

## Dynamics of education policy formulation after the 18th amendment in Province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

Zaheer Ahmad<sup>1</sup>, Ikram Shah<sup>2\*)</sup>, Arif Alam<sup>3</sup>, Humayun Khan<sup>4</sup>

1,2,3,4 Department of Development Studies COMSATS University Islamabad – Abbottabad Campus, Pakistan

### Abstract

*The 18th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan has authorized provinces, including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), to formulate autonomous education policies. This authority includes determining the direction and strategy of the education system for future goals such as literacy rates, gender equality, and quality education. However, after 14 years of implementing this decentralization, KPK's progress in educational policy autonomy has been inadequate. This study evaluates the performance of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province in formulating its own educational policies in the context of the post-18th Constitutional Amendment era. This research is based on semi-structured interviews conducted with key stakeholders in the province. The study also found that as a small province, KPK faces various challenges, such as a shortage of experts in education policy formulation, limited financial and human resources, political interference, an unbalanced federal system, and a lack of extensive consultation with stakeholders. These variables act as barriers to the province's progress in all aspects of formal education, despite the decentralization of school education through the 18th Amendment in 2010. This study recommends the need to enhance the institutional capacity of the KPK Province in formulating education policies in accordance with the objectives of the 18th Amendment.*

**Keywords:** constitutional amendment, education policy formulation, stakeholders consultation

\*) corresponding author

E-mail: [ikramshah@cuiatd.edu.pk](mailto:ikramshah@cuiatd.edu.pk)

### Introduction

In 2010, Pakistan adopted the 18<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment which devolved various fundamental governing powers including school education to provinces (Zardari & Zardari, 2023). The devolution of powers to provinces sought to help provinces develop education policies that match their distinct economic situations, social dynamics and cultural realities (Ali, 2022; Ashraf et al., 2021). As Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) gained autonomy through this constitutional amendment, yet it has failed to formulate its own indigenous provincial education policy for the last fourteen-years posing serious questions about its governance capabilities (Baber & Wazir, 2023; Jamal, 2021). KPK continued to depend on outdated education policy frameworks in the absence of its own formulated education policy which hindered its ability to address critical problems such as high school dropout rates, inadequate educational facilities and unequal educational opportunities (Shah, 2012; Ullah & Khan, 2023). The devolution was intended to enable provinces to steer their own education systems with their indigenously formulated education policy so as to bring positive results in their

respective education systems (Siddiqui, 2010). This study conducts a detailed evaluation of the extent to which KPK province has fulfilled its devolved responsibility to formulate education policy and factors which prevented KPK from developing an extensive educational policy framework for such a long period of time.

Education Policy acts as a framework through which resources are channeled, plans are prioritized and activities at one level of the education system are linked to those of other levels (Jamal, 2021). In decentralized education systems, the education governance is usually shifted from a federal government to sub-national (Morgan, 2016). Hanson (1997) indicated that devolution is "the transfer of decision-making authority, responsibility, and governance from higher to lower organizational levels". The introduction of decentralized education system is driven by political and economic aspects; originated with the emergence of community-level decentralization in education in the United States during the post-World War-II era (Arno, 2019). However, the concept gained popularity and adopted as a governance reform model during 1980s with emphasis on the transformation of educational management and authority (Kettl, 2015). The contemporary literature on education documented devolution as "probably the single most advocated reform for improving the provision of such basic services as education and health in developing country" (Channa, 2016).

Education policies require increased engagement of stakeholders at every point within the policy formulation process so as to be successful in achieving set objectives (Pont & Viennet, 2017). It demands the involvement of all stakeholders including teachers, parents, students, education managers and other community members in setting priorities and devising solutions (Yaro et al., 2017). For example, engaging teachers and seeking their input in policy-making will make its implementation more practical for being an informed policy (Pont & Viennet, 2017). Likewise, involving the community in policy making makes policies reliable, closely-fit and culturally sensitive as well as relevant to the socio-cultural and socio-economic context (Sanderson, 2002). Lastly, the process of education policy formulation entails constant assessment and adjustment owing to this aspect (Henry et al., 2013). Education Policy must therefore, be dynamic, as it should provide for an updated solution and keep itself in line with the ever changing situation and context, making it flexible to meet dynamic needs and address developmental objectives (Henry et al., 2013).

In federal systems, the locus of education policy formulation is often debated among the stakeholders (McGinn & Welsh, 1999). It is usually contested whether to keep this responsibility with federal or provincial governments (Naidoo, 2005). Riker (1964) and Elazar (1987) demonstrated that decentralized governance creates better response and solutions to the public problems because federating units can better adapt educational policies to suit their specific contexts. The Constitution of Pakistan through 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment devolved school education governance to provinces. The devolution of education policy formulation to federating units in Pakistan followed the worldwide educational governance trends like in Australia and Canada, yet the major concern lies that it may create disharmony among provinces regarding policies. Pakistan through this landmark constitutional development intended to pursue education policy formulation in accordance with the model which combines provincial autonomy as well as national integration. Provincial governments were expected to possess the capacity to develop policies based on local socio-economic conditions

mainly for handling issues concerning regional education disparities along with gender inequalities and infrastructure development gaps.

The effectiveness of education policy in a federation hinges on inter-governmental cooperation, financial resource distribution, and institutional capacity. The devolution of education policy formulation to provinces in Pakistan was a historical move intended to devolve authority to the federating units so that they may get hold of their respective school education systems and solve their own educational problems (Hafeez et al., 2024). This shift clearly devolved the responsibility to devise school education policy to all provinces including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Mustafa, 2012). Due to its socio-cultural and socio-economic dynamics, KPK had got special needs that were to be addressed through indigenously formulated education policy well informed by the evidence from local context (Khan et al., 2020). KPK being a smaller and weak province was in need of a more focused and context-specific school education policy in line with its socio-economic and socio-cultural profile (Mustafa, 2012). This means that provincial policy was expected to meet Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's needs with a suitable response to the prevailing challenges. The absence of a sound education policy means that all attempts towards the educational improvement will not achieve the desired targets being inconsequential (Naz et al., 2021). For this reason, KPK's education policy not only needs to confront socio-economic factors, but changes brought by modern education systems as well (Shaukat et al., 2021).

Education policy maneuvers and steers the overall education system of a nation (Radó 2001). It defines both human resources and drives social and economic development in a society (Naidoo, 2005). Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) faces significant challenges since it has yet to formulate a comprehensive education policy as already discussed. The province has been devising numerous short-term educational plans and introducing educational reforms from time to time, yet a long term consolidated education policy is still a distant reality in the province. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Blueprint 2018-2023 along with the Education Sector Plans like 2020/21 and 2024/25 provide general guidelines yet they do not replace a detailed education policy framework which unites all aspects within the education sector. Different governments introduced multiple isolated reforms including infrastructure development, teacher recruitment programs and early childhood education programs without integrating them within a unified education policy structure (Shaheen, 2013). These reforms and plans could not achieve desired results being uncoordinated and with poor capability to sustain impacts for a longer period of time leading to substantial voids when dealing with institutional problems in KPK.

The province ok KPK succeeded in boosting school enrollment yet inadequate policy implementation barred it from resolving school dropout issues together with gender biases and geographic barriers for educational access. The introduction of the Independent Monitoring Unit (IMU) and school-based management committees improved accountability in education yet remained disconnected from a unified educational development strategy. A well-crafted education policy in KPK is direly needed to successfully coordinate crucial aspects of education in the province and to connect them with national and global requirements. In its absence, provincial government resorted to implement fragmented educational plans instead of relying on a well-integrated and coherent educational approach. A meticulously crafted and evidence based education policy remains critical for a province like KPK because it may

enable the province to solve socio-economic differences bringing educational inclusion (Mustafa, 2012). An effective education policy brings a fine balance between local needs and national educational standards so as to serve the tenets of federal state structure in a multi-lingual and multi-cultural context (Ashraf et al., 2021). Education policy formulation requires a collaborative procedure that includes wide consultation and evidence from all stakeholders of education system to guarantee positive and effective policy outcomes (Pont & Viennet, 2017). A properly formulated education policy boosts both educational planning and implementation processes along with the enhancement of provincial capability to execute its other devolved school education responsibilities with more efficiency (Adams, 2002).

KPK being culturally and linguistically complex and diverse province requires effective policy formulation process in line with the public aspirations and developmental goals (Khan et al., 2020). Education policy based on local context with due stakeholders' consultation is likely to elicit commitment since its implementation is associated with the stakeholders themselves (Bijlsma et al., 2011). Formulation of an education policy in KPK is essential for fostering stakeholder engagement and building a consensus-driven approach to educational development. Unique cultural and linguistic diversity of KPK underscores importance of inclusive decision-making processes that reflect aspirations and concerns of its population (Lakhan, 2024). Absence of a comprehensive education policy in KPK limits province's ability to perform its other allied responsibilities effectively (Parvez et al., 2021).

## **Research Method**

### ***Study Area***

KPK is one of the four provinces of Pakistan and lies to the north-west of Afghanistan and to the east of Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan while to the south it has province of Punjab and Baluchistan. It occupies more than 10,000 square kilometres and the population of the province is over 40 million. Geographically, KPK comprised of seven divisions having several districts within them. However, there have been efforts by the province to increase literacy rate within the province where only 53% of people are literate, this is lower than the national literacy level of 59.3%. Province has also observed certain inequalities which have impeded the educational performance of the province. KPK school education systems include government and private schools. The public system operates at the primary, middle, high and higher secondary levels with the private setup; however, there are slight differences across the country in affiliation and curriculum. At present, KPK has 34,431 public and 8,840 private school education institutions and it has 2,021,218 students enrolled in primary, middle, secondary and higher secondary classes. However, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Bureau of Statistics indicated that still over 260 primary, 27 middle and 4 high schools have been non-functional in this province. These non-functional schools are mainly in the districts like Kohistan, Torghar and the erstwhile FATA.

### ***Participants***

Due to the nature of the current study the participants selected for the study are education handlers at Elementary and Secondary Education Department Peshawar, Directorate of Elementary and Secondary Education Peshawar, Directorate of Curriculum and Teachers Education Abbottabad, School Education Authorities at

district level, District Monitoring Officers, Chairpersons of Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education, selected educationists of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Sector Program and Principals of Government school. (see table 1).

**Table 1: Short Profile of Respondents Participants of In-depth Interviews**

Field Interviews Details	Gender		Age Range	Total Participants
	Male	Female		
Elementary & Secondary Education Department, Peshawar, KP: R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8	7	1	25-60	8
Directorate of Elementary & Secondary Education, Peshawar, KP: R9, R10, R11, R12, R13, R14, R15	6	1	25-60	7
Directorate of Curriculum & Teacher Education, KPK Abbottabad, KP: R16, R17, R18, R19	4	-	35-60	4
School Education Authorities (DEOs) at District Level: Abbottabad, Mansehra & Haripur: R20, R21, R22, R23, R24, R25	3	3	35-45	6
District Monitoring Officers (DMOs), Abbottabad, Mansehra & Haripur: R26, R27, R28	3	-	25-40	3
Board of Intermediate & Secondary Education, Abbottabad, Mardan, Kohat & Peshawar: R29, R30, R31, R32	3	1	25-55	4
NGOs (Private Education Network (PEN) KP, SRSP KP: R33, R34, R35, R36	4	-	25-45	4
KPK Education Sector Programme, Abbottabad & Mansehra KP: R37, R38, R39, R40, R41, R42	4	2	25-45	6
Principals of Govt Schools, Abbottabad, Haripur, Mansehra, KP: R43, R44, R45, R46, R47, R48, R49, R50,	4	4	40-55	8
Educationists R51, R52, R53, R54, R55,	3	2	45-60	5
Parents of Govt School Students R56, R57, R58, R59, R60	3	2	35-45	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>16</b>		<b>60</b>

*Source: processed by authors*

### **Research Approach**

The findings of this study are developed through the use of mixed method research. Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews, personal observations, field notes, government institutions and independent organizations reports and online publications on the subjects. Some of the approvals that entitle the research idea include the department ethical review committee among others. First of all, all the respondents were categorized into ten groups, and from each of them, employing snowball and purposive sampling techniques; semi-structured interviews were conducted with the respondents until data saturation of this primary research data was reached. All the interviews were conducted face to face in the natural sittings of the respondents. It was established that all interviews were conducted in one round and the duration of an interview was forty-five minutes to one hour. Written and verbal informed consents were taken and every participant was made aware of the purpose of this research study. Interview guide was distributed to respondents to have clear understanding about interview questions. After each interview, notes taken by the

researcher were reviewed filed to ensure the validity and reliability of data gathered from the interview process. Descriptive analysis was conducted for quantitative data while qualitative data was in themes through matrices analysis following steps like categorisation of data into common themes, compounding the information in each respondent under each theme, and the analysis of the rows of each theme.

## **Results and Discussion**

Understanding the experiences obtained concerning education policy making in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province creates a worthwhile background about the difficulties and views linked with this essential process in the post 18<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment context. This discussion critically appreciates and presents assessment of the findings focusing on the different aspects of the education policy-making in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

### **Education Policy Making Process in KPK**

One of the major themes derived from the data is tied to the process within the education policy-making process in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). As to the depth, inclusiveness, and technical expertise of the current policy formulation process, the respondents were given different questions. R.1 answered to the question that *"I am presently leading this process in KPK and we are about to finalize our first draft of education policy very soon"*. Regarding the overall pace of this process another respondent R-4 pronounced that it seems to me that *"Education policy-making process is going on in KPK at a very slow pace and it is significantly delayed"*. In addition to the above, another respondent R.3 shows his dissatisfaction that, I am sure that *"It is generally done by non-technical bureaucrats and due consultations are not done in education policy making"*. R.8 responded that, *"it is not purely evidence based and stake holders consultation is very slender in this process"* whereas on the other hand R.11 presented a little optimistic view and upheld that, *"KPK gained autonomy in formulating policy through 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment and provincial E&SE Department is actively pursuing this responsibility and it is expected consult all the stake holders of informed policy making"*. To sum with the level of agreement and disagreement, the majority of the respondents have expressed that education making process in KPK province is a lengthy process and KPK's capacity is inadequate in this domain, therefore; federal government must assist KPK province in this domain for effective and timely formulation of education policy in KPK.

### **Potential of KPK to Formulate its Own Education Policy**

One of the major concerns observed during the course of this research was the high level of disbelief in KPK's ability to formulate its own indigenous education policy autonomously. Majority of the respondents thus were found with some level of skepticism with regard to KPK readiness, based on lack of adequate expertise perceived requirement for external help particularly from the federal government. While some respondents narrated the recent progress in the capacity building of KPK like technical teams' formation, yet most responses pointed the continued inadequacies in developing enough local capacity for education policy-making. About the competency of the experts and consultation with the relevant stakeholders proved to be sensitive issue. Key informant respondents urged that due to the lack of experts in KPK, the government relies on a few people to formulate education policy in KPK. They stressed

the need for cross-sectional stakeholders' engagement in the formulation of policies for efficiency and effectiveness. Grading of the performance of KPK in core indicator of education policy making is given in table-2 below.

**Table 2.** Perspective of Respondents on Grading of the Performance of KPK in Core Indicators

Indicator	Average Score (Out of 10)
Educational Policy Making	3.695

*Source: processed by authors*

The average score for education policy making in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province is 3.695 out of 10. These ratings suggest that respondents' cumulative average understanding of the formulation of educational policies is perceived to be less than average. As per the responses of the respondents, there is a consensus among respondents that KPK lacks its own indigenous education policy, which is essential for addressing local educational needs and priorities effectively. Respondents attributed this failure with the capacity issue of KPK in education policy making domain particularly.

### **Progress of KPK in Formulating its Own Education Policy**

When the respondents were asked to express their opinion on how far KPK has been successful in formulating its own education policy in the backdrop of the 18th Amendment, which devolved the responsibility to formulate education policy to provinces. The majority of respondents expressed concern that no education policy has yet been compiled by KPK; however, they were optimistic that the process is slowly and gradually underway. The respondents hold contradictory opinions about the general progress of education policy formulation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), particularly when compared with other provinces after the 18th Constitutional Amendment. Their retrospectives highlighted delays and enhancements in the process, as well as how structural and capacity-related issues were to be addressed. R.1 stated that, *"KPK is late and slow like other provinces as no province has so far been able to formulate education policy as devolved through 18th Amendment"*. R.12 upheld that, *"KPK is still working on this task and its very time consuming taking and KPK is trying to enhance its capacity as well despite all constraints"*. In contrast to this perspective, another respondent, R.14, pronounced that, *"Education policy making is on track and gradually it is improving in KPK"*. Another similar response recorded by R.54, as a Vice Principal, in my opinion, *"KPK is still working like all other provinces and it is closer to the final stage of education policy formulation"*.

Conclusively, although the respondents who felt strongly with the delays and capacity shortcomings in the policy making process at the KPK highlighted the policy process shortcomings, others reported consistency of improvement and the focus of the policy making process at KPK towards the constitutional roles vested upon it through devolution. This inconsistency is indicative of the transition period during which institutional reforms are slowly being developed albeit not without obstacles.

**Table 3.** Perspective of Respondents on KPK Capacity of formulation of its Own Educational Policy

Respondents Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	11	18.33
No	49	81.66
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: processed by authors*

In order to determine the opinion of the respondents about the capacity of KPK to formulate its own education policy another item was placed. Out of 60 respondents 11 respondents stated that yes the KPK has the capacity to formulate its own education policy whereas a substantial majority of 49 respondents firmly believed that the province has no capacity to formulate its own education policy (table 3). Although majority of respondents did not agree about the capacity of province to formulate education policy but they stated their valuable opinions like R.4 stated that *"assistance in the form of experts from Federal Ministry may be helpful in this regard"*. R.23 highlighted the obstacles in the way to formulate education policy. Another group of respondents from Elementary & Secondary Education have shown a considerable level of agreement on the issue to the extent in saying that, *"KPK has undertaken this responsibility proactively realizing the importance of education policy as a pivot for the educational upliftment"* is a major reason the system. They further opined that, *"though initially KPK faced immense capacity issue in this domain, yet we have now a team of some technical members who are involved in this complex process to formulate the education policy"*.

### **Availability of Expert Policy Makers to Formulate Education Policy**

The question about Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) having adequate number of expert policy makers who could pursue education policy formulation independently following 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment was treated with divided opinion among the stakeholders. Even though some respondents admitted that there was some improvement in the formulation of education policies, the bigger picture highlighted by the majority of respondents was the lack of institutional capacity and human resources available in the province. One of the senior interviewees, R.1 was cautious in stating that even though there are few education policy professionals in the province, attempts are currently being made towards addressing the mandate in a suitable and context-specific way. He also focused on resolute intention of the provincial government to progressively increase its ability and fill any technical loopholes. Nonetheless, different views were described by other respondents. One of the respondents, R.2 acknowledged that there are experts available in KPK but upheld that the transfer of responsibility has been hard due to centralization policy of education that has its historical roots at the federal level. He maintained that Federal Government traditionally pursuing education policy formulation had entrenched an institutional dependence and this could strategically be leveraged to remain a supportive bridge in enhancing provincial capacity.

In addition to these responses, most of the respondents expressed a general opinion that the province does not have sufficient numbers of expert policy professionals. Some of the respondents claimed that a lack of trained staff as well as less exposure to evidence-based policy formulation procedures coupled with a lack of institutional structures devoted to policy research and planning has severely affected the way the province can assume control over this devolved duty effectively. This perceived lack of expertise is the most cited as one of the fundamental barriers that hinder the capacity of the province in formulating education policy that is to be responsive to local socio-cultural, economic and geographic realities. The results reinforce the greater issues also found in the literature on decentralization in developing nations, where devolution in the absence of parallel capacity building has observed gaps in governance at sub-national levels manifested in different ways like

service delivery (Smoke, 2015). The issue in terms of KPK is not just whether individual experts are available or not, but rather the absence of an institutionalized architecture of the policy-making process that can tap-in to the available expertise and draw on the contribution of the stakeholder and streamline the educational goals to the ground realities. In the absence of such institutional preparedness, respondents stressed that even having authority devolved, it would not have any significant effects unless it is followed by long-term investments in human capital and institutional reinforcement. Consequently, despite some isolated examples of policy expertise at a provincial level, the overall finding based on the narratives of respondent points to a severe gap in capacity, which still prevents KPK taking over its full devolved functions on education policy formulation.

### **Familiarity with the Process of Education Policy Formulation**

The opinions of the respondents in KPK about the education policy making process paint a mixed picture. Some of the respondents like the R.1 and R.4 who are engaged in the process directly indicated that the process of education policy formulation started late due to numerous reasons. One of the major concerns was the involvement of non-technical bureaucrats in the education policy making process coupled with inadequate consultations with the genuine stake holders followed by critically examining the weaknesses and gaps in the structures of policy making process. Regarding the success in formulating the education policy under the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment, the notion was mostly negative. Respondents stated that the process was lengthy and arduous; they upheld that like other provinces in Pakistan, KPK still does not have its education policy. Some of the respondents stated that they had seen some positive change as far as policy making process is concerned, but most of them opined slow movement and institutional limitations are hampering the policy making process in KPK. Responses concerning satisfaction on overall progress of KPK in education policy making are appended below in table 4.

**Table 4.** Perspective of Respondents on Satisfaction on Overall Progress of KPK in Education Policy Making

<b>Core Indicator</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Unknown</b>
Educational Policy Making	4	46	10
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>13</b>

*Source: processed by authors*

The table 4 presents the responses from 60 respondents regarding their view about the overall satisfaction on progress of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in education policy making domain. The majority of respondents that is 46 who were officials dealing with school education and educational policy-making expressed dissatisfaction on this aspect. The responses reflect a clear perception of KPK's performance in the fundamental domain of education policy making devolved to the province through 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

The respondents were asked about their satisfaction with the process of current education policy and mechanism of stake holders' consultation in KPK. Among the key stakeholders, R.1 commented that, *"the process of education policy making is going on well under my supervision and I am satisfied with the process"* but R.2 disagreed in this regard and stated that *"I am not satisfied with the process at all and generally it's a very narrow process of consultation involved"*. Majority of the respondents disagreed and

upheld that usually a wide range of stakeholders are not consulted in education policy making and as far as the capacity of KPK province is concerned, province lacks the desired capacity and institutional will to formulate its indigenous education policy.

### **Stake Holders Consultation in Education Policy Making Process**

Stakeholder consultation emerged as a significant theme in the study on education policy-making in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). Respondents emphasized the need for inclusive and participatory processes that engage actors across various levels of the education system. R.2 asserted that, "there should be a broad consultation including both horizontal and vertical stakeholders for effective education policy-making". A similar response was expressed by R-3, who stated that, "all stakeholders including parents, teachers, private schools association, and academia should be engaged". These views reflect a shared understanding among respondents that stakeholder engagement is essential for formulating contextually relevant and widely accepted education policies in the post-devolution landscape of KPK province. Almost all the respondents agreed about this matter that all the stakeholders i.e. parents, teachers, private schools owners, NGOs, educationist and politicians all should be consulted for the formulation of the effective and informed education policy. When these respondents were asked that whether all stakeholders including academia are being consulted in current education policy making process, they acutely disagreed and said that no consultation is being done and generally it is very narrow and inadequate process. R.13 indicated that, *"consultation for education policy formulation at federal level has always remained very narrow over the past years. Now after devolution of education policy making to provinces KPK has tried its level best to keep most of the stake-holders engaged through elaborate consultation, yet it needs more vertical and horizontal and vertical collaboration with all stake-holders"*.

Respondents were asked that what is their opinion that education policy be formulated at federal or provincial level. Respondents expressed different opinions like R.1 commented that, *"it can be done at provinces yet if done at federal level can foster national integration"* whereas R.2 contradicted that, *"I support this to be done at provincial level"*. R.8 with his agreement shared his reservations that, *"I think if done at federal level it can bring national integration, but there is a gap in the spirit of 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment and practically what is actually lying on ground"*. So divergent responses were received in this regard with a solid majority expressing that it should be at provincial level yet certain respondents, with few in favor of federal government to formulate education policy for national integration and uniformity in the nation across. Respondents were asked that whether they have ever remained the part of the education policy formulation or not and how way their experience. Most of the respondents intimated that they have never been part of any such process and only very few respondents remained involved in the process. R.1 pointed out that, *"I remained part of it and currently I am currently leading this process in KPK and it is very complex process"*. Other section of respondents shared their experience that they have only attended different seminars and conferences in connection with the education policy formulation. This shows majority of the education handlers at provincial level never remained part and parcel of any education policy making endeavor of the government throughout their career.

### **Constitutional Mandate of KPK to Formulate Education Policy**

The role of the federal government in education policy-making after the 18<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment remains a contested issue among respondents. While some view federal involvement as a violation of provincial autonomy, others recognize a continued need for national coordination and standardization within Pakistan's federal structure. R.1 opined that any sort of federal interference in the education policy domain truly goes against the spirit of devolution introduced through the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment. On the other hand, a different perspective was offered by R.2, who upheld that for the sake of integration and standardization of school education, there has always been considerable federal government interference in the provincial domain raising concerns about the delicate balance between national cohesion and provincial autonomy. This tension led respondents to question how provincial interests can be harmonized with national unity in Pakistan's federal system.

Supporting this view, R.3 and R.6 emphasized that for the purpose of achieving uniformity and national integration, the federal role in school education policy-making cannot be entirely eliminated. Further, R.12 upheld that issues of federal incursion into provincial jurisdiction especially in policy matters highlight the urgent need to clearly define mutual roles and responsibilities, not only in theoretically in constitution but also in practical implementation. Collectively, these responses highlight a vital obscurity in center-province relations in Pakistan concerning educational governance, suggesting a critical need for well-defined mechanisms of coordination to prevent overlaps, confusions, and political friction among stakeholders.

### **Challenges Faced by KPK in Fulfilling its Education Policy Making Responsibilities**

A broader theme was also investigated that what are the challenges faced by KPK province in fulfilling its education policy making responsibilities after 18<sup>th</sup> amendment. Respondents identified several critical challenges hindering the effective formulation of education policy in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). These included inadequate resource allocation, constrained stakeholder engagement, lack of technical expertise, and unresolved federal-provincial tensions post-devolution. The biggest concerns highlighted during interviews were the upper hand of Federal Government towards education policy making, lack of desired expertise and capacity on the part of provinces. R.6 Special Secretary E&SE Department articulated that *"resource constraints and effective coordination among different stakeholders are the key challenges for KPK in fulfilling its policy making responsibilities after 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment"*. R.9 espoused that *"lack of proper resource allocation, due stakeholders' consultation, and lack of capacity to formulate education policy are the key challenges"*. R.13 highlighted that, *"lack of expertise and undue interference of the federal government with high-handedness is a key challenge in the way of smooth formulation of education policy"*.

Similarly, R.29 asserted that, *"imbalance in center-province relations in Pakistan is the biggest challenge for effective discharge of responsibilities like education policy-making by provinces like KPK after the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment"*. While addressing the challenges, R.16 emphasized that, *"experts present at the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MoFEPT) may help provinces to fulfill policy-making responsibilities. Mere leaving the devolved responsibilities at the disposal of provinces creates capacity issues for the provinces in so many domains, including education policy-making"*. Overall, the majority of respondents pointed to a complex array of

institutional, political, and administrative barriers that continue to obstruct KPK's progress in independently formulating education policy.

Overall, the capacity issue, lacking requisite man-power to pursue education policy making, narrow consultation with stakeholders and integrationist approach of federal government are the biggest challenges highlighted by the respondents. From the findings emanating from the respondent's perceptions towards KPK's education policy making responsibilities after the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment, multiple challenges have been highlighted. Keeping these challenges in view, like lack of local expertise, federal government's dominating role, lack of experience on the part of KPK provincial machinery, resource scarcity, lack of adequate co-ordination with the stakeholders and the prevalence of integrationist approach on the part of federal government, a plausible course of action is recommended failing which may continue to compromise the spirit of the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment and devolution of powers in Pakistan.

## **Conclusion**

The challenges emphasized by the respondents signify the call for vivid changes and strategic improvement in the field of education policy making in KPK. There is need to formulate an education policy in KPK because the society needs to take ownership of its education system in order to achieve meaningful and sustainable system. Genuine policy-making process is by its nature collaborative and grounded process, which entails the involvement of all stakeholders like teachers, parents, students, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders from across the society. Public organizations in KPK should consider investing in training and development programs that would enhance the capacity of policy makers and education handlers dealing with education policy making. This can further be supplemented by hiring the education policy making professionals from across the country and establishing working relationships with official at federal level. There is need to bring clarity in government roles and responsibilities at this point of time. The extent of legislative authority shifted from the federal government to the provinces by the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment is also needed to be made clear for effective functioning as there is still a confusion prevailing among the stake holders regarding the performance of education policy making responsibilities. Modern education policy making processes demands an extensive and elaborate involvement of all horizontal and vertical stake holders for policy making to increase the level of social acceptability. This increases the efficiency and effectiveness in education policy making it a choice of people across the board.

There is need to initiate a debate and a search for a fine balance between the powers of federal government and the autonomy of provinces in federal system of Pakistan. This overlapping and frequent violation of provincial jurisdiction is not commensurate with the federal system in Pakistan. Such education policies made with obvious violation of provincial jurisdiction like National Education Policy 2017-25, not expected to be ineffective for being contrary to the constitutional standards of the country. Therefore, creating a state of balance and equilibrium between federal and provincial governments is immensely needed to bring better outcomes of the education system. Promoting organizational learning through training and human resource development aimed at improving the skills of the personnel who are involved in the education policy formulation may help in addressing the challenges. This entails identifying and hiring specialized professionals as well as engaging in effective

collaborations with universities and international organizations to strengthen the province's capacity. There is a need to ensure that people-centered practices aiming at inclusion of educators, parents, students and community leaders in the education policy-making process. This will engage all stakeholders creating a feeling of belongingness among all across the board.

Promoting the practices of research-based education policy formulation by utilising modern data collection techniques and scientific research steps in KPK's education policy formulation may bring positive policy outcomes by making the process more scientific and target oriented. It is high time to engage federal government and international organizations for technical contributions and help in the formulation of education policy in KPK. Such joint initiatives can build effective and efficient practices to mitigate the capacity limitations challenges at the devolved provincial level of education policy making. To address these challenges, it is necessary to go for focused efforts on provincial capacity building, making decision-making process more inclusive and engaging all stake holders to make sure that education policies in KPK are relevant to the local needs and demands so as to be better translated for achievement of educational targets. Education governance in the context of post-18<sup>th</sup> Amendment scenario in Pakistan gives rise to the friction between the desire for "*national integration*" and "*provincial autonomy*".

On the other hand, the constitutional devolution through 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment sought to bestow more powers to provinces has increased concerns on the way the intended goals of national integration could be achieved while at the same time provincial autonomy be ensured as well. Solving these challenges through a multifaceted strategy will bring far reaching impacts on the educational landscape of the province enabling it to formulate its much cherished indigenously tailored education policy.

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