PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT DIAGNOSTIC REPORT PUNJAB

Parental Engagement Diagnostic Report-Punjab

Contents

List of Acronyms

ADO – Assistant District Officer

AEO – Assistant Education Officer

B-TAG- Bridging Technical Assistance for the Governments

CSEN – Civil Society Education Networks

E&SED – Elementary and Secondary Education Department

FGD – Focus Group Discussion

GOAL- Girls and Out of School: Action for Learning

KII – Key Informant Interviews

KP – Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

PE – Parental Engagement

PMIU - Programme Monitoring and Implementation Unit

PTA – Parent Teacher Association

PTC – Parent Teacher Committee

PTM – Parent-Teacher Meetings

SC – School Council

SED – Special Education Department

SIP – School Improvement Plan

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Parental engagement is a pivotal factor in shaping children's education at home and in school. The research underscores its significance in fostering academic achievement, motivation, self-esteem, attendance, behaviour, and overall well-being among students. Yet, achieving effective parental engagement poses challenges, especially in government-run schools dealing with limitations like scarce resources, high teacher turnover, and parental literacy issues. A comprehensive understanding of these challenges is crucial as we delve into the positive transformations occurring in Punjab's educational landscape.

The implementation of reforms in the last decade has initiated a positive shift. Although the alarming number of out-of-school children and the issue of "learning poverty" persist, there is a growing awareness and commitment to address these concerns. With a substantial 11.73 million children still out of school in Punjab, there is a heightened recognition of the need for collective action. This study focuses on assessing parental engagement in education within the province. It acknowledges the critical role that public demand and collective action play in educational reform and emphasises the potential for improvement in the learning environment. The study delves into various aspects of parental engagement, exploring perceptions, levels of engagement, available platforms, and specific challenges unique to Punjab.

The study reveals a strong inclination among parents to engage in their child's education, particularly in contributing towards their academic achievements and collaboration to ensure the availability of physical facilities at the schools. However, a notable gap exists in prioritising holistic child development, improving the school environment, and participating in co-curricular activities. Insights into parental involvement are gleaned from assessing how effectively schools communicate with parents. The study found that parents receive sporadic updates from schools on their child's academic progress, including attendance and exam results, but less frequently on school events and teacher performance.

Despite existing engagement forums such as School Councils (SC) in Punjab, there is a discernible lack of interest in active participation in these forums by parents. Even with efforts, parental representation in SCs remains around 50% or less, feeding into limitations in terms of the effective performance of SCs and, at times, interference by influential members. Resource constraints pose a significant barrier to parental engagement, particularly for those dependent on daily wages. Societal restraints contribute to low female participation in SCs. A

regularly organised and structured training regime needs to be improved. The current training primarily focuses on school-centric issues, mainly related to improving facilities. This creates a gap in understanding the broader mandate of these forums and effectively engaging with governmental bodies to influence decision-making.

In conclusion, regional disparities in parental engagement persist, with urban areas showing higher participation levels than rural regions. Economic challenges compound the issue, limiting the time parents can invest in school-related activities. Policy implementation faces hurdles due to a need for School Council (SC) members to be familiar with policies, revealing the pressing need for mandatory training and standardised modules. Challenges in SC member selection criteria and knowledge gaps further highlight the urgency for transparent and merit-based processes and targeted training programs. Addressing parental engagement requires a multifaceted approach, including policy improvements, training initiatives, and a cultural shift recognising parents' pivotal role in education. Key policy recommendations for the School Education Department (SED) include:

Enhancing School Council Election Transparency and Community Engagement: There needs to be a formal mechanism for promoting and advertising SC elections, which has led to limited parental awareness and participation. To rectify this, it is recommended that the SED notifies District Education Authorities before each election cycle, urging them to publicise SC elections. Leveraging existing communication channels in rural areas, such as mosques, banners, and parent contacts, can improve the dissemination of election information.

Enhancing Parental Representation in School Councils: To boost the school council's ability to facilitate greater parental involvement in decision-making, it is proposed to increase the minimum parental representation from 50% to 75%. The additional representation should be given to mothers. This adjustment safeguards against political influence and promotes the empowerment of parents as direct stakeholders in decision-making.

Facilitating Collaboration between Educational Authorities and School Councils: The effective liaison between school councils and education officials is crucial for providing essential support mechanisms to enhance school improvement. To enhance this collaboration, it is recommended that the SED mandates AEOs to attend a minimum of two SC meetings each month in person.

Enhancing Financial Transparency: Actively involving parents in decision-making requires openly sharing financial details, including NSB funds and expenses. To achieve this, it is

recommended that the School Council Policy be modified, obligating schools to prominently display this information using a specified form at the school level.

Engaging Local Stakeholders for Educational Outreach: To enhance outreach, the SED should leverage local social and political capital, involving public representatives, religious leaders, and community elders. Consider organising joint workshops, community events, and information sessions to disseminate information and raise awareness effectively.

Efficient SC Information Management: Currently, School Council details are stored in registers at the school level. SED is recommended to update the Student Information System to upload SC members' credentials onto a centralised database. This automation will streamline data consolidation, enabling sample-based communication to assess engagement and enhance internal controls for meeting regularity, member re-elections, and SIPs.

Implementing Robust Monitoring and Accountability Measures: SED should establish a robust system of comprehensive assessments to monitor School Councils' progress systematically. This includes identifying areas that require improvement and providing a mechanism for removing non-participating SC members.

Encourage Mothers' Participation in the SCs: Recognizing mothers' vital role in their children's education, the SED should actively promote their engagement in School Councils. This can be achieved through targeted outreach, flexible meeting options, and informative sessions tailored to foster an inclusive and enriched educational environment.

Building Capacities of SC Members: School councils need thorough training on their roles, functions, School-based Action Plan development, NSB utilisation, and taxation. The SED should initiate a comprehensive training program. Additionally, the PMIU should create and circulate communication products like infographics and short videos for effective training.

Encourage and Incentivize Parental Participation: To boost parental involvement, the SED should launch a targeted public awareness campaign emphasising parents' integral role in holistic child development beyond academics. Additionally, the SED should encourage and incentivise active parental participation in school events, recognising and rewarding such involvement to promote a supportive community where parents are valued partners in overall student development.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the notable progress seen in education indicators in recent years, Pakistan still grapples with challenges related to access, quality, and educational governance. Ensuring the attendance, retention, and learning of all children, especially the most disadvantaged, remains a significant hurdle for the country. While the predicament of having over 26 million out-of-school children in Pakistan is substantial, the deeper problem lies in the insufficient learning outcomes among those who do attend school. Similarly, the Province of Punjab, like other Provinces of Pakistan, contends with diverse challenges in its primary and secondary education system. This includes addressing the challenge of 11.73 million out-of-school children in Punjab. More importantly, nearly 77 per cent of children in Pakistan at a late primary age today are not proficient in reading; a vast majority of 10-year-old children face challenges in reading and comprehending age-appropriate content independently, indicating a prevalent issue of "learning poverty"[1].Challenges such as deficient infrastructure, shortages of teachers, inadequate educational accomplishments, and socioeconomic inequalities add to the intricacy of the issue, notwithstanding the comprehensive reform initiatives undertaken by the provincial governments[2].

Educational policies and reform initiatives demonstrate the most substantial and enduring outcomes when they originate from public demand and collective action, such as with the engagement of mobilised parents and communities. In contrast, a narrowly technical and supply-driven approach to change does not yield the same positive results. The available evidence emphasises the pivotal role parental engagement can play in addressing some of the educational challenges. Parental engagement at home and school plays a substantive role in their children's education. Research from around the world has shown that parental engagement is a crucial factor in promoting children's academic achievement, motivation, self-esteem, attendance, behaviour, and well-being[3]. It has a demonstrated impact on the academic

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[1] World Bank, *Pakistan Learning Poverty Brief*, June 2022.

[2] During the previous ten years, Punjab has enacted comprehensive reforms, including the implementation of more stringent, merit-based teacher recruitment processes, leading to a 50% increase in the number of qualified teachers. Consequently, these teachers demonstrated improved punctuality, with attendance rising from 92% in 2012 to 95% in 2019.

[3] Janet Goodall and John Vorhaus. 2011. *Review of Best Practice in Parental Engagement*. Institute of Education. UK

achievement of children. The available evidence indicates that such involvement is positively correlated with better academic performance and class participation. A multi-country study has reported a positive correlation between parental engagement in school governance and volunteering and the academic performance of students[4]. By fostering collaboration between educators, policymakers, and parents, a collective effort can be made to enhance the overall quality of education and create a more conducive learning environment for the nation's youth.

Effective parental engagement in government-run schools remains a challenge faced by various educational systems worldwide. A review of international practices and research consistently highlights the complexity of fostering robust parental involvement in the face of numerous obstacles. According to a comparative study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in multiple countries, there are several persistent obstacles to effective parental engagement. These include resource limitations, high staff turnover rates, socio-cultural diversity, and low parental literacy levels[5]. In the case of Punjab, besides the limitations of the existing framework for parental engagement, i.e. the School Council's Policy, the limited resources make engaging parents effectively a complex undertaking. Additionally, poverty and the prevalence of parents lacking formal education further compound the challenges faced by government-run schools in fostering effective engagement.

Moreover, the benefits of parental engagement are not distributed equally among all groups. Research indicates that children belonging to marginalised communities, such as the poor, girls, those living in remote geographies, and individuals with disabilities, along with those who have limited access to education and learning resources, are less likely to receive the benefits of parental involvement in their education[6]. The existing disparities in access to educational opportunities amplify the challenges faced by these marginalised groups, hindering their academic success and perpetuating educational inequalities.

In the given context, this research embarks on a diagnostic evaluation to scrutinise the degree of parental involvement in the realm of school education in the province of Punjab. The diagnostic assessment is geared towards addressing the following research inquiries:

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[4] Matthew van Poortvliet, Nick Axford, and Jenny Lloyd. 2018. *Working with Parents to Support Children's Learning, Guidance Report.* Education Endowment Foundation

[5] Francesca Borgonovi and Guillermo Montt. 2012. *Parental Involvement in Selected PISA Countries and Economies.* OECD Education Working Papers No. 73

[6] Susan Nicolai, et.al. 2023. *Edtech and Parental Engagement*. UNESCO Paper for Global Education Monitoring Report.

What are the prevailing perceptions and levels of parental engagement exhibited by parents in Punjab concerning their children's educational pursuits?

What are the existing platforms established either by the government or other organisations aimed at fostering and promoting parental engagement in education?

To what extent do the current forums of parental engagement influence decisions related to various aspects of children's education, encompassing elements such as school access, safety, facilities, student learning and holistic development, classroom environment, and coordination and advocacy at the governmental level?

What discernible gaps and challenges characterise parental engagement in primary and secondary education across different administrative levels, including schools, education departments, tehsils, and districts?

Methodology

The diagnostic study involves an examination of both primary and secondary data sources. The team conducted a comprehensive review of statistics, policies, assessments, analyses, and various international and national reports about parental engagement to collect secondary data. This document review facilitated the identification of international best practices in the realm of parental engagement, highlighting successful models implemented by other countries. In order to understand the dynamics of parental engagement in settings exhibiting similarities to Pakistan, the team scrutinised the status of parental involvement in education in countries such as India, Bangladesh, and Nigeria, among others. Furthermore, a global perspective was gained by examining noteworthy examples, including innovative initiatives like Singapore's EdTech Plan and Japan's Kyoiku Mama initiative, shedding light on the design of policies aimed at addressing low parental engagement in education at an international level. *A comprehensive bibliography is provided in Annex 1.*

Primary data collection was conducted through individual interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) involving parents, members of the School Council in Punjab, Headteachers, and government representatives from the School Education Department at Provincial and district levels. Semi-structured interview guides were employed to guide discussions, allowing stakeholders to delve into areas of particular relevance to the study.

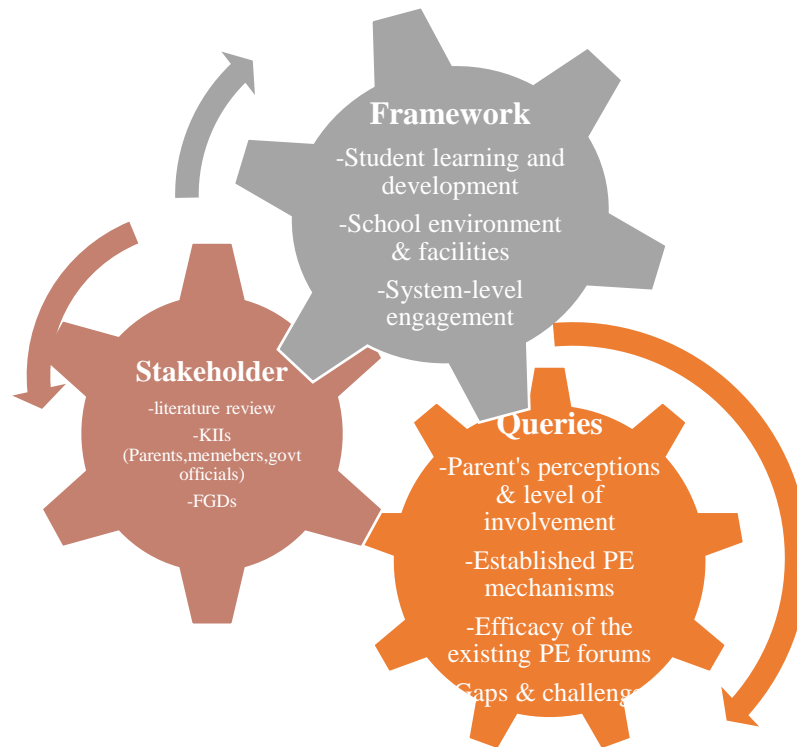The following framework was used for data analysis:

Figure 1: Framework of Analysis.

The analysis process included identifying themes and recognising the frequencies of similar types of responses and patterns of responses across parental awareness and preparedness, practices regarding parental engagement, available parental engagement forums, and their efficacy, challenges, and approaches.

Scope and Limitations

It is imperative to keep in mind certain cautions while interpreting the findings and implications of this study. The current study pertains to Punjab, and while providing in-depth insights into these specific educational contexts, it introduces a limitation regarding the applicability of the study's findings to other provinces in Pakistan. Educational policies, cultural norms, and socioeconomic factors vary across regions, and this regional specificity may impact the study's broader relevance. Moreover, there is limited available data regarding parental engagement outcomes and the influence of initiatives aimed at promoting parental participation. Additionally, the analysis also relies on comprehension of the cultural context, stakeholder perspectives, anecdotes, and observations of occasionally nuanced perceptions of the respondents.

Structure of the Report

The report is structured into six sections. The initial section outlines the study's background, objectives, and methodology. Section II delves into a review of literature and international best practices. Following this, the report details the policy and institutional framework concerning parental engagement in Punjab. Section IV examines parental perspectives in Punjab, while Section V focuses on parental involvement in decision-making in Punjab. In Section VI, the report concludes by offering recommendations to enhance parental engagement and agency and foster effective contributions within the SC for promoting holistic child development and learning.

PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATION: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND PRACTICE

Historically, the concept of parental engagement in education has been interpreted in diverse delineations. In essence, it entails cooperative endeavours between parents and school personnel to enhance children and adolescents' learning, development, and overall well-being. Acknowledging its complexity across cultural, socioeconomic, and contextual dimensions, parental engagement is not a one-size-fits-all model. It encompasses creating expectations, setting goals, collaborating with teachers, and emphasising shared responsibility in a child's education. This engagement is essential for promoting a child's academic success, social and emotional development, and overall well-being throughout their educational journey. Numerous studies indicate a positive correlation between parental and community engagement in school management and improved student performance. However, a systematic examination of which types of parental involvement most strongly relate to achievement is still needed.

Several studies highlight the beneficial effects of parental and community engagement in school management on student results, such as decreased dropout rates, higher enrollment, and improved attendance. (Asim and Dee 2016; Behlol, Rafaqat, and Shahid 2017). According to Calwell (2005), parental engagement is crucial as it empowers parents and communities to actively participate in financial decision-making actively, thereby improving access, quality, and service delivery. Additionally, the study by Gina Madrigal Sapungan and Ronel Mondragon Sapungan (2014) explored the correlation between parental engagement and student learning, performance, and satisfaction. Their findings suggest that students whose parents are actively involved in student affairs are 52% more likely to achieve higher grades and exhibit a greater enthusiasm for studies, particularly in kindergarten through the 5th grade. The 2008 study "Parental Effort, School Resources, and Student Achievement" by Conway and Houtenville highlights the significant impact of parental involvement on academic success. It reveals a consistent correlation between parental effort and heightened student achievement, emphasising that replicating this impact through increased per-pupil spending would necessitate a substantial investment exceeding $1,000. The study underscores parents' indispensable role in shaping their children's education, suggesting that financial investments in school resources alone may not yield comparable benefits. However, Banerjee, Banerji,

Duflo, Glennerster, and Khemani (2010) highlight a need for more conclusive evidence regarding the association between parental engagement and student performance.

Evidence from International Practices in Parental Engagement

Parental engagement forums, such as Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), have been established worldwide[7] to facilitate regular discussions on school policies, curriculum updates, and student activities. Countries like the UK, Nigeria, Finland, the USA and Singapore have implemented successful models to foster collaboration between parents, teachers, and communities.

Nigeria: The PTA in Nigeria serves as a dynamic governance structure for parental and community involvement in education, promoting collaboration between principals and parents to foster a cooperative approach to education. In response to educational challenges, Nigeria initiated a program to increase PTAs as a prerequisite to addressing various issues (Felicia Ukamaka Iremeka, Ifeyinwa O. Ezenwaji1, Chisom Ogochukwu Ezenwaji, 2021).

Singapore: Integrated technology into the education system through an EdTech plan guided by a human-centred learning approach. This plan, further reinforced by the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, actively involves teachers, parents, and community members in the learning process. Anchored in Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach, the initiative emphasises empowering schools, fostering continuous teacher professional growth, and gaining a comprehensive understanding of home environments. Despite global challenges, Singapore's well-structured governance and educational initiatives strategically position the country to address learning inequities and remain resilient. This emphasises the need for a strong global mindset and social compact for future success amid uncertainties[8].

Brazil: In 2001, Brazil implemented a successful school development program through community engagement and empowerment in 5,600 schools. The program established school councils comprising parents, local community members, students, and school officials. These councils have the authority to elect school heads and oversee and advise on pedagogical,

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[7] Established in 1897, the Parent-Teacher Association comprises the major child well-being association worldwide[7]. The group was formed expecting mothers to lead the cause of child protection and wellbeing. By 1917, the organization encompassed 37 state congresses, and later in 1970, the National PTA joined the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers to emerge as the principal volunteer child support group mandated to resolve student problems through advocacy, education, and lawmaking.
[8] (https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-42671-1_10).

financial, and administrative activities. Additionally, the councils prioritise and plan school improvement activities, addressing various aspects of school management, from improving education quality to providing missing infrastructure facilities, with government funding supporting plan execution (I-SAPS, 2020).

USA: The National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) is a non-profit organisation in the United States that advocates for the well-being of children and families, particularly in education, health, and safety. With its membership and representation at local, state, and national levels, the PTA collaborates with policymakers, educators, and community leaders to influence legislation and funding for public education. The organisation plays a crucial role in shaping policies impacting millions of children and families across the country.

United Kingdom: The National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) is a professional organisation in England that advocates for school leaders and facilitates their growth. The NAHT has established a Parental Engagement Forum that brings together parents, school leaders, and experts to exchange knowledge, research, and resources on parental engagement. Additionally, the forum serves as a platform for providing feedback and advice to the NAHT on its policies and campaigns. (Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011)

Finland: Finland's education system is renowned for its systemic approach to parental engagement. Policies like shorter school days and minimal homework encourage parents to engage in more informal learning activities with their children. This approach fosters a holistic perspective on education beyond traditional classrooms.

Mexico: In 2001, Mexico introduced the Quality Schools Program, a community involvement initiative to enhance educational quality. The program entails providing schools with $5000 grants to empower school administration and parents to foster improvements. In exchange for the financial support, schools must collaboratively develop a five-year plan with Parents' Associations detailing how the funds will be utilised. The first four years focus on allocating the cash transfer to school materials and basic facilities, while the fifth year emphasises special allocations for teachers' training. Approximately 10% of schools, primarily in disadvantaged urban areas, have voluntarily joined the program. An independent assessment by Skoufias and Shapiro in 2006 revealed positive outcomes, including a cumulative decrease in dropout, failure, and repetition rates. Participating schools witnessed increased parental involvement in decision-making and supervision of children's homework. (Gertler, et al., 2006).

Select Models of Parental Engagement

The current examination, in its quest to conduct a thorough diagnostic, also explored various successful models that have proven effective in fostering meaningful connections between parents, children, and schools. By examining these models, the study aims to glean valuable insights that can inform our study and provide a comprehensive analysis by shedding light on innovative approaches and best practices in enhancing collaboration between educators and parents.

a. **Goodall and Montgomery's Model:** This model advocates for a shift from parental involvement to active engagement, emphasising the dynamic connection between parents, children, and schools. It challenges the schools having primary agency in parental engagement, promoting negotiated agency between schools and parents. Underscoring the pivotal role of parental engagement, it underscores benefits such as improved self-esteem and enhanced learning outcomes. The continuum model encourages shared decision-making and recognises the crucial role of parental engagement beyond traditional school activities.

b. **Joyce Epstein's Model:** Epstein's model encompasses six types of engagement, focusing on parenting, effective communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaboration with the community. This comprehensive framework aims to enhance students' learning outcomes by cultivating a supportive learning environment through various dimensions of parental involvement.

- *The first dimension, **parenting**, focuses on assisting parents in their primary caregiving role by providing resources for creating a home environment that is conducive to learning.*
- *The second dimension emphasises **effective communication** channels, promoting regular and meaningful exchanges between parents and teachers to keep parents informed about their child's progress and school events.*
- *The opportunity to **volunteer** encourages parents to actively participate in school activities, fostering a sense of community and shared responsibility for student success.*

- *The fourth dimension, **learning at home**, underscores the crucial role parents play in supporting and extending classroom learning.*
- ***Decision-making**, the fifth dimension, involves including parents in school decision-making processes through various platforms*
- *Lastly, **collaboration** with the community recognises schools as integral parts of broader communities, encouraging the engagement of community resources to enrich the overall educational experience.*

c. Australia has formulated a **Family-School Partnerships Framework** to promote cooperation among families, schools, and communities. The framework centres on cultivating positive relationships, facilitating effective communication, and engaging in collaborative decision-making.

d. In Japan, the **"Kyoiku Mama" model** positions mothers as the foundation of education. Both Japanese and Islamic educational philosophies underscore the crucial role of mothers in shaping children's character and contributing to a robust society. The "Kyoiku mama" model in Japan and Islamic teachings emphasise the responsibility of mothers in imparting values, with both cultures acknowledging the transformative influence of mothers on the nation's civilisation.

The models proposed by Goodall and Montgomery, Joyce Epstein, Australia, and Japan highlight the crucial collaboration between parents and schools to enhance learning outcomes. They underscore the importance of active engagement, shared decision-making, and fostering positive relationships as key elements in creating a supportive educational environment.

PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT IN PUNJAB: POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

School councils play a pivotal role in community participation and school governance in Punjab. This initiative began in 1994 under the Social Action Plan (SAP) when School Management Committees (SMCs) and School Repair Committees (SRCs) were established for primary and elementary schools. Initially assigned tasks such as promoting enrolment, monitoring teacher attendance, and utilising available funds for educational improvement and school repairs, SMCs were later renamed School Councils (SC) in a 2007 policy subsequently amended in 2013[9].

Until the fiscal year 2013-14, the School Councils (SCs) faced resource constraints that limited their effectiveness in contributing to enhancing the learning environment and infrastructure. The significance of SCs was heightened with the introduction of the Non-Salary Budget (NSB) Scheme in 2013, which granted the councils a role in the planning and monitoring of NSB funds.

Recognising the crucial role that SCs can play in addressing educational challenges within their respective communities, The New Deal 2018-2023 designates SCs as pivotal institutions to expedite the reform process in the province. By identifying SCs as a primary channel for implementing school-level solutions, such as enrollment, retention, and classroom construction, the objective is to fortify the role of SCs, enabling them to undertake a more proactive and effective stance in enhancing service delivery at the school level[10]. A June 2022 notification in Punjab outlines the constitution of School Councils in private educational institutions, emphasising the inclusion of parent members for effective governance.

School Councils, serving as a vehicle for parental engagement, are mandated to enhance access, quality, and service delivery within schools and boast significant representation from the community. Each council is mandated to consist of a minimum of 9 members, strategically distributed across three distinct categories: school, parents, and general members. The school category is exclusively represented by the head teacher of the respective school, standing as

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[9] School Education Department (2017).
[10] School Education Department (2019). p.21

the sole member of this specific category. Conversely, the remaining two categories are distinctly comprised of community members who participate either as parents of the students enrolled in the school or as general community members. An evaluation of the constitution of School Councils reveals several constraints stemming from the existing school council policy[11].

Despite many years of involvement, the impact on schools is mixed. There are examples of active roles in parent mobilisation, fund-raising, and school-building improvement. However, school councils are not very active in other areas of their responsibilities, such as monitoring teachers' attendance, enrolment, and co-curricular activities. Nevertheless, they are believed to have made some difference at the school level.

In terms of the parental engagement and participation, the most significant aspect is the low representation of the parents. The policy stipulates that the representation of parents in the formation of the council must surpass 50% of the total membership[12]. While schools generally adhere to this requirement, the study reveals that the representation of parents often hovers around the 50% mark, a figure deemed insufficient by district education officials. The drawback of this limited parental representation is that it creates room for undue political influence, wherein head teachers receive nominations from local public representatives dictating the composition of the council. Political interference poses a significant challenge for district education administrations, extending from the higher echelons to the head-teacher level. Following the general elections 2018, officials faced immense pressure to replace existing council members with nominees endorsed by the newly ruling political party. In the absence of rules or policy guidelines to shield head teachers and education managers from such interference, a substantial majority of schools in the surveyed districts reconfigured their councils to accommodate the nominated individuals.

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[11] Section 3.12 of School Council Policy 2007 (amended 2013).
[12] Section 3.13 of School Council Policy 2007 (amended 2013). Section 3.14, 3.15 and 3.16 provide further detail on the respective categories.

PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT IN PUNJAB: EXPLORING PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES

Parental Perspectives: Priorities and Responsibilities

As elucidated in the literature review, the significance of parental engagement in education is widely acknowledged. Nevertheless, due to its varied interpretations globally, assigning a definitive meaning to the concept proves challenging. The broad acknowledgement of the concept is limited by the difficulty in establishing a singular, universally applicable explanation, given its multifaceted and culturally nuanced implementation across different regions. To assess the foundational understanding of parental engagement among parents in Punjab, we initiated inquiries about parents' perceived responsibilities in their children's education and the practices implemented in their homes. Their diverse responses can be categorised into three periodised areas:

   a. *Monitoring children's learning progress,*
   b. *Coordinating with school staff to address issues and*
   c. *Contributing to school infrastructure improvements.*

In Punjab, 72% of respondents expressed monitoring learning progress as their responsibility, while only 57% actively engaged in staying informed about their child's academic progress. In terms of coordination, 43% of parents considered it their responsibility to coordinate with schools, while 19% believed in actively participating in addressing school issues and providing quality education. Regarding school facility improvements, 55% of parents acknowledged this responsibility, with 27% actively participating. A discernible proportion of respondents in Punjab acknowledged their responsibility in engaging with enrolment campaigns and ensuring the safeguarding and care of students. Conversely, none of the respondents deemed it their obligation to contact education department officials to address educational issues, and a small number of parents ever approached them.

This data indicates that parents show a strong inclination to engage in their child's education, particularly focusing on student learning achievements and collaboration with schools for physical facilities. However, there is a discernible gap in prioritising the overall development of children, including student care and participation in co-curricular activities. Additionally,

there is a lack of recognition among parents regarding their role and capacity to impact decision-making forums at the governmental education level. In Punjab, a gap between parental responsibilities and active participation suggests a potential need for enhanced engagement strategies.

When inquired from the respondents about the actions to be taken to enhance parental engagement. Government officials in Punjab emphasised the importance of arranging regular Parent-Teacher Meetings (PTMs), sharing student assessments, creating effective communication channels such as WhatsApp groups, and conducting workshops for parents on educational principles and homework methods.

- Organizing parent-teacher meetings twice a month
- Sharing examination results with parents regularly
- Establishing regular and easily accessible channels of communication like WhatsApp groups
- Organizing workshops for parents on principles of education and homework methods
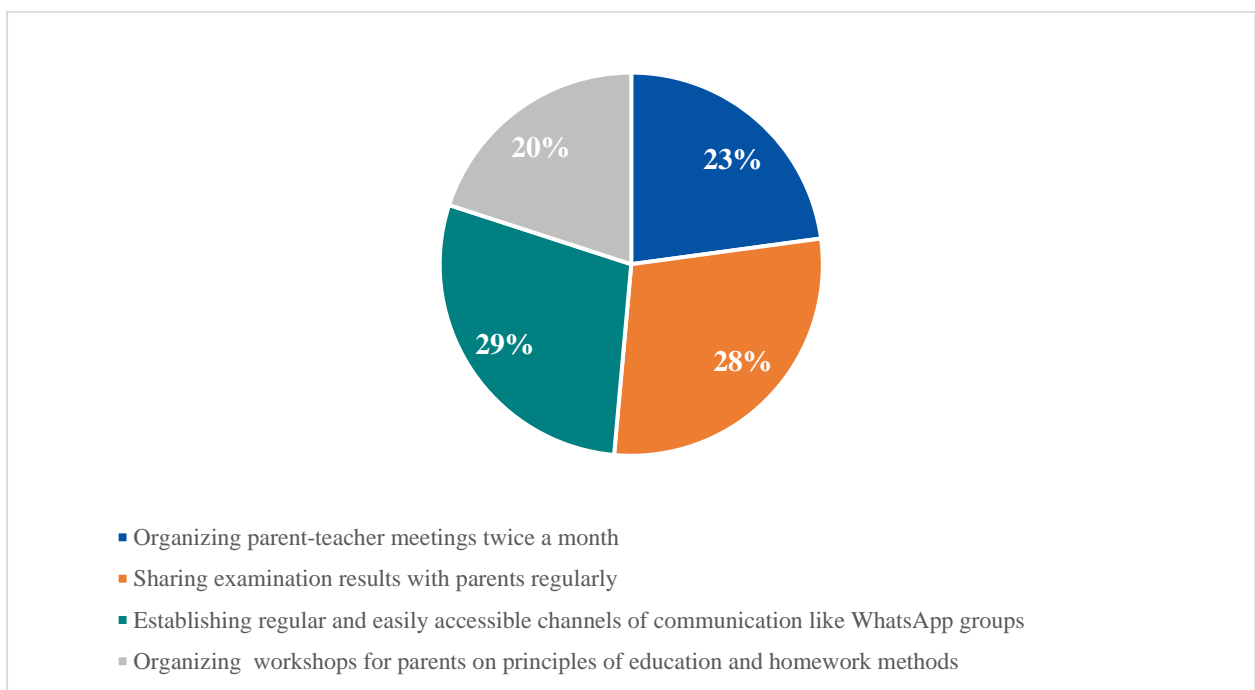
Figure 2: Government officials' opinions on avenues for parental engagement

In Punjab, parent respondents indicated that information regarding their child's overall learning progress was shared with parents, including student attendance, homework, quarterly exam results, etc. Less often, they also receive updates regarding events in their school and about the performance of the teacher. Parents in Punjab also stressed the importance of receiving information about overall student performance at the school, tehsil, and district level to keep parents and children motivated and engaged with education. 70% of the participants in Punjab indicated a preference for the monthly sharing of this data.
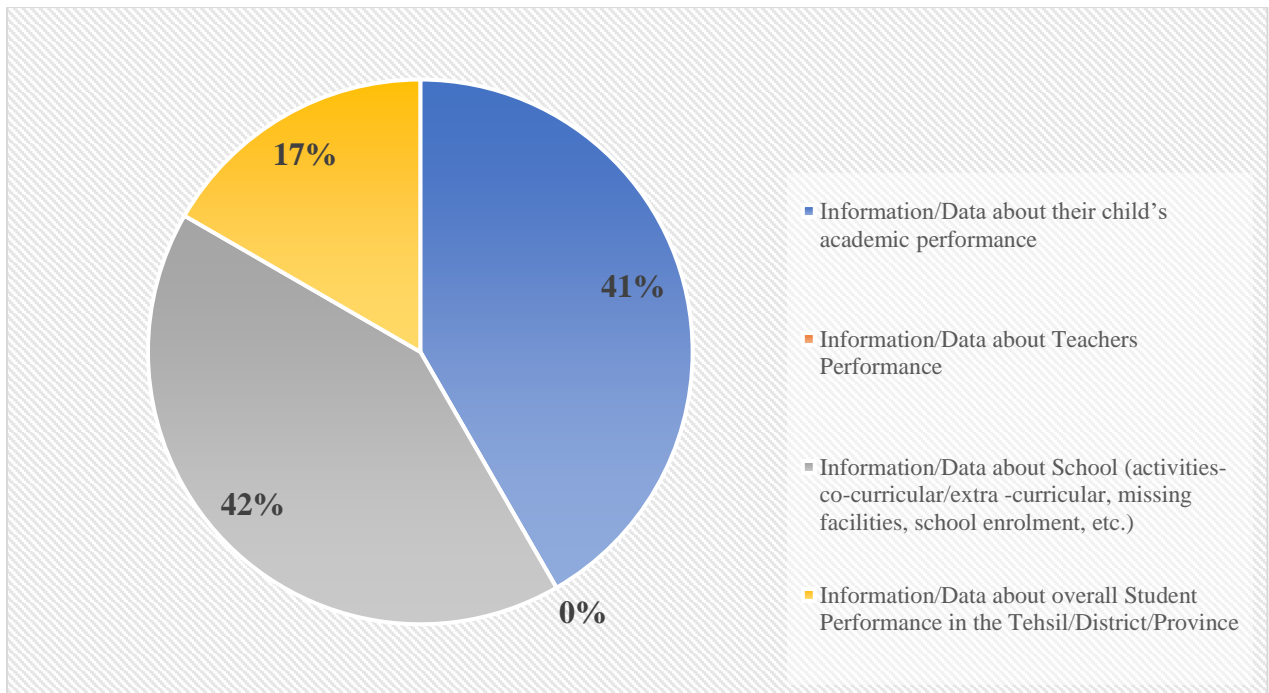
Figure 3: Government officials' opinion on what kinds of information should be shared with parents

The graph below illustrates the mediums of sharing information with parents that government respondents in Punjab most commonly prioritise.
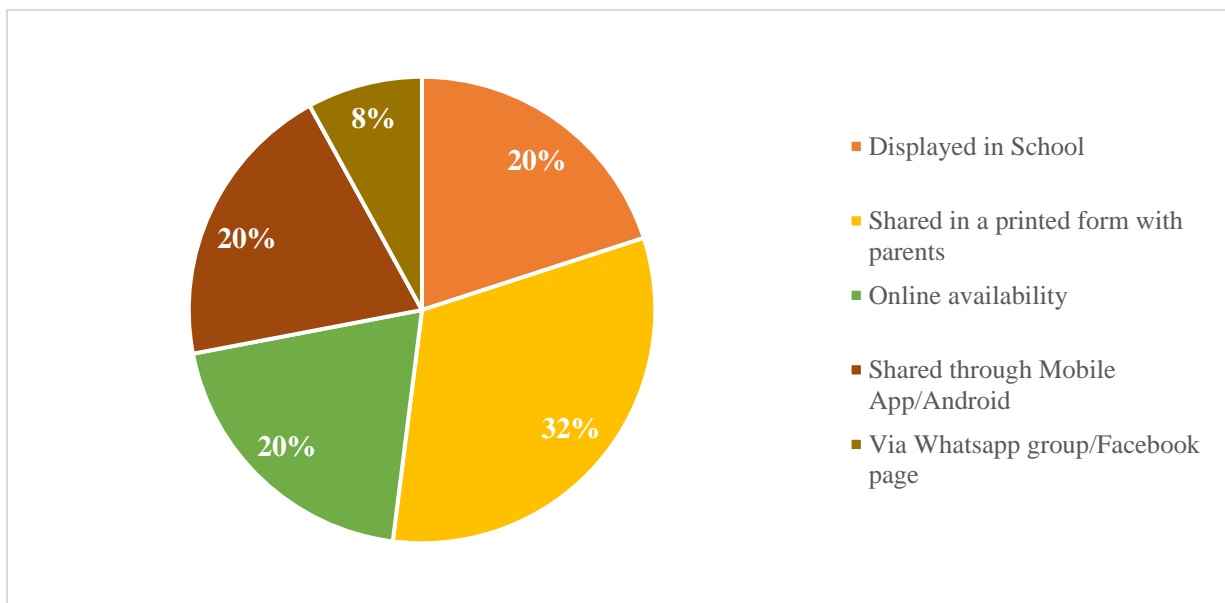

Figure 4: Government officials' opinion on appropriate mediums to share data with parents

In Punjab, a remarkable 80% of non-member respondents expressed a positive interest in joining School Councils, indicating a strong desire for active participation.
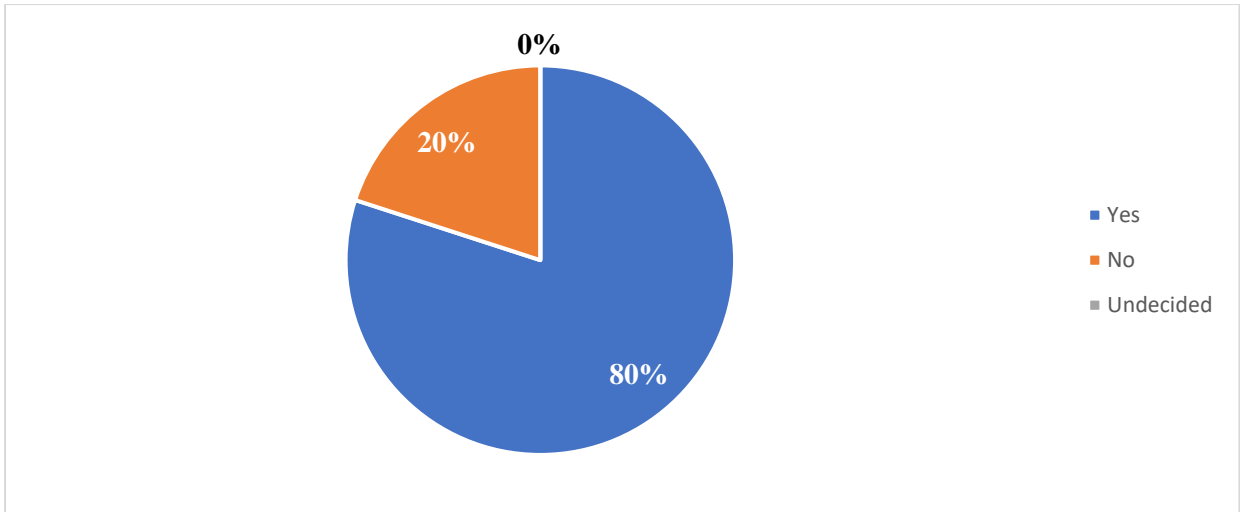
Figure 5: Percentage of non-member parents who would or would not want to become a SC member

In the face of economic challenges, particularly daily wage work, parents exhibit an interest in and willingness to actively engage in their child's education. This significant interest indicates a readiness on their part to contribute despite economic constraints. These compelling statistics underscore the vital need to establish avenues that consider and accommodate the financial realities of parents. In Punjab, parent members unanimously believed that a mobile application would effectively keep parents informed about their child's education and school-related matters.
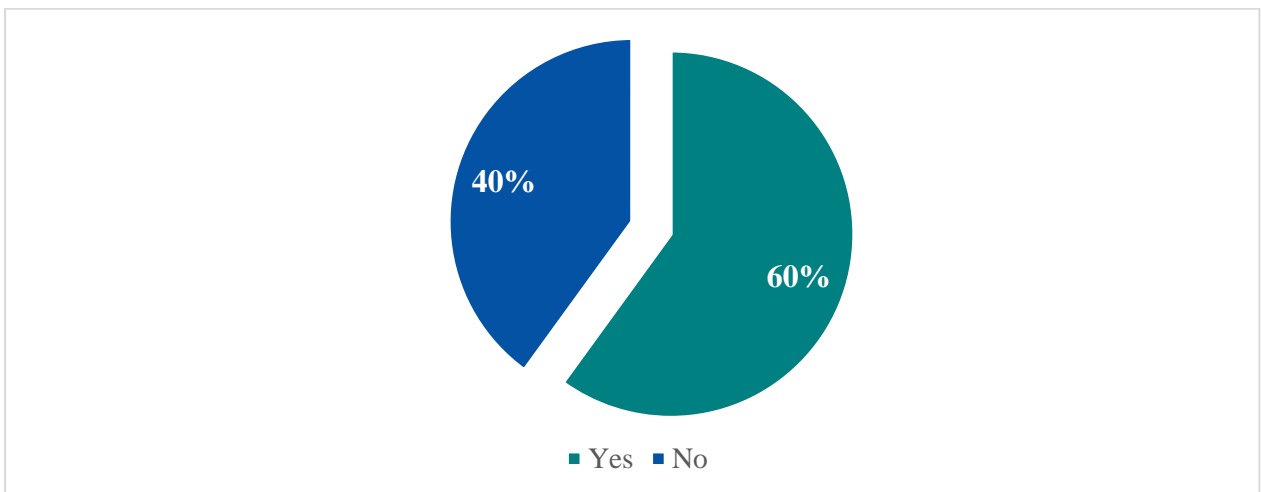

Figure 6: Percentage of parents who would benefit from an app as a data-sharing medium

In summary, the study reveals a disconnect between perceived parental responsibilities and actual engagement. While parents prioritise monitoring learning progress and contributing to infrastructure improvements, there is a noticeable gap in involvement in holistic child development and governmental decision-making forums. The lack of recognition of parental impact underscores the need for increased awareness.

Government officials emphasise effective communication through PTMs, WhatsApp groups, and workshops. Parents prefer updates on their child's progress, school events, and teacher performance. Despite economic challenges, 80% of non-member parents express interest in joining School Councils, and there's a unanimous preference for a mobile app to enhance communication. Addressing these findings requires bridging the gap between perceived responsibilities and actual engagement, considering economic realities, and fostering a holistic approach to child development.

PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT IN PUNJAB: PARENTS' PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATIONAL DECISION-MAKING

Exploring Concerns: Motivational Challenges and Criteria for Selection

In Punjab, School Councils serve as representative platforms for community engagement in school improvement and development efforts. To ensure alignment with community aspirations, the council policy mandates elections every two years[13], conducted by Assistant Education Officers (AEOs). These elections include the general body meeting for membership under general and parent categories. Additionally, the community elects a cosignatory responsible for managing the financial resources the School Education Department allocates[14]. Challenges to the effectiveness of school councils arise from existing practices and policy requirements related to their formation.

Dynamics of the Influential Role in Councils.

When examining the current forums, School Councils as an institution encounter distinct challenges. Concerns regarding motivation and selection criteria in the formation of these councils are evident, highlighting potential issues in the selection process. The concept of "*Elite Capture*", as termed by the study respondents, becomes a notable concern, where Head Teachers might establish School Councils through personal connections, thereby introducing the risk of personal motivations influencing the composition of the council[15]. This issue is exacerbated by low awareness of the significance of School Councils, particularly in low-income areas where parents may have limited educational backgrounds. Low attendance at council meetings is a consequential challenge, leading to "elite capture" during member selection. In response, head teachers sometimes include individuals without a genuine interest in the school, like janitors or security guards, resulting in ineffective councils[16]. This dynamic perpetuates a disconnect between the school administration and genuine parental concerns, hindering meaningful engagement.

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[13] Section 3.2 of School Council Policy 2007 (amended 2013).

[14] Section 3.3.2 of School Council Policy 2007 (amended 2013).
[15] FGD Lahore
[16] FGD Lahore

Limited AEO Involvement Hampers True Parental Representation in School Councils

Currently, the Assistant Education Officers (AEOs) are not fulfilling their role in organising elections and notifying the membership of school councils as stipulated by the policy. Instead, head teachers establish the council with community representation and provide the AEOs with information about the council members.

Irregular Elections Diminish Parent Members' Motivation

The prescribed biennial elections are not conducted regularly as outlined in the policy, leading to school council committees persisting for prolonged periods without re-elections. The school council, once established, operates indefinitely, leading to members serving for extended periods, up to 6-7 years, including the co-signatory. Changes due to migration or death occur intermittently, with the head teacher replacing outgoing members. Despite the existing rules, there is a limited mechanism at the district and sub-district levels to guarantee that schools conduct fresh elections every two years for their respective councils.

Low Parental Representation in SCs

Furthermore, the policy mandates that parents' representation in the council formation must surpass 50% of the total membership. Although schools typically comply with this requirement, the study reveals that parents' representation often exists around 50% or less which has the drawback of potential for unwarranted political interference, wherein local public representatives nominate individuals for inclusion in the council, particularly influencing head-teacher's decisions**.**

Rafaqat Islam's study, 2017, while focusing on School Councils in Punjab, holds relevance for School Councils in Punjab and other specialised parental engagement forums. Islam emphasises the necessity for expanded criteria beyond personal connections in selecting School Council members. One suggested criterion is establishing a direct link to a student within the school. This not only diversifies the council's composition but also ensures a more inclusive representation of stakeholders with a direct interest in the educational well-being of students. The goal is to mitigate the risk of elite capture and promote a transparent and representative School Council formation process.

Poor Participation of Mothers in School Councils Due to Societal Norms

Similarly, mothers encounter considerable obstacles in engaging with schools despite their pivotal role in early years education. In Pakistan, a notable issue arises due to societal norms limiting women's presence in public spheres. Our interviews and discussions with government

officials revealed a unanimous concern about low female participation in School Councils, exacerbated by the absence of government initiatives facilitating women's involvement in their children's education.

Closely linked to the selection criteria is how members acquire information about SC and their elections. According to our interviews with parents who were council members, 93% acquired information about joining the School Council primarily from the school itself. The second most common source of information was through their children.

The Relevance of Training for Members of Parent-Teacher Councils and School Councils

In areas where a substantial number of parents lack formal education and awareness, it becomes essential to offer the necessary training to newly appointed members of School Councils about their roles and functions. This training is a cornerstone, ensuring these members are adequately prepared to make informed and beneficial decisions. For instance, effective training initiatives could address the underutilisation of funds by School Councils. This not only diversifies perspectives but also improves decision-making efficacy.

Referring to insights gathered from interviews with parent members, it was found that in Punjab, a significant 93% of School Council members underwent training related to their expected roles and responsibilities. The training predominantly revolved around the formulation of the School Improvement Plan (SIP), a response category selected by a majority of respondents. School-centric issues such as repairs and maintenance were also selected by a large number of respondents. Notably, the least emphasised area was promoting awareness regarding interactions with government officials. This underscores a potential gap in understanding and engaging with governmental bodies and relevant officials within the training priorities. While the training addresses the development of a school improvement plan, the assessment reveals a significant gap in practice. School council members generally lack awareness of the existing School-Based Action Plan (SBAP). Surprisingly, planning exercises have yet to occur during their tenure, contradicting policy expectations.

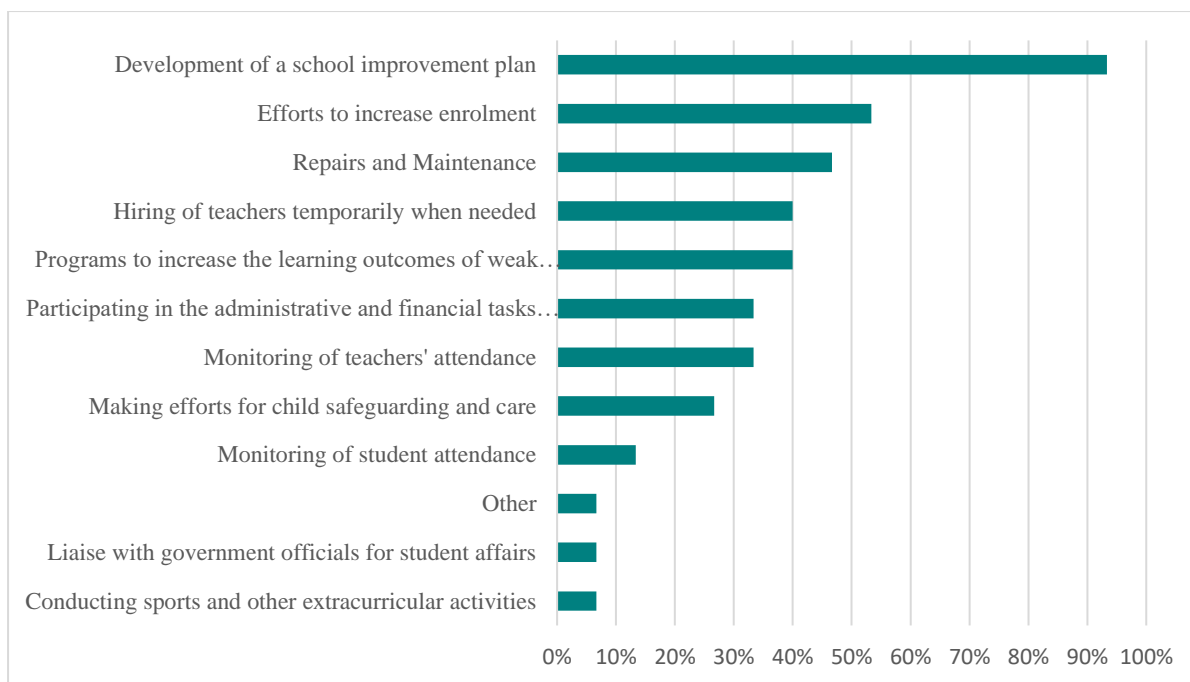 In Punjab, a substantial 93 per cent of the respondents believed they needed additional training.

Figure 7: Topics covered in the SC member's training

Navigating the Balance between Infrastructure and Student-Focused Initiatives

Currently, School Councils tend to adopt a predominantly "school-centric" approach, primarily focusing on addressing infrastructural challenges faced by the school. These include tasks such as repairing boundary walls, ensuring water provision and attending to minor repairs. While these issues are undoubtedly crucial for the overall functioning of the school, it is noteworthy that the mandates of these councils also encompass addressing "child-centric" concerns. This involves initiatives aimed at enhancing student attendance and retention and efforts directed at higher student enrollment, highlighting the broader scope of their responsibilities.

However, to actively involve School Councils in matters related to teaching and learning, additional factors come into play. To enhance their involvement in teaching and learning, it's crucial to grasp educational dynamics and commit to actively participating in initiatives that directly affect students' academic progress and well-being.

Parent Members' Role and Participation in Decision-making

In the realm of educational affairs, the participation of parent members in decision-making holds paramount significance. To substantiate this participation, it is vital to understand the influence parents wield in making decisions related to school management. The

responsibilities of the SC encompass activities related to the physical school, such as infrastructure and facilities, as well as those about students' learning, including attendance and extra-curricular activities.

In Punjab, we inquired with interview participants about the responsibilities undertaken by parent members in the SC across student affairs, school-level, and system-level domains.

- The majority of respondents in Punjab emphasised activities such as a. resource mobilisation, b. development of the School Improvement Plan (SIP), and c. improvement of school facilities at the **school level**.
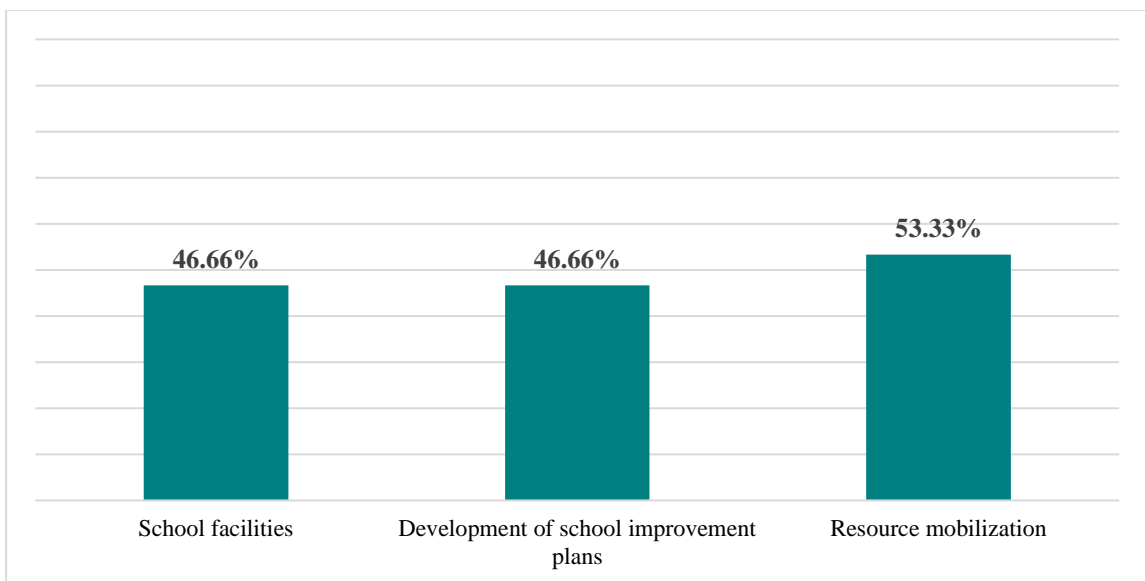

Figure 8: Frequency of parental involvement at the School Level

- **At the student level**, the School Council emphasises co-curricular activities, enrollment campaigns, safeguarding initiatives, and overall learning outcomes.
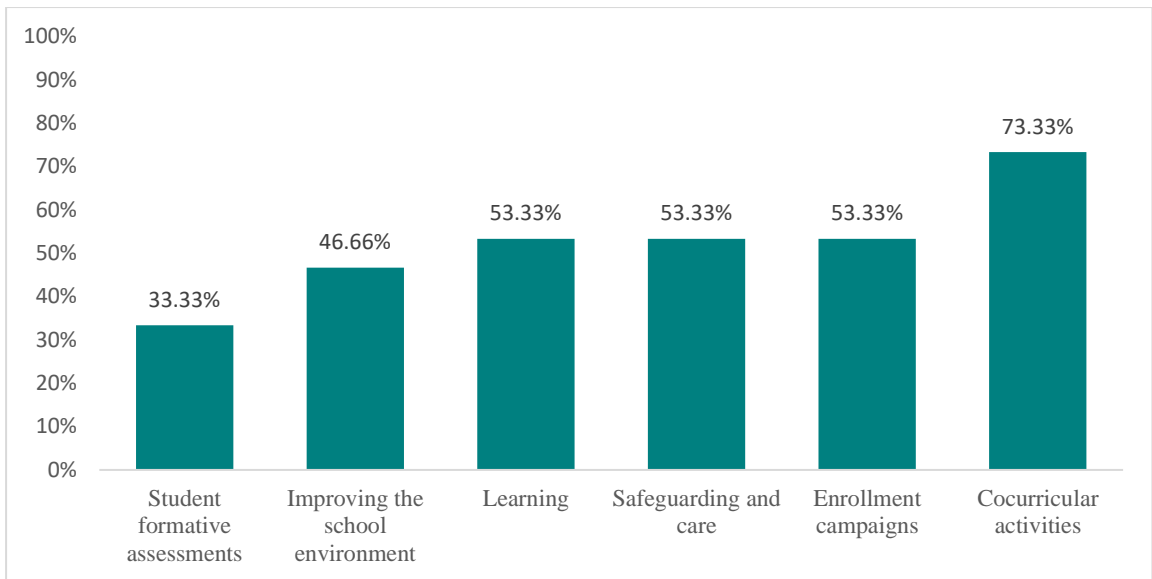
Figure 9: Frequency of parental involvement at the Student Level

- Advocacy of parental voice is prioritised at the **system level**, but representation in decision-making at the government level is the least prioritised option. Most respondents had not met with relevant governmental officials, and 53% claimed to receive no support from the school's administration in decision-making.
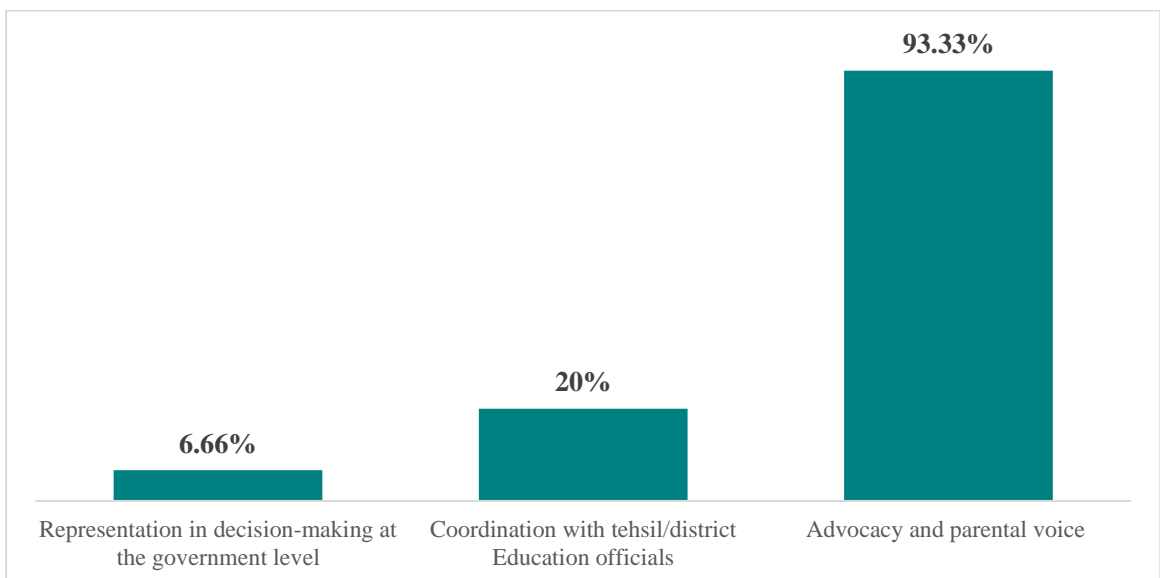

Figure 10: Frequency of parental involvement at the System Level

At the SC level, women members encounter challenges in fulfilling their responsibilities due to societal restrictions on women's participation. They express the need for incentives to advance parental engagement beyond improving their child's education. Consensus exists among participants in Punjab that very few females participate in the council/committee

meetings. Financial inadequacies in Punjab pose challenges to the effective functioning of SC, necessitating an increase in funds and a revision of the non-salary budget distribution policy. Optimising the system for resource distribution is crucial to address recurring financial challenges.

As for decision-making processes, School Councils rely on voting. Some respondents indicated that decisions are made by a majority vote, and few believed it to be by unanimous voting. In Punjab, the majority of respondents (67%) perceive independence in voting and decision-making.
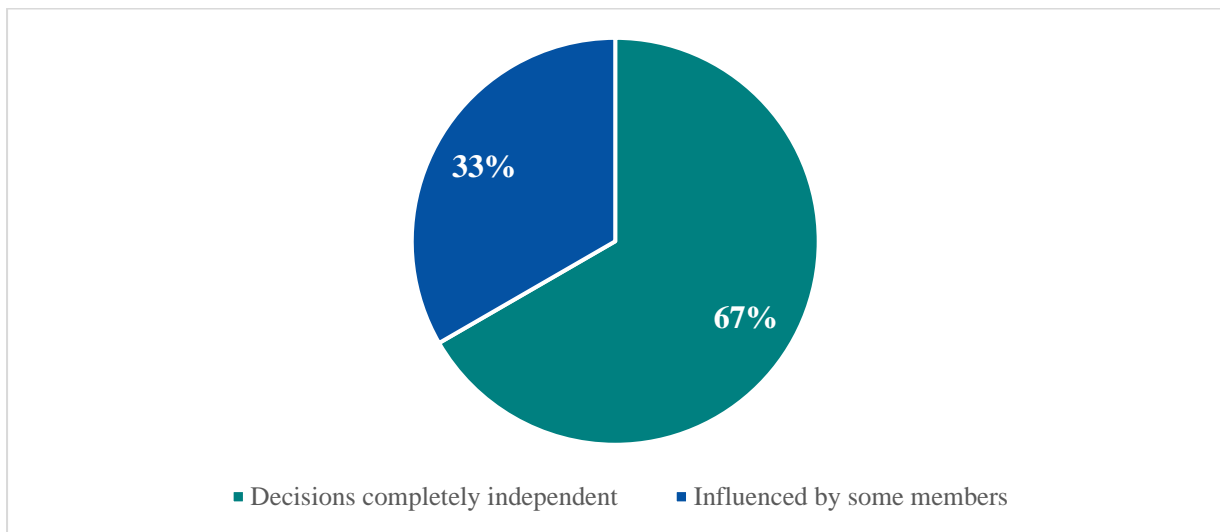

Figure 11: Percentage of members who are and are not able to vote independently

When asked about challenges or limitations in the SC's structure, composition, and functions, the respondents' feedback is condensed and visually represented in the graph below.
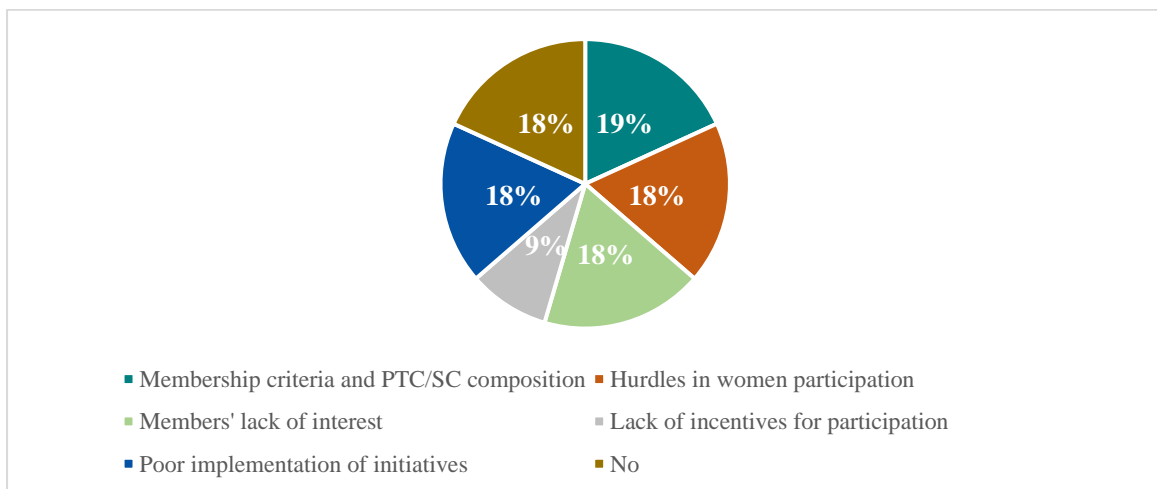

Figure 12: Challenges highlighted by SC members

Challenges in Vertical Impact: The Limited Influence of Parental Engagement through School Councils

The participation of parents in education, mainly through school councils in Punjab, fails to generate substantial influence at higher levels of education policy and service delivery. Despite sincere engagement, these councils have limited vertical impact, exerting minimal sway over Education Officers at the Tehsil and District levels. Higher-ranking officials often display passive involvement or disregard the recommendations presented by school councils. Challenges and issues identified at the school level that require action from higher tiers frequently go unaddressed. Consequently, there is a notable absence of a systematic mechanism for consolidating parental interests into public demands for decision-makers. The lack of a representative forum beyond the school level poses a substantial institutional barrier to demand-side answerability within Pakistan's education system.

Coordination and Feedback Mechanism between SCs and Government

A robust feedback mechanism between the government and School Councils is essential for their effectiveness. A feedback mechanism is required to facilitate transparent communication, allowing councils to convey on-the-ground challenges while the government can offer adequate support. This exchange is necessary for responsive policymaking, aligning educational initiatives with actual school needs.

In engaging with government officials in Punjab, the absence of a currently functioning feedback mechanism emerged as a notable concern. AEOs, who serve as the first tier of government representation beyond the Student Councils, and are often recognisable rural community members. The discussion shed light on instances where AEOs are sought out by parents and principals to address student's pressing issues, further emphasising the critical need for a feedback system. The representative of PMIU highlighted the SED Complaint Resolution Policy and Grievance Redressal Mechanism as government-initiated feedback systems. However, it was noted that these mechanisms lack a clear protocol for contacting the relevant officials. While they serve as examples of feedback initiatives, there is a recognised need for refining the communication protocols to enhance the effectiveness of these systems in addressing concerns and resolving grievances. Such a mechanism could facilitate efficient communication and contribute to timely issue resolution, ensuring a more responsive and effective educational governance structure. It was unanimously agreed that establishing a

collaborative approach ultimately will enhance the overall efficacy of SCs in fostering positive educational outcomes.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, disparities in parental engagement are evident across regions, with urban areas displaying higher levels than rural counterparts. Economic challenges further impede parental involvement in school affairs. Selection criteria concerns, particularly the "Elite Capture" risk, highlight potential biases in School Council formation, influencing their composition based on personal connections.

Policy implementation faces challenges due to SC members' unfamiliarity with assigned policies, stemming from a lack of mandatory training and standardised modules. This knowledge gap hinders effective decision-making and engagement strategies. Parental motivation in School Councils is hindered by time and financial constraints, emphasising the need for accessible and incentivised participation methods.

Discrepancies in parental authority between private and public sectors underscore the importance of motivating teachers in the public sector to foster relationships with parents, promoting periodic information sharing and proactive discussions. Knowledge gaps among School Council members emphasise the necessity for targeted training programmes to enhance their understanding of roles contributing to a child's holistic development.

Limited interactions between government officials and School Councils, coupled with the absence of a feedback mechanism, pose challenges in ensuring transparency, communicating committee performance, and addressing educational issues in decision-making processes. In addressing these multifaceted challenges, a comprehensive approach is required, encompassing policy improvements, targeted training initiatives, and a cultural shift towards fostering meaningful collaboration between parents, schools, and government officials.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Acknowledging the pivotal role of the School Education Department in fostering parental engagement, the department's commitment is evident through the establishment of a comprehensive policy guideline on the mandate of school councils and education reforms. The diagnostic study yields recommendations strategically aligned to augment and harmonise with the School Education Department's endeavours. These recommendations aim to reinforce a

well-structured and participatory approach to parental engagement and to bolster effective governance within the education system.

i. *Fostering Transparency and Broadening Parental Participation by publicising School Council Elections:* Currently, there is a lack of a formal mechanism for promoting and advertising School Council elections within communities. This results in a lack of awareness among parents about upcoming school elections, depriving them of the chance to participate in council elections and contribute to school management decisions. To address this issue, it is recommended that the School Education Department issues notifications to District Education Authorities before each election cycle, urging them to advertise and publicise School Council elections. Utilizing existing communication channels in rural settings, such as mosques, banners, and parent contacts, can enhance the dissemination of election information.

ii. *Augmenting Parental Representation in School Councils:* To strengthen the capacity of the school council to facilitate increased parental participation in decision-making and oversight at the school level, it is proposed to raise the minimum threshold for parental representation in the council from 50% to 75%. This adjustment aims to protect school councils from political influence in the selection of members favoured by locally influential individuals. Moreover, it will elevate the community's involvement in school management by providing parents, who are direct stakeholders, with increased participation in decision-making at the school level.

iii. *Facilitating Collaboration between Educational Authorities and School Councils:* The effective liaison between school councils and education officials is crucial for providing essential support mechanisms to enhance school improvement. Notably, the AEO role in Punjab has recently been redefined, emphasising a significant role in offering technical support at the school level. To enhance this collaboration, it is recommended that the S ED mandates AEOs to personally attend a minimum of two School Council meetings each month. This will establish vital communication channels between school council members and district-level education administrators.

iv. *Promoting Transparency in Resource Allocation and Decision-Making:* To actively engage the parents in decision-making processes, it is crucial to openly share financial details, including the allocated and disbursed NSB funds, along with monthly/quarterly expenses, with all council members. To achieve this, a modification in the School Council Policy is recommended, making it obligatory for schools to display this

information prominently using a specified form at the school level. This modification in the School Council Policy will enhance transparency and community participation in decision-making.

v. ***Engaging Local Stakeholders for Educational Outreach:*** In order to enhance educational outreach efforts, it is recommended that the School Education Department should harness local social and political capital, including public representatives, religious leaders, community elders, etc. To implement this recommendation, the SED may consider organising joint workshops, community events, and information sessions involving these influential figures. This collaborative approach will effectively disseminate information and raise awareness about education and parental engagement within the community.

vi. ***Updating School Council Information for Efficient Management:*** Currently, School Council details, including member names, contact information, and membership categories, are stored in registers at the school level. It is recommended that the School Education Department updates the Student Information System at the school level to upload School Council members' credentials onto a centralised database. This automation will facilitate the streamlined consolidation of council member data, enabling sample-based communication to assess their engagement with the school. This system will also contribute to internal control measures concerning council meeting regularity, member re-elections, and the formulation and execution of school-based action plans.

vii. ***Implementing Robust Monitoring and Accountability Measures***: SED should establish a robust system of comprehensive assessments to monitor School Councils' progress systematically. This includes identifying areas that require improvement and providing a mechanism for removing individuals who cannot fulfil their responsibilities within the School Council. This proactive approach will contribute to the overall effectiveness and functionality of the School Councils, ensuring a more dynamic and responsive school governance structure.

viii. ***Encourage Mothers' Participation in the SCs***: Recognising the vital role mothers play in their children's education, the SED should actively promote their engagement in School Councils. This can be achieved through targeted outreach, flexible meeting options, and informative sessions tailored to facilitate their participation. Embracing the diverse perspectives of mothers will foster a more inclusive and enriched

educational environment, ultimately benefiting both students and the entire school community.

ix. ***Building Capacities of School Council (SC) Members***: School councils need thorough training on their roles, functions, School-based Action Plan development, NSB utilisation, and taxation. The School Education Department should initiate a comprehensive training program through AEOs or independent non-government organisations. Additionally, the PMIU should create and circulate communication products like infographics and short videos for effective training.

x. ***Encourage and Incentivize Parental Participation:*** To enhance parental participation in education, the School Education Department is recommended to design and implement a targeted public awareness campaign. This campaign should underscore parents' integral role in fostering a child's holistic development, surpassing academic achievements. Simultaneously, the SED should encourage and incentivise active parental participation in school events, creating initiatives recognising and rewarding such involvement. By promoting a deeper understanding of the collaborative relationship between home and school and reinforcing this bond through incentives, educational institutions can cultivate a supportive and cohesive community where parents are recognised as valued partners in the overall development of students.

ANNEXURES

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