded that during 2019-2023 infrastructure improvement related work took place in the instant district though at limited level largely in high enrolment schools but yielded positive results in making school environment child-friendly and increasing enrolment. However, certain factors entailing political consideration remained there in respect of development works carried out for rehabilitation and renovation of school buildings in the district.

Theme 7: Teacher Recruitment

All the respondents seemed highly informed and appreciative of recruitment of new teachers and termed it a landmark progress in the education of Sindh province including district Umerkot. One of the respondents told that “Recruitment of teachers has been made at large scale in Sindh in free, fair and transparent manner. The teachers seem competent, academically sound and familiar with use of information technology. Five teachers are posted 3 male and two female in my school and they are science background having experience of teaching in private schools.” A Head Mistress, appreciating teachers recruitment remarked that, “as per my knowledge nearly 500 closed primary schools have been opened in the district through appointment of newly selected teachers. Today I witness education activities in majority of primary and secondary schools in full swing.” In agreement with majority participants, it was concluded that the recent recruitment was on merit with gender balance leading to reopen of many closed viable primary schools.

Theme 8: Teacher Trainings

All the participants even teachers said that better capacity building trainings seemed in place for these recruited teachers. One of the respondents said, “I have observed well settled arrangements

of initial professional development trainings for these newly appointed teachers. I myself remained part of training as a Resource Person and found competent young well equipped academically and technically but pedagogically lacking to be a good teacher, communicator and facilitator.” Another lady respondent added that “I myself am associated with different teacher trainings including currently initial professional development training for newly inducted teachers and found this effective willingly attended by the teachers with spirit of enthusiasm and commitment.” Majority of the Head Masters termed the trainings productive and result-oriented in enhancing teaching and learning skills and abilities of young teachers. One of the Head Mistresses told, “I have observed teachers before trainings and after one period spending in training comparatively change in his attitude, classroom management, dealing with students and fellow teachers and applying teaching practices better than earlier. It seemed that initial professional development training experience made mentionable difference in the daily routine teachings.” In the light of comments of majority of Head Masters as well as District Education Officials regarding teacher trainings, the researcher came to the conclusion that the professional development trainings were effectively organized where participation of teachers stayed with willingness, motivation and spirit of enthusiasm.

Theme 9: Clustering of schools

All the participants agreed that clustering of school did not take place in the district. This component of the sector plan as envisaged in the implementation plan of the sector plan remained unimplemented. However, documents show that identification, verification and draft working was made for formation of clusters in the district.

Theme 10: Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

In response to query regarding experiences of the respondents regarding implementation of continuous professional development component, reply of the majority was found either in negative or not so being aware about this initiative’s status on ground.

Theme 11: Upgradation

All the respondents stood agreed in respect of the increasing number of schools being upgraded to post-primary and endorsed that sizeable number

of primary schools were upgraded to next level in the district. One of the interviewees belonging to rural area told that, "my primary school has been upgraded which has made it possible for primary pass students, particularly girls to seek admission to continue education ahead. I found this upgradation beneficial for stopping drop out, if my school was not upgraded, surely some students, would have been dropped out, hence I support that each and every primary school may be declared elementary so as at least majority of students, particularly girls will have the opportunity to seek education at middle level". It was inferred from the perception of the participants that upgradation of schools rested there in the district during implementation phases of SESP&R 2019-2024 and it was considered as a promising development for enhance of education, mainly post-primary education.

Theme 12: Temporary Learning Centres/ Alternative Learning Spaces

All the participants mentioned different actions taken during Education in Emergency phases of the School Education Sector Plan & Roadmap for Sindh 2019-2024 implementation. COVID-19 and Floods/Rains 2022 seemed worst devastating factors badly hampering education activities. To compensate losses, number of actions emerged to have been taken as offline and online courses during pandemic and establishment of temporary learning centres during flood/rains emergency 2022, fairly. One of the Head Masters confided, "efforts of education department made in collaboration of development partners during flood/rain 2022 really deserve appreciation. I myself worked with district education administration in establishing temporary leaning centres and I feel pleasure to say that the concept of temporary learning centres started from my district Umerkot where first TLC was inaugurated by honourable Minister Education just after the settlement of tent cities in the vicinity of Umerkot city. Number of Temporary Learning Centres were set up across the district.

Another Head Mistress endorsing initiative of temporary learning opportunities for flood/rains affected children passing in critical moments of trauma saying "my school female teachers also served in these temporary learning centres where thousands of rains affected children continued education. She added that number of first-time school comers, especially girls were found there in these learning facilities getting education. This was a good experience of my life to see education uninterrupted in state of emergency." The opinion of all the respondents stood

agreed with district education officials who endorsed the actions of Education in Emergency, positively.

Discussion

According to the findings of the study, the Head Masters were aware about the developments taking place in the education sector of the district and some of them also had understanding and background of sector planning. However, they were not involved in planning process that could have resulted in making plan design better and well grounded. Certain activities focusing increase of enrolment at all levels, especially primary level did exist but in traditional way. Whereas, certain activities aimed to enhance access, strengthen quality seemed either unimplemented or partially implemented, as baseline survey for out of school children, their numbers and root causes for not attending schools, clustering of schools for effective management and continuous professional development for teachers were seen not on ground. Simultaneously, provision of transport facilities was initiated that too in the ending stages of the plan at very negligible level, upgradation not in systematic way.

Enrolment raising activities were conducted regularly except pandemic period and emerged effective to the extent of mobilizing communities and creating momentum in the district education. The modus operandi as observed through plan documents and perceptions of the head masters was found traditional with emphasis on organize of campaigns covering district and taluka headquarters, giving no priority to grassroot level and trickling down to villages and schools. Proper monitoring and follow up mechanism were found missing with regard to record keeping and tracking data of enrolment quarterly or yearly to measure progress, analyse things and make necessary changes and modification in the sector plan implementation strategies, accordingly. As per the interviews infrastructure, upgradation, recruitment of teachers, teachers training and temporary learning centres emerged effective and result oriented activities undertaken in line with initiatives of SESP&R 2019-2024. All the participants were appreciative regarding these activities and endorsed the positive correlation to improved access, enhanced enrolment and retention, respectively.

On the whole, keeping in view the track record of implementation of national education policies and plans it may be concluded that SESP&R 2019-2024 had a positive development encompassing strategies, roles and responsibilities and set targets and resources which guided the education machinery

in the district to move in the set direction and contribute to maintain retention of enrolment despite emergencies, enhance access, quality and governance. The gaps did exist there but the little bit achievements which were secured testify to the fact that something as attained in line with the School Education Sector Plan for Sindh 2019 -2024 indicted promising prospective. Despite certain shortcomings, overall implementation was fair compared to previous sector plan of 2014-2028, Number of targets set in the plan were put on ground in practical form which yielded promising results, i.e., sensitization mobilization and creation of momentum in respect of enrolment, out of school children, retention, early childhood education, transport facilities, infrastructure, teachers recruitment, trainings, opening of closed schools through proper placement of teachers, education in emergency in form of temporary learning centres and ultimate enhancement of access to education at all levels, particularly, primary education.

The study stands in line with findings of Soho et al., (2020) that a comprehensive strategy for monitoring and evaluation of the plans was lacking without it, results could not be measured in the long-term planning. Here monitoring and evaluation and follow up mechanism was also found missing in the implementation journey of School Education Sector Plan & Roadmap for Sindh, 2019-2024 hampering the effective tracking of the activities being carried out specially year wise and campaign wise measurable impact of enrolment campaigns. The study stays in agreement with Siddiqui (2016) study's findings that poor coordination and lacking monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of plans affected pace of progress, hampering the achievements of intended objectives, accordingly. The study also concurs to number of findings indicating access to education and implementation of policies plans to be the most pressing issues of education sector in Pakistan right from 1947 to 2023, respectively.

CONCLUSION

The study explored the status of the implementation of School Education Sector Plan & Roadmap for Sindh 2019-2024 and resulting enhancement of access to education at primary level. The study revealed that number of strategies prevailed there in the designated district education scenario to supplement fair execution of the plan-oriented activities, mainly and registration of out of school children, enrolment campaigns, early childhood education, transport facilities, infrastructure, teacher recruitment and trainings and education arrangements during flood/

rain emergency from 2019-to 2023. Non-conduct of baseline survey of out of school children and the reasons for being not in schools, clustering and continuous professional development initiatives, lacking proper monitoring, evaluation and follow up emerged amongst others major gaps of the plan implementation. The study employed Semi-structured interviews for eliciting details about the research problem.

It also analysed the sector plan related reports and for a more thorough understanding of the execution problems documents. In the light of findings, the study, recommend involvement of grassroots stakeholders, particularly teachers and head masters, district level dedicated unit specifically for monitoring and follow up of sector plan initiatives, activities and reforms, organize of enrolment campaigns with foolproof follow up mechanism, immediate start of non-started activities as baseline survey, clustering of schools and continuous professional development and scale up of transport, infrastructure and ECE facilities and continuation of teacher recruitment and trainings, respectively. Simultaneously, the periodical review of the sector plan-oriented initiatives should be undertaken at provincial, district and taluka levels taking district stakeholders on board to measure the pace of progress, and identify gaps, bottlenecks and challenges.

Future Implications

Studies of this nature require to be undertaken in other districts of Sindh province to see implementation of sector plan activities and improvement in access at Primary secondary and higher secondary levels. More studies need to be conducted to measure the impact of the implementation of quality and governance-focused activities under the school education sector plan.

Competing Interests

The authors has declared that no competing interests exist.

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