



Leveraging the Potential of District Education Managers in Pakistan

Study report

This report is part of the IIEP-UNESCO project '[The missing middle: harnessing the power of the middle tier for learning](#)', which seeks to examine the potential of middle-tier structures and actors to enhance management for improved learning outcomes and drive policy implementation. The project gathers information on mandates, staffing, role profiles, collaboration practices, and approaches to recruitment, training, and support. It also examines how the middle tier supports teaching and learning, focusing on data utilization, teachers' professional development, and cross-level collaboration within the education system.

The overarching objective is to evaluate the capacity of middle-tier staff and structures to drive learning improvements and achieve broader system goals, offering stakeholders a foundation for identifying challenges and proposing practical solutions to enhance effectiveness.

The proposed framework is the result of an ongoing collaboration between IIEP and the OECD on institutional capacity assessments, as part of the [SDG4 Education 2030 High Level Steering Committee](#)'s work plan (Functional Area 1). It builds on IIEP's expertise with [capacity analyses](#) and has been tailored for middle-tier implementation, with both organizations working together to refine the framework and further develop and consolidate the research tools.

This initiative is supported by several partners, including the Learning Generation Initiative, the What Works Hub for Global Education, and UK International Aid. The present report was funded by the UNESCO Pakistan Office, the What Works Hub for Global Education, and UK International Aid.

The ideas and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors; they are not necessarily those of UNESCO and do not commit the Organization.



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Abbreviations

ADEO	Assistant District Education Officer
AEO	Assistant Education Officer
ASDEO	Assistant Sub-Divisional Education Officer
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CPD	continuous professional development
DC	Deputy Commissioner
DCAR	Directorate of Curriculum, Assessments and Research
DCTE	Directorate of Curriculum and Teachers Education
DDEO	Deputy District Education Officer
DEA	District Education Authority
DEM	District Education Manager
DEMC	District Education Management Cadre
DEO	District Education Officer
DESE	Directorate of Elementary and Secondary Education
DMO	District Monitoring Officer
EMA	Education Monitoring Authority
EMIS	education management information system
ESED	Elementary and Secondary Education Department
ESP	Education Sector Plan
FGD	focus group discussion
IPEMC	Inter-Provincial Education Ministers Conference
I-SAPS	Institute of Social and Policy Sciences
KP	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
OOSC	out of school children
PCTB	Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board
PESRP	Punjab Education Sector Reform Programme
PMIU	Programme Monitoring and Implementation Unit
PITE	Provincial Institute of Teacher Education
PSC	public service commission
PTC	parent–teacher council
QAED	Quaid-e-Azam Academy for Educational Development
RSU	Reform Support Unit
SED	School Education Department
SELD	School Education and Literacy Department
SDEO	Sub-Divisional Education Officer
STEDA	Sindh Teachers Education and Development Authority
TEO	Taluka Education Officer
TO	Taluka Officer
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Executive summary

This report presents the findings of a capacity assessment of the middle tier in Pakistan, conducted as part of the global initiative promoted by IIEP to better leverage the potential of the education system's middle tier. The middle tier plays a critical role in translating education policies into practice, coordinating support for schools, and fostering equity and instructional leadership.

In the context of Pakistan, marked by large regional disparities, persistent gender gaps, and capacity constraints in education governance, strengthening the middle tier is a key priority. However, there is limited empirical research on how middle-tier education managers operate in such settings, and even less evidence on what institutional conditions enable or hinder their effectiveness. This lack of contextualized evidence has left a critical gap in both policy and practice. Mapping the current structures, capacities, and constraints of the middle tier is therefore not only timely but essential as this will provide a foundational evidence base to inform targeted capacity development and systemic reform. Understanding the lived realities of middle-tier managers, their working conditions, and their institutional environments is a necessary first step towards building an education system that is more coherent, responsive, and equitable.

Methodology and sample

To support ongoing reform efforts, the study assessed middle-tier capacity in five underperforming districts across the provinces of Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). The assessment was guided by the IIEP Institutional Capacity Assessment Framework, adapted for the specific context of the middle tier. It examined five key levers: (1) institutional and organizational structures fit for purpose, (2) clarity of roles and responsibilities, (3) competent and motivated staff, (4) strong learning culture, and (5) effective use of data and research evidence. Each lever was rated on a four-point scale – Latent, Emerging, Established, and Advanced – to visualize current capacity levels and identify areas for targeted improvement. These stages are not prescriptive, but serve to illustrate progress along a development continuum.

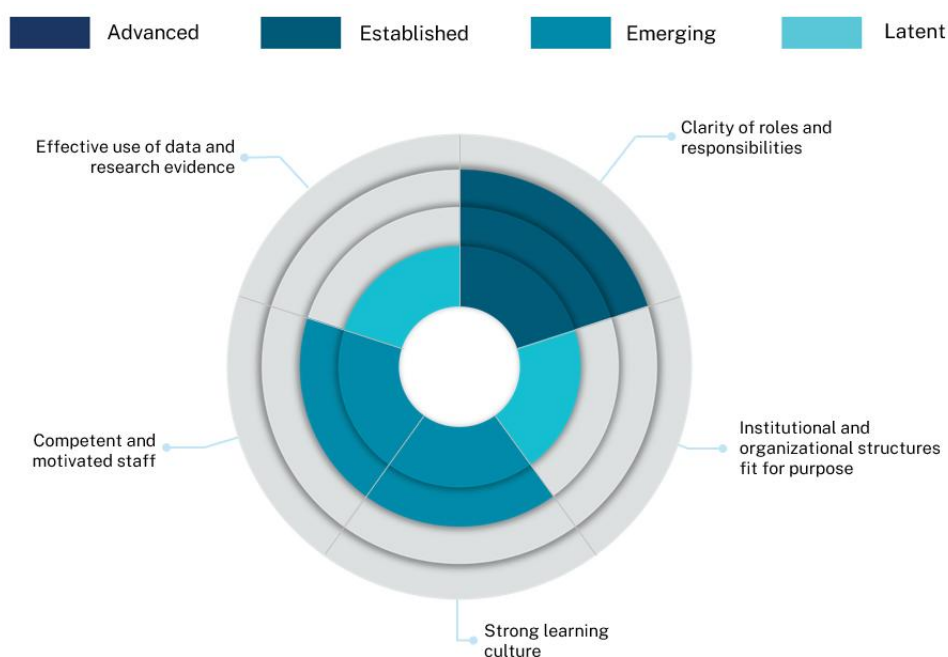
A mixed-methods approach was used to capture both breadth and depth. A large-scale survey gathered responses from 335 stakeholders, including district officials, head teachers, and teachers. The survey was administered both online and through in-person visits to ensure accessibility across the districts. This was complemented by 55 in-depth interviews and 10 school-based focus group discussions, which added qualitative insight into the working realities of the middle tier. The findings were validated and further refined during a national stakeholder workshop in April 2025, which also included participation from Balochistan province, underscoring the broader relevance of the results beyond the sampled districts.

Findings: capacity across five levers

The assessment highlights the central role that the middle tier already plays in the education system in Pakistan, often in the face of considerable challenges. Across the five capacity levers, the study reveals a combination of promising practices, dedicated personnel, and emerging support mechanisms. At the same time, structural gaps continue to constrain the middle tier's ability to reach its full potential. Rather than presenting a uniform picture, the findings reflect a complex landscape of uneven capacity, institutional fragmentation, and meaningful opportunities for strengthening. The sections below summarize the key trends and insights identified across each lever.

Figure 0.1 summarizes the key findings for each of the five institutional capacity assessment framework levers that were examined in this report. They were assessed based on analysis of data and information collected using a mixed-methods approach. The results are captured in an 'institutional capacity assessment snapshot' (*Figure 0.1*), and further described below.

Figure 0.1. Institutional capacity assessment snapshot for Pakistan



Source: Authors' own assessment based on analysis of all data and information collected through a mixed-methods approach.

Institutional and organizational structures fit for purpose

Across provinces, the middle tier lacks structures that are fit for purpose and allow for effective governance and service delivery. While some efforts have been made to decentralize management, such as the establishment of management cadres or district education authorities (DEA), these reforms are often only partially implemented and tend to be poorly aligned with service rules and operational mandates. Many district officials operate in fragmented institutional environments, without the decision space, coordination channels, or resources required to meaningfully fulfil their roles. More specifically:

- **Some institutional and organizational structures exist, but they need to be strengthened to support a specialist middle-tier management cadre.** While KP and Sindh provinces have introduced specialist management cadres, the frameworks lack clarity on service structures and performance. Punjab has not introduced specialist cadres, and DEAs serve as functional administrative structures governed by Conduct of Business rules that fail, however, to reflect the evolving demands of middle-tier education management.
- **Recruitment processes are inconsistent and can lead to lack of awareness among potential candidates.** Some officials are hired through provincial public commissions, while a majority of district education managers are transferred from teaching roles without a clear recruitment process.
- **Although recent policies and initiatives exist, there is further need to empower female managers in the middle tier and offer them an enabling environment.** Despite separate roles having been created for managing girls' schools, women are still under-represented in gender-neutral senior leadership positions.
- **Human, financial, and technological resources are insufficient and not fit for purpose.** Middle-tier managers often lack sufficient support staff such as data analysts, as well as resources, transport facilities, and IT equipment, affecting their ability to perform their roles effectively.
- **Some horizontal coordination structures exist at the district and provincial levels but should be formalized and reinforced.** Some coordination forums and interdepartmental meetings have facilitated

some coordination; however, they are often informal, sporadic, and insufficient to address persistent challenges in the education sector.

- **Opportunities for vertical coordination structures between the provincial, district, and sub-district tiers need to be enhanced and streamlined.** There is perceived limited responsiveness in establishing vertical linkages with public and private stakeholders, and minimal involvement of district officials in provincial decision-making. Communication between districts and schools, however, is seen as largely effective, and further support would help to reinforce and maintain it.

The recommendations call for strengthening institutional and policy frameworks to empower middle-tier education managers through decentralization, clear service structures, and merit-based recruitment. Emphasis is placed on improving coordination mechanisms (both horizontal and vertical), ensuring adequate human and technological resources, promoting gender equity, and actively involving middle-tier managers in policy, planning, and implementation processes to enhance education system effectiveness and responsiveness.

Clarity of roles and responsibilities

Mandate ambiguity is a persistent challenge. Although job descriptions formally exist, middle-tier officials frequently navigate overlapping mandates and blurred functional boundaries, particularly in areas like school monitoring, teacher oversight, and planning. This results in duplication of effort, a lack of strategic coherence, and diminished accountability. Importantly, the role of the middle tier as a driver of instructional leadership remains weakly defined in both policy and practice. More specifically:

- **Expanded mandates of provincial education authorities and DEAs have led to several overlaps within offices and tiers.** Roles and responsibilities of provincial and district authorities have expanded following the devolution of key education functions to the provinces. In Punjab, for example, comprehensive rules of business remain lacking. In the three provinces, functions such as monitoring and data collection have been assigned to multiple offices and management tiers without clear delineation of roles.
- **Overlapping mandates among multiple provincial and allied institutions add unnecessary complexity.** Across the three provinces, several institutions and offices share overlapping responsibilities in relation to data collection and analysis, as well as teacher training.
- **Although survey respondents generally agreed that roles and responsibilities were clear to them, there is ambiguity in their scope of practice.** When asked about their day-to-day responsibilities, most district officials listed administrative, monitoring, and reporting responsibilities, but did not mention their role as teaching leaders and community liaisons. The share of administrative tasks undermines the capacity of staff to undertake these support roles.
- **Middle-tier officials noted their limited scope in contributing to strategic planning.** Despite legal restructuring of the administration, they are not involved in setting priorities or creating target responses and have limited autonomy to assume financing roles and responsibilities.

The recommendations emphasize the need to clarify and streamline the roles and responsibilities of education offices and middle-tier managers to avoid duplication and improve efficiency. They call for governance reforms, financial autonomy, and system-strengthening through tools like financial management information systems and e-procurement. Additionally, the recommendations advocate for enhanced support for classroom learning through mentorship, training, and revised job descriptions, while also suggesting organizational restructuring at provincial and district levels.

Competent and motivated staff

Middle-tier managers are often promoted from teaching roles without systematic induction or targeted preparation for administrative and leadership responsibilities. Access to professional development remains uneven, and there is a notable absence of structured career progression pathways. Frequent staff rotation, combined with limited incentives and recognition, erodes motivation and disrupts continuity. While survey respondents expressed general satisfaction, qualitative findings point to frustration with the mismatch between responsibility and institutional support. More specifically:

- **Current appointment and induction mechanisms do not set up middle-tier managerial staff for success.** Middle-tier managers are appointed without prior management experience and do not receive sufficient and adequate induction training.
- **Tenure insecurity, unclear career progression, and lack of incentives for middle-tier staff can impact job performance and motivation.** Although district officials who responded to the survey generally reported a high level of job satisfaction, interviews revealed that frequent and arbitrary transfers of middle-tier officials at the district and provincial levels sometimes had negative implications for education sector management and performance.
- **Lack of career advancement opportunities and lack of incentives negatively impact district officials' morale and engagement.** Managers in the middle tier are rarely provided with opportunities for career advancement, performance incentives, or continued professional growth.
- **Middle-tier staff call for more relevant professional development.** There is a high reported demand for different types of professional development, which are currently not available, including in areas related to enhancing administrative, planning, and financial management skills, as well as developing learning leadership and mentoring.

To strengthen the competencies of middle-tier education staff, provincial governments should ensure timely hiring in alignment with academic calendars and provide mandatory induction training funded by the government. They should also ensure tenure security and establish clear career progression paths to reduce turnover, while offering relevant, sustained professional development through well-designed, hybrid training programmes with follow-up mechanisms, avoiding fragmented or short-term training.

Strong learning culture

The capacity for collective learning and professional reflection remains underdeveloped. Although some informal collaboration mechanisms exist, such as WhatsApp groups or monthly meetings, there are few structured opportunities for peer learning or joint problem-solving. Institutional actors mandated to support capacity development often operate in silos, with limited reach or contextual adaptation. This absence of a shared learning culture reduces the ability of district officials to innovate, adapt, and improve over time. More specifically:

- **Some aspects of collaborative working exist, but they should be encouraged at all levels.** Except for WhatsApp groups and progress review and coordination meetings, no regular knowledge-sharing and collaboration opportunities exist within the middle tier between different departments and allied education support institutions. The culture of sharing is sometimes perceived differently between district officials and school leaders.
- **A lack of communication and knowledge-sharing by the provincial departments hinders opportunities to share good practices at all levels.** There is very limited, one-dimensional communication among the provinces, districts, and schools.

- **Some professional development opportunities for middle-tier staff have been initiated, but it is crucial that they become structured and sustainable.** Although policy frameworks exist for in-service training, there are only a few opportunities available in each province, and these are often short in duration and ad hoc in nature.
- **There are disparities across provinces in the readiness of middle-tier staff to develop a culture of enquiry, experimentation, and innovation.** Participants in the survey gave varied responses as to whether they were encouraged to be innovative, think differently, or take initiative.
- **Districts say that they put in place multiple strategies to support schools in their corresponding districts, but teachers and school leaders are more nuanced.** Most district officials report setting up sharing of good practices and innovations for improved learning, sharing spaces between teachers from different schools, and disseminating formal and informal professional learning opportunities. Teachers and school leaders, however, report that these activities do not happen frequently, and in some cases not at all.

The recommendations emphasize fostering a strong learning culture by encouraging collaborative working and knowledge-sharing through online hubs, resource-sharing, and forums. They advocate for continuous professional development plans with mandatory participation, supporting innovation and enquiry by granting middle-tier managers more autonomy and resources, and incentivizing principals, teachers, and managers through mentoring, feedback, and performance-based rewards to improve education sector management and service delivery.

Effective use of data and research evidence

Despite the existence of multiple education management information system (EMIS) platforms and monitoring tools, the actual use of data by district managers remains limited. Officials report a lack of access to timely, disaggregated data, as well as insufficient skills and tools to analyse it. Data is often collected for compliance rather than for improvement. The fragmentation of systems and weak feedback loops further restrict the ability of the middle tier to engage in evidence-informed decision-making and planning. More specifically:

- **Although efforts are being made to design systems, middle-tier managers tend to use their own administrative data, and do not collect data on learning outcomes, teaching practices, and teacher training.** Local governments across the country have established EMISs; however, a significant number of education managers have restricted access to them and are unable to use them for planning and decision-making.
- **Various education databases create overlap and confusion.** The proliferation of information sources from the national and provincial EMISs, reform support units, as well as development partners and international and local organizations, creates confusion about which data to use, refer to, or quote.
- **Current aggregated data is sometimes irrelevant to middle-tier managers' daily tasks.** Middle-tier managers require more precise, tailored, and user-friendly datasets that are relevant to their assigned schools.
- **The gap between data collection and its dissemination makes it less relevant and effective for middle-tier managers.** Although national and provincial EMISs, along with other organizations, collect data in collaboration with middle-tier managers, the subsequent analysis, findings, and recommendations are only occasionally shared with them.
- **Middle-tier managers lack training and support to analyse and interpret data at the district level.** Professional development activities seldom focus on building IT and data analysis skills, despite the fact

that middle-tier managers responding to the survey overwhelmingly reported having large or very large needs in relation to data collection and analysis.

The recommendations emphasize improving middle-tier education managers' access to timely, relevant, and consistent data by streamlining data systems into user-friendly, integrated digital dashboards, and creating a comprehensive database to reduce redundancy. Additionally, they highlight the need to strengthen managers' data analysis skills through training and support, including introducing data analyst roles at the district level to enhance data-driven planning and decision-making.

Conclusion and key takeaways

This assessment provides a comprehensive and grounded analysis of how the middle tier functions within the education system of Pakistan. It confirms that district and sub-district actors are indispensable in translating policy into meaningful change in schools. Yet despite their central role, these actors often operate within fragmented institutional environments that limit their ability to act strategically, collaborate effectively, and support learning at scale.

Across the five levers assessed, the study reveals a middle tier with clear potential but persistent structural and operational constraints. While examples of good practice and strong commitment exist, they remain isolated rather than embedded in system-wide routines or support structures. Key obstacles include unclear mandates, limited professional development, weak coordination, and underdeveloped data systems. In this context, capacity is present, but uneven, undervalued, and insufficiently leveraged.

Throughout the report, each chapter concludes with targeted recommendations codeveloped with national and provincial stakeholders. These recommendations aim not only to address gaps and constraints but also to build on existing strengths and local innovation.

As Pakistan moves forward in implementing its education priorities, the middle tier must be recognized not simply as a layer of administration but as a strategic driver of reform. Investing in its capacity, coherence, and credibility is essential to building a more equitable and effective education system – one that delivers on its promises to all learners, in every province and district.

Foreword

In any education system, the middle tier – those who work at the district and sub-district levels – plays a crucial yet often underrecognized role. This publication shines a long-overdue spotlight on these education managers, positioning them not just as policy implementers, but as vital leaders, mentors, and connectors between national vision and classroom realities.

This study reflects on a critical question: how can district education managers be empowered to drive better service delivery and ensure equitable, quality education across Pakistan? Through joint work with IIEP and its partners, a new chapter has begun – one in which middle-tier managers are brought into focused dialogue about their responsibilities, challenges, and potential. This collaboration has surfaced inspiring local innovations – such as tailored enrolment drives and teacher mentoring models – that show real promise when properly supported. Just as importantly, it has revealed systemic gaps in training, coordination, and resourcing that must be addressed for these leaders to thrive.

The insights from this work are already informing national education policy efforts, particularly in the development of frameworks for both federal and non-formal education systems. For instance, steps are being taken to formalize coordination mechanisms between provincial and district levels – a move that reflects growing recognition of the need for a more connected and empowered middle tier.

Looking ahead, sustaining this momentum will require national commitment: from endorsing clear role definitions and performance standards, to investing in continuous professional development, robust data systems, and structured collaboration. With these measures in place, middle-tier officials can continue evolving into catalysts for meaningful reform.

The most valuable contribution of this initiative lies not only in its research findings, but in its approach: participatory, grounded, and inclusive. By centring the voices of those on the front lines of education management, it has validated their experiences and equipped them to play a more active role in shaping the future of education in Pakistan.

This work reminds us that real transformation happens not only in policy rooms or classrooms, but also in the vital spaces in between.

Dr Muhammad Shahid Soroya

Director General, Pakistan Institute of Education

1. Introduction and context

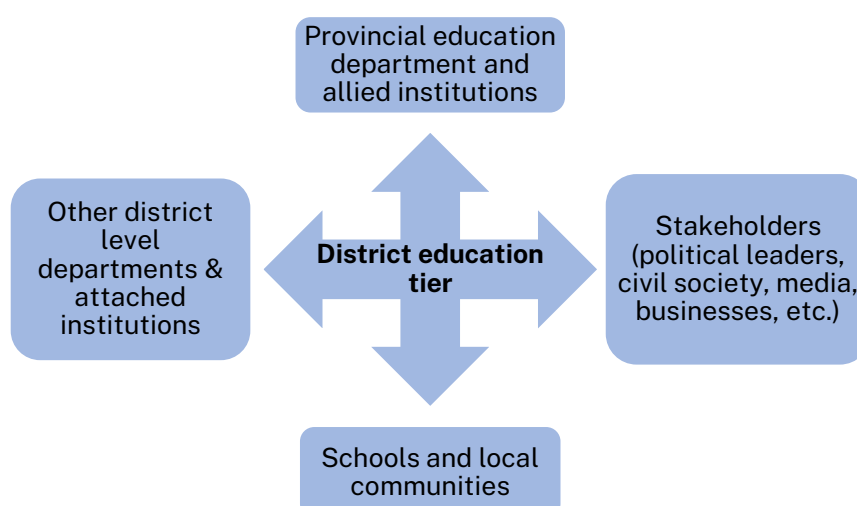
1.1. Context and objectives

Pakistan is 1 of 99 countries in the world that guarantees free, high-quality education to all school-aged children for at least 12 years (UNESCO, 2023). With an exponential growth in the country's population since the early 2000s (currently estimated at 251 million; United Nations, 2024), challenges related to education access and quality have been exacerbated due to the increasing number of school-aged children. To meet the growing demand of a burgeoning school-aged population and as part of their constitutional obligation, the federal and provincial governments have implemented a number of education initiatives aimed at ensuring equitable access to high-quality education for all children. In every province, one of the main goals of these reforms has been to strengthen educational management and administration at the district and school levels (Government of the Punjab, 2020; KPESD, 2022; Government of Sindh, 2020a). Improved education management and administration are crucial for ensuring that education sector resources are allocated effectively, policies are implemented consistently, and educators are continuously supported in their roles. This leads to a better learning environment in schools, ultimately contributing to improved student outcomes and a more equitable education system overall.

Despite the implementation of diverse education reforms since the early 2000s, the education indicators in all provinces of Pakistan have not shown much progress towards achieving the national and global goals and targets (e.g. indicators and targets set in provincial sector plan targets and Sustainable Development Goal targets). Learning loss and access to education have become even more pressing issues since the COVID-19 pandemic (Geven and Hasan, 2020). Pre-pandemic crises and constraints in Pakistan kept around 22 million school-age children out of school, with girls facing disproportionately higher marginalization (comprising 75% of the out-of-school population) at primary school age (UNESCO, 2019). This situation has become significantly worse as recent estimates show that the number of out-of-school children (OOSC) has increased to more than 26 million in the country (PIE, 2022). The nationwide school closures triggered by COVID-19 pushed an entire generation of school-age children out of school, amplifying challenges and barriers in particular for marginalized girls who have very limited access to technology and distance-learning facilities. This group is also at a much higher risk of staying out of school having dropped out after temporary school closures (Wagner and Warren, 2020). It is also alarming to note that children who are in school are not learning well, and the majority are not able to read and write at a level appropriate for their grade (Geven and Hasan, 2020). Gender disparities in the sector are also stark. Pakistan is ranked 130th out of 159 countries on the Gender Inequality Index (GII; UNDP, 2016).

A continuously rising out-of-school population and consistently low performance on key education indicators in the country indicate that there are broader issues surrounding governance, management, and service delivery in the education sector. Provincial policy frameworks and sector plans also highlight the need to address challenges relating to planning, management, and implementation, especially in the middle tier (i.e. district level, comprising officials at the district, tehsil, and markaz/union council levels) (Government of the Punjab, 2020; KPESD, 2022; Government of Sindh, 2020a). To overcome challenges in local education management and service delivery, improvements are needed not only in existing processes, practices, and capacities, but also in how the middle tier collaborates across the system. Earlier research has helped identify these coordination issues – particularly the limited vertical and horizontal linkages between district-level management and other actors at the provincial, district, and school levels (see e.g. Government of the Punjab, 2020; GPE, 2019; Jahan and Islam, 2022; Oxford Policy Management, 2019; Usman, 2020; World Bank, 2019). These key relational dynamics are visualized in *Figure 1.1*.

Figure 0.1. Horizontals and vertical touch points for middle-tier education managers



Source: Authors.

Given that the middle tier of education management plays a crucial role in translating policy into practice, coordinating resources, and providing instructional leadership, this study has been conducted to understand the bottlenecks that undermine the capacity of district staff, structures, processes, and practices. The study aims to assess education management and service delivery capacities in five districts of the three provinces – KP, Punjab, and Sindh.

The study focuses not only on human resource capacity gaps but also on administrative challenges and structural bottlenecks at provincial, district, and sub-district/school levels. In addition to assessing structure and institutional set-up, it also maps the challenges faced by middle-tier education managers in using data for devising contextualized solutions to challenges at the district level in each province.

1.2. Scope of the study

This study examines the bottlenecks and gaps that limit the effectiveness and capacity of middle-tier education managers in delivering quality education services. To explore these issues in depth, data were collected from five districts across three provinces of Pakistan: Upper Kohistan, Mohmand, Swat, Muzaffargarh, and Tharparkar. These districts were purposefully selected to reflect a diversity of educational contexts and ongoing equity challenges (see *Table 1.1*).

The study formed part of the broader UNESCO Girls’ Lower Secondary Education Programme. This meant its geographic scope was confined to the provinces and districts where this umbrella initiative was being implemented.

The selected districts were identified based on their comparatively low performance on key indicators of participation and quality. For example, Upper Kohistan has one of the lowest female enrolment rates in the country.

Conducting the study in these districts also offered strategic advantages. Pre-existing relationships with local education stakeholders – such as school management committees, teachers, and DEAs – provided a strong foundation for meaningful engagement and robust data collection.

Table 0.1. Provinces and districts selected for the study

Province	District	Location
KP	Upper Kohistan	North
	Mohmand	South

Province	District	Location
	Swat	North
Punjab	Muzaffargarh	South
Sindh	Tharparkar	South-East

Source: Authors.

Given the importance of coordination and collaboration across system levels and institutions as well as the goal of comprehensively covering the education management landscape, data were collected at the provincial, district, and sub-district levels, including schools.

The roles and the responsibilities of the district education management tier vary from province to province, hence the study attempted to ensure the inclusion of the maximum number of education management tier representatives to gather their insight and holistic understanding in terms of administrative challenges and processes in their respective positions and tiers.

To analyse the effectiveness and posed challenges in performance of the education management tier, different tools were designed to capture the diverse roles and responsibilities of education managers. This approach helped in collecting specific detailed information from each tier. At the provincial level this study encompassed the key school education departments and allied institutions mandated to undertake the following functions:

- policy development and sector planning;
- budget formulation, release and tracking of annual development plan utilization;
- teacher recruitment, transfers, professional development, performance management, instructional leadership, and accreditation;
- curriculum, textbooks, and student assessments;
- information systems, data management, and monitoring.

The assessment at the provincial tier focused on:

- gaining insight into the province's relationship with the district education management;
- identifying the coordination and support mechanisms in place between province and districts;
- mapping the challenges and areas of improvement for increased effectiveness of the education administration and implementation of education policies.

District-level assessment was conducted in the five districts listed in *Table 1.1*, and focused on the following aspects:

- documentation of processes and mapping of administrative tasks performed by district education management tiers;
- coordination and frequency of interaction with provincial entities (teacher training, examination, textbooks, etc.) and among different levels within district education management;
- officials' knowledge and understanding of their assigned roles and responsibilities;
- understanding and capacity to use available datasets and resources for informed and contextualized decision-making;
- initiatives and interventions introduced by district education officials to improve school enrolment, retention, and learning outcomes;
- knowledge and skill development needs of district and sub-district officials.

1.3. Approach and methodology of the study

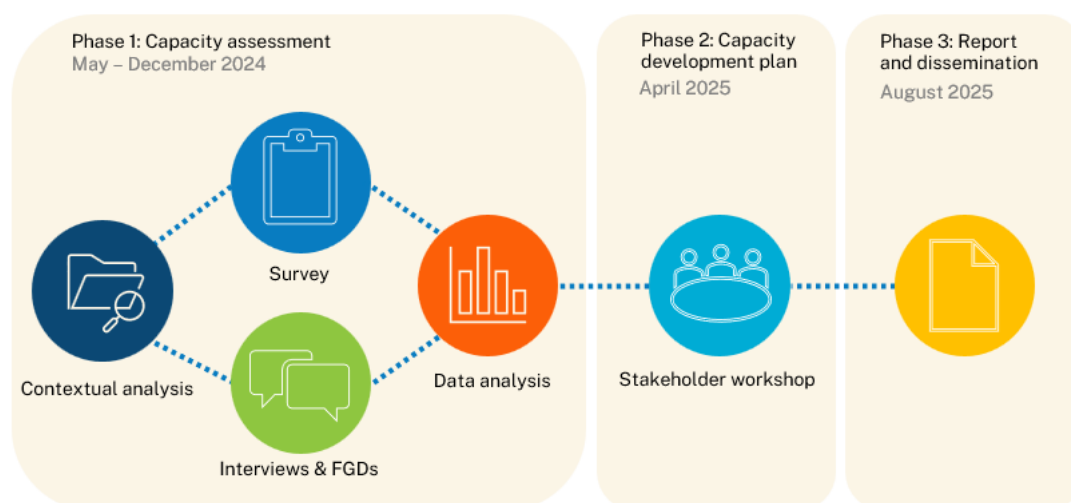
The technical approach guiding this study draws on the middle-tier capacity assessment framework developed by IIEP (Tournier et al., 2025). To better leverage the role of the middle tier, the study assessed its capacity across five levers: (i) institutional and organizational structures fit for purpose; (ii) clarity of roles and responsibilities;

(iii) competent and motivated staff; (iv) effective use of data and research evidence; and (v) strong learning culture.

This framework enabled a structured assessment of how the middle tier functions across the three studied provinces, helping to identify both systemic strengths and areas in need of improvement. The framework is grounded in internationally recognized capacity assessment principles (see OECD, 2010; IIEP-UNESCO, 2022), which distinguish between individual, organizational, and institutional capacities. To contextualize these findings and determine benchmarks and expectations, the study reviewed provincial education sector plans (ESPs), relevant education policies, and the formal mandates of district and provincial departments. These sources provided a reference point for identifying where capacity gaps exist and what is needed to address them.

The overall methodological approach is summarized in *Figure 1.2*. In the next sections, each step will be described in more detail.

Figure 0.2. Methodological approach for middle-tier capacity assessment



Source: Authors.

1.3.1. Contextual analysis

The first phase of the study focused on developing a deep contextual understanding of the education system in Pakistan, with specific attention to the governance, planning, and service delivery roles of the middle tier. This was done through a desk-based review of national and provincial ESPs, relevant policy and legal frameworks, and previous performance in international learning assessments. The literature and document review helped map structural characteristics, priorities for reform, and persistent bottlenecks in educational administration.

To complement this desk review, the research team undertook one inception visit to Pakistan. During the visit, initial meetings were held with key national stakeholders, including the PIE, the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, and I-SAPS. Consultations were also held with development partners actively engaged in education sector support, including UNESCO, the Aga Khan Foundation, and the World Bank Pakistan office.

A central activity during the first visit was a 3.5-hour focus group discussion (FGD) with 45 education officials working at district and provincial levels. These discussions focused on participants' institutional mandates, coordination practices, and the key challenges they face in fulfilling their roles. Insights from this session proved vital in shaping the research instruments for the study, especially the refinement of the survey to ensure contextual relevance and resonance with the lived realities of education managers.

A three-day workshop was subsequently held to further validate the adapted study methodology with national stakeholders. During this meeting, feedback was gathered on the overall design and the planned implementation process, helping to foster local ownership and to ensure it reflected local realities and practical needs.

1.3.2. Data collection via a mixed-methods approach

To comprehensively assess middle-tier capacity in Pakistan, the study adopted a mixed-methods approach, informed by the IIEP middle-tier capacity assessment framework (Tournier et al., 2025), which combined both quantitative and qualitative data sources. An online survey was conducted with district and sub-district officials, head teachers, and teachers to capture broad patterns in roles, practices, and constraints. In parallel, qualitative data were gathered through interviews and in-depth FGDs. These complementary methods provided both a wide-angle perspective and rich, contextualized insights into the experiences of middle-tier actors.

While both strands of data collection were essential to the analysis, the study placed particular emphasis on the qualitative component to better understand the underlying dynamics, institutional bottlenecks, and opportunities for strengthening middle-tier functions. The sections below outline the specific tools and procedures used in the study.

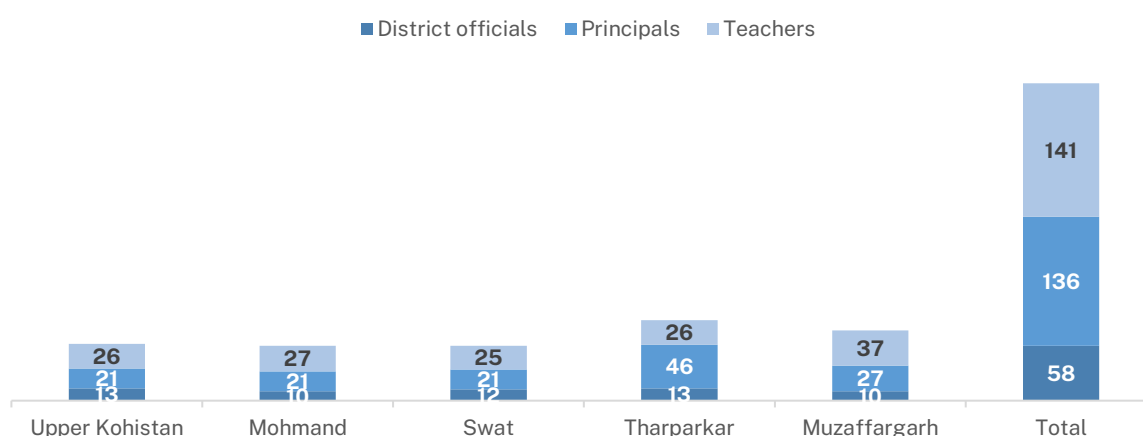
Quantitative method: survey

To gain a general overview of middle-tier capacity, practices, and challenges in Pakistan, a survey was conducted targeting education officials at the district and sub-district levels, as well as school-level actors such as head teachers and teachers. The survey instrument was reviewed and piloted in light of the insights gathered during the contextual analysis, to ensure cultural appropriateness and alignment with the study’s objectives.

Given the wide geographic spread of the selected districts and to ensure anonymity, the survey was administered online. To facilitate distribution and maximize outreach, existing WhatsApp groups were used to share the questionnaire across the five districts. However, connectivity issues prevented some participants from completing the survey independently. To mitigate this, the research team provided in-person support during field visits, conducting face-to-face survey interviews and uploading the responses into the online system on behalf of the participants.

These efforts contributed to the successful collection of a substantial dataset, with a total of 335 responses gathered across the five study districts. An overview of the respondent profile, disaggregated by district and professional role, is presented in *Figure 1.3*.

Figure 0.3. Distribution of survey respondents by professional role and district



Source: Authors’ calculations based on IIEP-UNESCO, I-SAPS, and UNESCO Islamabad office (2024a, 2024b, 2024c).

To better understand the profile of the respondents, the survey data were further disaggregated by both professional role and gender. *Table 1.2* presents the gender distribution of survey participants, organized by survey type and district. Overall, 51% of respondents were female, although this percentage differs when broken down by survey type and by district. For the districts survey, 66% of respondents were male, while the inverse is true for the teachers survey, with 61% of respondents being female. The principals survey is more balanced, with near parity in the percentages of men and women respondents (51% and 49%, respectively). There is greater

disparity between the number of male and female respondents among the five districts, with, for example, Mohmand having 72% women respondents, while Tharparkar only had 20%.

Table 0.2. Survey respondents' gender disaggregation by survey type and district

	Female		Male		Total	
	<i>n</i>	% (row)	<i>N</i>	% (row)	<i>n</i>	% (column)
Survey type						
Districts	20	34%	38	66%	58	17%
Principals	66	49%	70	51%	136	41%
Teachers	86	61%	55	39%	141	42%
District						
Upper Kohistan	38	63%	22	37%	60	18%
Mohmand	42	72%	16	28%	58	17%
Muzaffargarh	51	69%	23	31%	74	22%
Swat	24	41%	34	59%	58	17%
Tharparkar	17	20%	68	80%	85	25%
Total	172	51%	163	49%	335	100%

Source: Authors' calculations based on IIEP-UNESCO, I-SAPS, and UNESCO Islamabad office (2024a, 2024b, 2024c).

Qualitative methods: key informant interviews and FGDs

Given the central focus of the study on understanding the deeper dynamics and challenges facing the middle tier, qualitative methods formed a core component of the data-collection strategy. In-depth key informant interviews were conducted with actors operating at provincial, district, and school levels. These interviews were designed to explore existing processes, practices, and institutional capacities, with a particular focus on the role and functioning of the middle tier. In each province, interviews were held with officials from the school education departments and allied provincial institutions responsible for areas such as teacher training, student assessment, and system monitoring. At the district level, interviews captured the perspectives of middle-tier officials on their daily responsibilities, institutional mandates, coordination mechanisms, and key operational challenges. *Table 1.3* presents the total number of interviews conducted at the provincial and district levels across each province, along with the respondents' departmental affiliations and official designations.

Table 0.3. Number of interviews conducted by province and district

Province	Location/District	Number of interviews	Respondent department/designation
Punjab	Lahore	4	Special Secretary, School Education Department (male) Additional Secretary, Planning & Budget, School Education Department (male) Directorate of Public Instruction – Secondary Education (DPI – SE) (male) Managing Director, Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board (PCTB) (male)

Province	Location/District	Number of interviews	Respondent department/designation
	Muzaffargarh	5	Chief Executive Officer (Education) District Education Officer (DEO) (male) DEO (female) Deputy DEO (DDEO) (female) District Official – Quaid-e-Azam Academy for Educational Development (QAED) (male)
Sindh	Karachi/Nawabshah	5	Special Secretary, School Education and Literacy Department (male) Executive Director, Sindh Teachers Education Development Authority (STEDA) (male) Directorate of School Education – Elementary, Secondary & High Secondary (DSE) (male) Directorate of Curriculum, Assessment and Research (DCAR) (male) Reform Support Unit (CPM – RSU) (male)
	Tharparkar	5	DEO (male) DDEO (male) DDEO (male) Taluka Education Officer (TEO) (female) TEO (male)
KP	Peshawar	5	Special Secretary, Planning & Development Department (male) Additional Directorate of Elementary & Secondary Education (female) Chief Planning Officer (male) Directorate of Curriculum and Teacher Education (DCTE) (male) Directorate of Professional Development (DPD) (female)
	Mohmand	5 interviews x 3 districts	DEO (male) DEO (female) DDEO (female) Sub-Divisional Education Officer (SDEO) (female)

Province	Location/District	Number of interviews	Respondent department/designation
	Swat		Assistant SDEO (ASDEO) (female)
			DEO (male)
	DEO (female)		
	DDEO (female)		
	SDEO (female)		
	ASDEO (male)		
Upper Kohistan		DEO (male)	
		DEO (male)	
		DDEO (female)	
		SDEO (male)	
		ASDEO (male)	

Source: Authors.

In addition to the interviews with province and district staff, individual interviews with school leaders and FGDs were conducted at the school level to further explore how middle-tier support is perceived and experienced by education staff. A total of 10 interviews with school leaders and 10 FGDs were held – covering one rural and one urban secondary school in each of the five study districts – engaging 10 school leaders and 56 teachers. Since the broader programme focused on improving girls’ access to lower-secondary education, all selected schools operated at this level. These school-level interviews and FGDs offered valuable, complementary insights into how district-level guidance, resources, and monitoring are understood and experienced at the school level, as well as the challenges and opportunities present in this relationship. The FGDs, by creating space for open reflection, revealed localized experiences and perceptions that may not have emerged through individual interviews or surveys alone.

1.3.3. Data analysis

Quantitative data

Given the exploratory nature of the study, a descriptive analytical approach was adopted as the most appropriate method to identify general trends and patterns in responses. Initially, survey data were disaggregated and analysed by province to account for potential contextual variation. However, during analysis, it became apparent that the findings displayed substantial overlap across provinces. As a result, the decision was taken to present aggregated results, in order to highlight common patterns and cross-cutting challenges at the system level.

During analysis of survey responses, it was also noted that a relatively large proportion of respondents selected the neutral response option across all survey items. While these responses are acknowledged in the report and the number of neutral responses is indicated below each figure, they were excluded from graphical representations to facilitate clearer interpretation of attitudinal and behavioural trends. This decision is further reflected upon in the discussion of study limitations (see *Section 8.1*).

Qualitative data

The qualitative data, comprising transcriptions from interviews and FGDs, were analysed using a framework analysis approach. Data were systematically organized into matrices by case and theme using Microsoft Excel.

This facilitated structured comparison across provinces and districts, and enabled the identification of both converging and diverging perspectives. The resulting matrices offered a consolidated view of perspectives from different governance levels, informing evidence-based conclusions and targeted recommendations for improving policy, practice, and capacity.

1.3.4. Workshop with stakeholders

In order to validate the study's preliminary findings and test their relevance across provinces, a three-day participatory workshop was held in Islamabad from 15 to 17 April 2025. The event brought together 67 unique stakeholders in total, with participation from national ministries, provincial education departments, district offices, and development partners. The primary objectives were to validate the findings of the capacity assessment, collectively refine and prioritize the policy recommendations, and foster ownership among those responsible for implementation.

Participants engaged with the main findings and recommendations for each of the five capacity levers using structured validation sheets. Working in provincial groups, they collaboratively reviewed, revised, and prioritized actions based on their own operational realities. Several participants also shared successful initiatives – some ongoing, others recently discontinued – that offered valuable practices for cross-provincial learning. The workshop thus not only served as a validation mechanism, but also created a rare space for interprovincial dialogue and exchange. In a system where provinces often operate in isolation, the event encouraged a more collaborative and coordinated approach to addressing shared challenges.

Despite administrative constraints, representatives from Sindh participated virtually and remained fully engaged. Importantly, the workshop also included a representative from Balochistan, a province not covered in the original assessment. The contribution from Balochistan helped validate the study's relevance beyond the sampled provinces and enhanced its national applicability.

The recommendations presented in the boxes at the end of each chapter are a direct outcome of this workshop process. They reflect the collective validation, contextual refinement, and prioritization efforts of key stakeholders, and are thus firmly grounded in field realities and provincial implementation priorities.

1.4. Structure of the report

The report is structured into seven different chapters with an executive summary at the top. The first chapter comprises sections on the context, objectives, and scope of the study. It also presents the approach and methodology employed. *Chapter 2* describes the educational landscape of Pakistan. A nationwide overview is presented followed by a comparative analysis of the provincial educational landscape. *Chapter 3* presents an analysis of the institutional set-up, practices, and legislative framework that enable middle-tier education managers to perform their roles effectively. *Chapter 4* provides an analysis of the different roles and responsibilities across the different provinces and institutional actors, and their perceived clarity. *Chapter 5* presents the conditions and challenges regarding the existence of competent and motivated staff across various tiers of management. *Chapter 6* goes into the learning culture within the different structures, while *Chapter 7* presents insights regarding the availability and usage of data and evidence for decision-making processes. Related recommendations are provided at the end of each chapter. A list of references and several appendices close the document.

2. The federal and provincial educational landscape

2.1. Education governance in Pakistan: legislative and strategic planning environment

In Pakistan, provision of free and compulsory education is the responsibility of the state under Article 25-A of the Constitution of Pakistan, which states:

The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of 5 to 16 years in such a manner as may be determined by law.

Following on from Article 25-A, Article 37-B calls upon the state to ‘remove illiteracy and provide free and compulsory Secondary Education within minimum possible period’ (Pakistan, 1973). This clause expands the government’s responsibility beyond just primary and secondary education to also include efforts to eradicate adult illiteracy. It emphasizes the state’s duty to implement programmes and policies aimed at educating all school-age children who do not have access to or cannot complete their schooling.

In 2010, the Eighteenth Constitutional Amendment was made, which delegated school education management authority to provincial governments, hence making the provincial governments responsible for the provision of quality education to every child between the ages of 5 and 16 years. These constitutional arrangements give the federal government responsibility for tertiary education and the provincial governments responsibility for school education. Meanwhile, the provinces are responsible for formulating educational policy, budgets, and resource allocation, as well as establishing monitoring and administration mechanisms that fit their local requirements.

After the inclusion of the right to education as a fundamental right under Article 25-A of the Constitution, provincial governments enacted legislation to ensure free primary and secondary education for all school-aged children. In this regard, the provincial assembly of Sindh enacted the Sindh Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, no. XIV of 2013. The Act requires the local government to provide free education for all children, prevent discrimination against children based on race, religion, gender, or economic disadvantage, and to provide adequate infrastructure, laboratories, and libraries. In addition to ensuring a high-quality education and providing training facilities for teachers and students, this Act also emphasizes the role of parents and guardians in the education of their children.

Following Sindh’s example, the Government of Punjab enacted the Punjab Free and Compulsory Education Act, no. XXVI of 2014. The Act recognizes every child’s right to free and compulsory education from grades 1 to 10. In this Act, there are provisions to address the issue of OOSC, whether they have never attended school or have dropped out. Among the four provinces in Pakistan, KP was the last to pass similar legislation, with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Free Compulsory Primary and Secondary Education Act, no. XII of 2017. The Act stipulates that the government in the province of KP is responsible for providing free and compulsory education to all children from the age of 5 to 16, and that parents are responsible for keeping their children in school until the children have completed their secondary education, with exceptions for non-attendance made only where there is a reasonable excuse such as sickness or there being no school within an acceptable distance of the child’s home.

In addition to enacting laws, all three provinces developed five-year strategic plans for implementing reforms and localized strategies aimed at improving the quality of education provision. Among these plans are the Punjab ESP 2019–2024, the School ESP and Roadmap (SESPR) 2019–2024, and the KP ESP 2020–25. Taking into account

the merger of erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas, commonly known as FATA,¹ the KP ESP 2020–25 is also aligned to the Tribal Decade Strategy 2020–30 and the Accelerated Implementation Programme. This programme intends to address regional disparities and to bring the merged areas to par with the rest of the province.

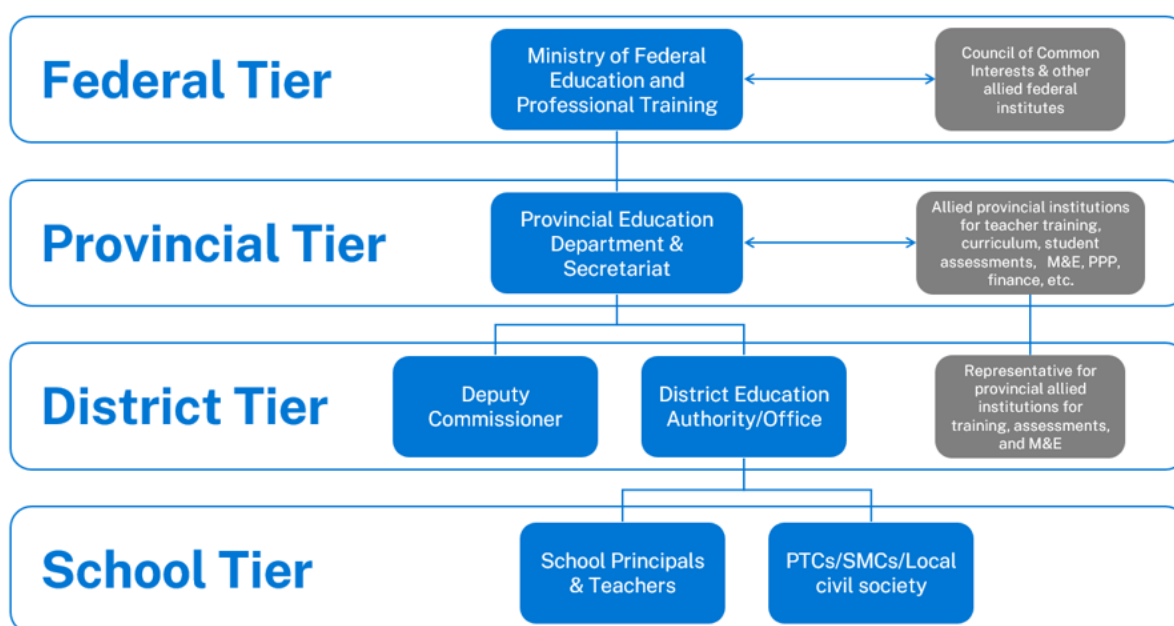
2.2. An overview of the education landscape: management and service delivery structure

Pakistan has a multi-tiered structure for education management and service delivery which is presented in *Figure 2.1*. Following the Eighteenth Constitutional Amendment (2010), education became a provincial responsibility. Provincial governments hold primary authority over education policy and related matters, while the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MoFE&PT) oversees federal-level institutions and schools within the Islamabad Capital Territory, as well as supporting intergovernmental coordination through the Council of Common Interests. The ministry also focuses on administration of education in the federal capital, intergovernmental coordination, education of Pakistani students in foreign countries, professional studies, and standards in higher education. Its core mandate is to promote national cohesion on education policies and reforms.

At the provincial tier, local governments are responsible for the equitable provision of education to all school-age children from primary to higher secondary level. Provinces formulate policies, allocate resources, guide curriculum development, lead teacher training, and more.

Provinces have further devolved some education management and administration functions to the district tier, which is considered the middle tier of education management. At the district level, the Deputy Commissioner (DC) serves as the administrative lead, overseeing and coordinating with the DEO and representatives from provincial education departments. District education management implements policy and ensures the provision of quality services. In doing so, the district managers are supported by school-level stakeholders who include principals, teachers, and parent–teacher councils (PTCs), also known as school management committees. They work directly with students while implementing the curriculum provided by the provincial authorities.

Figure 0.1. Education administration structure of Pakistan

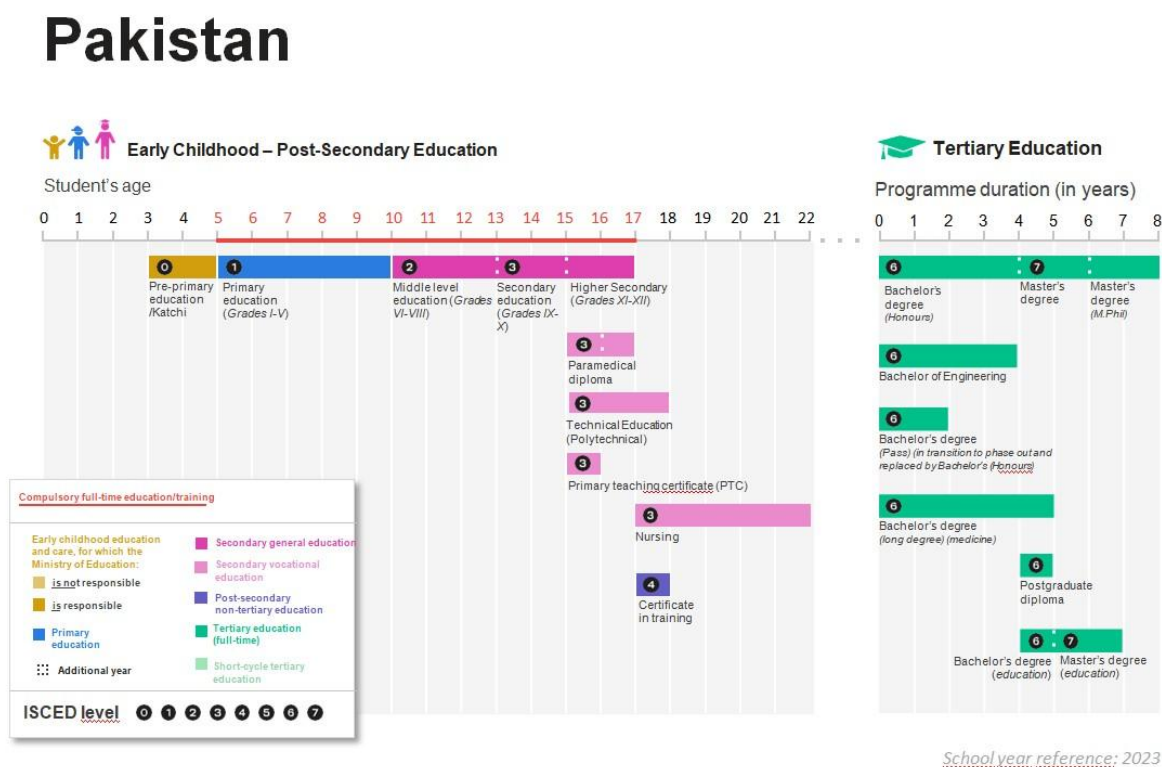


Source: Authors.

¹ The twenty-fifth amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan merged FATA with the neighbouring province of KP in 2018.

Pakistan is one of the largest education systems in the world: statistics for the year 2021–22 show that there are 313,418 educational institutions operating in the country to cater for the 54,810,964 students with the help of 2,139,631 professional teachers (PIE, 2022: 39). There are five levels of schooling in the education system: pre-primary, primary, middle, high, and higher secondary. These stages together form the structure of the K–16 education system in Pakistan, as illustrated in *Figure 2.2*.

Figure 0.2. The Pakistani education system (K–16)



Source: UIS, 2025.

Among all the educational institutions in the country, there are 227,506 formal schools (73%) that provide education from primary to higher secondary levels. Of these schools, 61% provide only primary education (grades 1–5/ages 5–9). It is estimated that 87% of the primary schools are operated by the public sector, while only 13% are operated by the private sector. A more detailed breakdown of institutions, teachers, and students across the different educational levels and ownership types is provided in *Table 2.1*.

Table 0.1. Number of institutions, teachers, and students by educational level and ownership in Pakistan, 2024

Schooling level	Institutions		Teachers		Students	
	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private
Pre- & primary	117,230	18,735	309,504	120,479	16,304,090	12,267,318
Middle	15,981	31,584	119,886	312,782	5,029,733	2,486,482
High	14,556	19,722	243,796	335,469	2,641,754	1,174,955
Higher secondary	3,059	4,574	64,294	68,115	1,385,959	698,794

Source: Authors' calculations based on PIE (2022).

According to recent data published by the PIE (2022), of the 47,565 schools at middle level, the share of private institutions (66%) is significantly greater than the public-sector institutions (34%). The distribution of teachers follows the same trend.

The data also demonstrate that there is uneven provision of gender-based schooling among the public and private primary schools. Among the public primary institutions, 62% of schools are for boys only, while 37% schools are listed as girls-only schools, and only 1% schools are declared as co-education institutions. Contrary to this, the majority of private-sector schools (94%) are co-educational, while only 2% enrol only boys and 4% enrol only girls (PIE, 2022). It is also interesting to note that the public sector provides an almost equal number of single-sex middle schools for girls and boys, with an insignificant percentage (1%) of mixed schools. In contrast, 94% of private-sector middle schools are co-education institutions. To better understand the gender composition of the education landscape of Pakistan, *Table 2.2* provides a breakdown of institutions, teachers, and student enrolment by sex and schooling level for the year 2024.

Table 0.2. Number of institutions, teachers, and students by educational level and sex, 2024

Schooling Level	Institutions			Teachers		Students	
	Male	Female	Mixed	Male	Female	Male	Female
Pre- & primary	74,106	44,860	17,701	196,039	236,073	15,739,772	13,120,901
Middle	8,902	9,140	29,303	119,898	310,994	4,213,330	3,451,299
High	10,170	7,886	16,206	220,009	359,977	2,207,431	1,699,324
Higher secondary	1,891	1,444	2,946	70,130	75,526	1,154,901	989,172

Source: Authors' calculations based on PIE (2022).

The ratio of middle schools to primary schools (1:2.88) is not overly encouraging since this is one of the main contributing factors for the decline in the transition rate of students from primary to middle school, which in 2016–17 reached 84%, but in 2021–22 had fallen back to 81% (PIE, 2022). As regards the rural–urban distribution, overall, 55% of all middle schools are established in rural areas. Public-sector middle schools have more enrolment in rural areas, whereas the majority of private-sector middle schools have more enrolment in urban areas.

There are 34,262 high schools, which represents only 15% of the total number of formal schools across the country. Among these, 10,170 serve male students, while 7,886 are for female students only. The remaining 16,206 schools are co-education schools enrolling both male and female students. Among the total number of high schools, the distribution between rural and urban areas is as follows: around 57% schools are located in urban areas, while 43% are based in rural areas. At the high school level, the majority of schools (58%) are privately managed, with only 42% managed by the public sector. This demonstrates that the private sector captures a major share of the high school market due to the absence of public-sector facilities.

Higher secondary schools are a smaller segment of the national educational infrastructure, with only 3% of the total share of educational institutions nationwide. This indicates that, despite being an essential bridge between school and higher education, higher secondary education provision is lagging. Among higher secondary schools nationwide, 43% belong to the public sector, while 57% are private.

Box 0.1. Public–private partnership

The creation of national and provincial education foundations led to the strengthening of the public–private partnership in the education sector in Pakistan. This model has become more prevalent in the provision of education services to a larger population, especially in Punjab, Sindh, and Islamabad Capital Territory. The leaders in promoting public–private partnership in the education sector include the Punjab Education Foundation, the Sindh Education Foundation, and the National Education Foundation. By combining the strengths of the public and private sectors, these foundations have successfully brought together the resources and knowledge needed to improve quality education service delivery. A variety of strategies and public–private partnership models have been introduced by these foundations to improve the quality and accessibility of education. One of these strategies is to encourage the private sector to establish and expand low-fee private schools that can reduce the pressure on public institutions. A second strategy was the

education voucher model, which raised the enrolment and attendance rates of marginalized students in private schools.

A total of 10,087 schools are part of public–private partnerships, representing around 3% of the entire education system. This has proven effective at providing educational opportunities to children from low-income families. There are 3,406,747 students enrolled in the public–private partnership school system, with 54% of those students being male and 46% female. An increase in the enrolment at these schools of 14% has been observed, demonstrating the popularity and effectiveness of public–private partnerships among the masses.

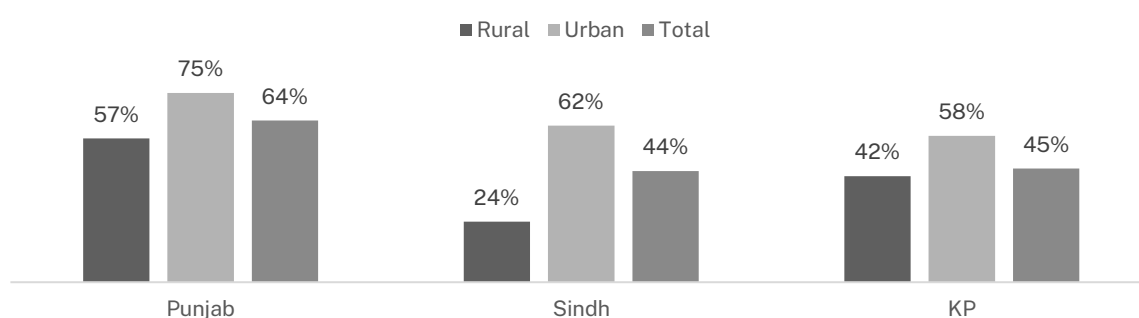
2.3. Comparing and contrasting provincial education profiles

2.3.1. Access to quality education

One of the biggest challenges faced by middle-tier education managers in all three provinces included in this study is low access to quality education; this has contributed to the country being home to the world’s second largest population of OOSC. In 2019, 4.13 million households reported that they had children between the ages of 5 and 17 none of whom went to school, while 6.99 million reported that some of them didn’t (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2021). This problem is more notable in rural areas, where only 46% of households with school-aged children report that all of them go to school, compared to 68% in urban settings.

The extent and distribution of OOSC across provinces is illustrated in *Figure 2.3*. Big regional disparities exist, with a difference of almost 20 percentage points between Punjab and both Sindh and KP in the total proportion of households with children aged between 5 and 17 years that report that all children go to school. While across all the provinces more urban households responded that all of their school-age children are in education, there are differences depending on the area. In Punjab and KP, the proportion of urban households sending all their children to school is 18 and 14 percentage points higher, respectively, than their rural counterparts, but Sindh has a much bigger variance, with urban households more than twice as likely to send all their children to school than rural ones (Amir, 2021).

Figure 0.3. Proportion of households with children aged between 5 and 17 years that report that all children go to school



Source: Authors’ calculations based on Amir (2021) (prepared using Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2021).

Data on OOSC disaggregated by gender reveal a major gap, with more girls of school age (53%) being out of school compared to boys (47%) in the same age group. Among the provinces, only in Punjab do boys make up a greater proportion of the out-of-school population than girls (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2021).

In addition to OOSC, there is high percentage of dropout at primary level in the country; the survival rate to Grade 5 – that is, the proportion of students who enrolled in Grade 1 and stayed in school until Grade 5 – is 79% for boys and 78% for girls (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2021: 23). To address the challenge of the large number of OOSC, a multidimensional approach is required with robust actions and reforms in the provision of more

schools, development of infrastructure and facilities, teacher training, provision of learning resources, allocation of finances, and other key considerations. There is a need for localized actions and reforms within each province to address this challenge.

2.3.2. Schools, teachers, and students

According to the most recent data from PIE (2022) on the educational landscape of KP, there are 44,234 primary, middle, high, and higher secondary schools (both public and private) within the province. These schools are serving almost 6.7 million students, supported by 302,768 teachers (PIE, 2022). Although the PIE data indicate that all public schools in the province are functional, Elementary and Secondary Education Department (ESED) data for the same reporting period reveals that around 0.7% of the public schools in settled districts of KP are non-functional (KPEMA, 2022).

In terms of number and size, Punjab has the largest public school system (52,470 schools) in Pakistan. Combining public and private institutions, the province also has a large total number of schools (98,798) at all levels. These schools serve 12.4 million students in the province (Government of the Punjab, 2020: 6) with the help of 403,172 teachers. At the primary level, Punjab has achieved the highest adjusted net enrolment rate across the country, at 86%. Yet the area still faces numerous challenges, such as an acute shortage of funds and resources, as well as gender disparity and inequality in socio-economic status among the population. Although an increase in education budget and upgrading of infrastructure have been enacted to address the challenges, there still exist significant gaps between policies and their implementation.

In Sindh, there are 52,751 schools (combining public and private) in the province which cater for around 6.8 million students at the primary, middle, high, and higher secondary levels. There are 255,371 teachers serving these schools (PIE, 2022). The teacher–school ratio in the province is only three teachers per school (PIE, 2022), which is the lowest in comparison to the other provinces. Among the total number of schools, a significant percentage (88.4%) are at the primary education level.

2.3.3. Gender disparities

The Global Gender Gap Index 2023 ranked Pakistan 138 out of 146 countries (down from 135 the previous year), with an education attainment score of 0.825 (World Economic Forum, 2023). The Gender Parity Index in enrolment in KP schools shows concerning figures of 0.77 at the primary level and 0.61 at secondary level (KPEMA, 2022: 14). At the primary school level, Punjab has reached gender parity with a ratio of nearly 1, which indicates nearly equal participation of boys and girls. The disparities are more evident at the high school and higher secondary levels, with girls dropping out at a greater rate than boys. According to Bureau of Statistics of Punjab (2023), Punjab’s Gender Parity Index ranges between 0.99 and 1.09 for its different educational levels, meaning that girls’ access goes from equality to being more favourable to them. For KP, this indicator ranges from 0.52 to 0.95 for the different schooling levels (KPESED, 2022), while for Sindh, it ranges from 0.50 to 0.71 (Government of Sindh, 2020b), meaning that girls are strongly and systematically disadvantaged across all levels of education in these provinces. Comparing the overall Gender Parity Index of the educational landscape in Sindh with the other provinces, Sindh is clearly the lowest, at only 0.68. This demonstrates that there is a great gap in education opportunities for boys and girls across provinces and different education levels.

The socio-economic conditions, access to quality education and societal norms are the key factors contributing to these disparities. Key sociocultural factors contributing to education disparities include safety concerns of parents, high poverty, child labour practices, limited employment options for girls, sociocultural attitudes towards education in general and to the education of girls in particular, distance to schools and observance of purdah (wearing a veil) (Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2019; Khalid, 2006; Naveed, 2018; Pasha, 2024). Balanced and targeted interventions by the government are needed to tackle these challenges and ensure that girls enjoy equal opportunities in pursuing their education.

2.4. Provincial education administration: structure and functions

As a result of education being added to the provincial legislative list, all key functions have been devolved to the provinces (see *Table 2.3*). Among these functions are policy, planning, curriculum, syllabus, standards of education, centres of excellence, and higher education.

At the provincial level in KP, the key department responsible for policy, planning, and service delivery is ESED. Along with ESED, the Directorate of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) plays an important role in budgeting and planning, monitoring and reporting, as well as human resource management. Like KP, Punjab's educational management structure is also multi-tiered, comprising provincial key actors, district management, and school-level stakeholders. In Punjab, the School Education Department (SED) is the key provincial body responsible for strategic planning, finance, and policy formulation. SED and its allied institutions perform duties like policy formulation, sectoral planning and budgeting, human and technological resource allocation, and mentoring and support to district management. SED, under the guidance of the provincial government, is tasked with providing high-quality education to students while improving the provincial educational landscape. Operations related to teacher recruitment, allocation of resources, implementation and scale-up of reforms, and provision of facilities and resources to schools are among the major responsibilities of SED. A few significant initiatives introduced and led by SED include the Punjab Education Sector Reform Programme (PESRP), School Information System, and Teacher Information System, which aim to improve the governance and management systems in the province. In Sindh, at the provincial level, the School Education and Literacy Department (SELD), is the prime authority with responsibility for policy formulation and implementation, regulating and monitoring schools, along with the formulation and provision of budgets to schools and school management committees.

SED in Punjab, SELD in Sindh, and ESED in KP work in collaboration with their allied provincial institutions and some independent organizations in performing different functions. These allied institutions help in the continuous professional development (CPD) of officials, curriculum development, policy planning, monitoring and evaluation, registration of private schools, and more. The roles and responsibilities of these allied institutions are significant in delivering quality education to all children in KP, Punjab, and Sindh. *Table 2.3* gives a list of these allied institutions and their areas of focus. A description of their mandates is presented in [Section 8.2](#) of this report.

Table 0.3. Key provincial allied institutions and their areas of focus

Domain/focus area			Provincial education administration		
			KP	Punjab	Sindh
Provincial department			ESED	SED	SELD
Directorates to support the education department			Directorate of ESED	Directorate of Public Instructions (Elementary Education) – Punjab Directorate of Public Instructions (Secondary Education) – Punjab	Directorate of School Education, Education, Schools & Health Services – regional directorates
Provincial allied institutions	Allied provincial institutions	Curriculum and textbooks	DCTE	PCTB	DCAR
		Teacher training and professional development	DPD	QAED	Directorate of Teachers Training Institution

Domain/focus area		Provincial education administration		
		KP	Punjab	Sindh
	Student assessments	DCTE/Education Monitoring Authority (EMA)	Provincial Education Assessment System/Punjab Examination Commission/ Programme Monitoring and Implementation Unit (PMIU)	DCAR
	Monitoring and reform support	EMA/Education Sector Reform Unit	PMIU/PESRP	Sindh School Monitoring System / RSU
	Public-private partnerships	Elementary and Secondary Education Foundation	Punjab Education Foundation	Sindh Education Foundation
	Inspection and registration of private schools	Private School Regulatory Authority	Private Education Provider Registration and Information System	Directorate of Inspection & Registration of Private Institutions Sindh
	Literacy and non-formal education	Literacy & Non-formal Basic Education Department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	Literacy & Non-formal Basic Education Department Punjab	Directorate of Literacy and Non-Formal Education
	Other special initiatives	New School Initiative	Daanish schools	Sindh Early Learning Enhancement Through Classroom Transformation (Select)

Source: Authors.

2.5. District education management: hierarchy and scope

Following the Eighteenth Constitutional Amendment, as well as local government legislation across provinces in Pakistan, education management and service delivery was further devolved to the district tier – that is, the middle tier. Generally, the middle tier in education refers to district-level managers and structures that serve as intermediaries between the provincial education authorities and individual schools and communities. In districts across Pakistan, DEOs play a major role in planning and managing education services. Being the implementers of policies and regulations, they are responsible for managing local resources, supervising school leadership, and ensuring delivery of quality education in all classrooms in each school in their respective districts. They are also responsible for assessing district-specific education challenges and devising strategies and plans to mitigate these challenges.

Despite having similar functions and structural layers (e.g., district, tehsil, tehsil/taluka, markaz/circle,² and school levels), district education management in Punjab, Sindh, and KP differs in terms of its nomenclature (i.e., using different job titles for the same administrative positions), management approach (cadre or non-cadre), and recruitment processes. Formerly, most education managers at the district and sub-district levels across these provinces in Pakistan were promoted or appointed from their teaching positions, also known as the teaching cadre (Academy of Education Planning and Management, 2015; Government of Sindh, 2014). As part of the

² A taluka is the administrative sub-division in the districts in Sindh. In the rest of the Pakistan, these administrative district sub-divisions are called tehsil. A markaz is a sub-administrative unit that sits under the sub-district (tehsil, taluka).

teaching cadre, DEOs advance through various teaching roles, from being teachers to head teachers, school leaders,³ and finally to administrative roles in markaz/school circles, tehsils, and districts. In contrast, administrative/management cadre candidates are required to pass competitive exams conducted by provincial public service commissions (PSCs).

Earlier research in Pakistan shows that there was no specific training provided to these officials regarding district-level management and planning. Owing to their background as teachers, they often lacked the management skills required for the planning, budgeting, and monitoring of education (Academy of Education Planning and Management, 2015; World Bank, 2019). As provinces recognized that specialist skills and knowledge are essential for effective decision-making in the middle tier, reforms were introduced to create specialist district education management cadres (DEMC).

2.5.1. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

KP was the first province in Pakistan to establish a DEMC with the intent of segregating officials responsible for teaching from those responsible for education management and administration at district level. Initially introduced in 2009, the KP management cadre was revised in 2012 (I-SAPS, 2022).

The overarching goal behind the formation of the management cadre in KP was to enhance governance and service delivery by professionalizing educational management at the district level. This reform was introduced to ensure that district-level education officials are dedicated solely to administrative and managerial functions rather than being simultaneously involved in classroom teaching. The shift was intended to bring more focus, accountability, and capacity to education planning and monitoring functions.

According to the KP ESP (2015–2020) Education Sector Analysis (ESA – 2014), the management cadre serves the following objectives:

- to streamline and clarify roles and responsibilities across different levels of education management;
- to ensure effective implementation of education policies, plans, and standards at the district and sub-district levels;
- to improve school supervision and performance-monitoring mechanisms;
- to enhance coordination between district education offices and provincial authorities.

The management cadre in KP comprises a structured hierarchy of officers responsible for overseeing the performance and administration of public schools across the province. These include:

- DEOs: Responsible for overall management and supervision of schools within the district. KP typically has separate DEOs for male and female schools.
- SDEOs: Operate under the DEOs and are responsible for specific sub-divisions within the district. Like DEOs, SDEOs are also gender-specific (SDEO-Male, SDEO-Female).
- Assistant District Education Officers (ADEOs)/ASDEOs: Function at a more localized level, supporting SDEOs in day-to-day monitoring, school visits, data collection, and compliance with education standards. ADEOs/ASDEOs may be responsible for primary, middle, or high schools, depending on district structure.

The management cadre in KP also supports broader functions such as teacher deployment and rationalization, monitoring of school infrastructure and attendance, oversight of budget allocation and utilization at the school level, and coordination with community stakeholders including PTCs.

³ School leaders sit in a tier between head teachers and ASDEOs in KP. The key role of school leaders is to plan, organize, assess, and report on the educational/academic activities and resources in a local education area.

2.5.2. Sindh

Sindh also prioritized establishment of a professional management cadre at the district level in 2014. This DEMC was designed to provide district-level education leadership and a management structure with clearly defined functions.⁴ According to the Sindh ESP 2014–18 the key objective of establishing a DEMC was:

to professionalize educational management, i.e. strengthen governance and service delivery by creating a professional management cadre, improving the functioning capacity and accountability of all levels of management, enhancing the equity of resource allocation, transparency and accountability in the use of public resources, leading to greater enrolment and reduction in the dropouts.

(SELD, 2014: 49)

The new DEMC has categorized middle-tier education management into three distinct segments:

- School Executive Service, comprising school directors, district management officers (DEO, DDEO, AEO);
- School Management Service, including principals and headmasters;
- School Finance Service, including Director Finance, Deputy Director Finance, Assistant Director Finance.

At the district level, the district education office is led by the DEO. These DEOs are further divided into DEO Primary and DEO Elementary, High, and High Secondary schools. ADEOs support the DEO in the district to ensure effective management of educational activities. ADEOs are further sub-divided into Primary level ADEOs and Elementary, High, and High Secondary ADEOs, who are supported by TEOs at sub-district levels and the Markaz Education Officers at markaz level.

2.5.3. Punjab

Although Punjab has not introduced a specialist management cadre for middle-tier education management, it has experimented with a variety of administrative forums and compositions. SED created District Education Groups in 2013 to provide a forum for diverse stakeholders to support efforts to improve education at the district level. District Education Groups were chaired by DEOs and included representatives from the Social Welfare Department, principals of degree colleges, as well as the teachers' unions and civil society. Besides establishing District Education Groups, SED also established DEAs in 2014 to enhance district education services.⁵ Under the chairship of the DEO, the DEAs included: the DC or their representative, the District Accounts Officer, the DEO-Male, the DEO-Female, the DDEOs (male and female), head teachers, and learning coordinators. In 2016, the composition of DEAs was revisited, and DCs became the chairs of the authority. Moreover, District Monitoring Coordinators were placed in the DCs' offices to help ensure that provincial ESP targets could be met.

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) plays a crucial role in each DEA, serving as the Chief Accounting and Operating Officer and executing DEA responsibilities. Unlike their predecessors, the CEO is directly responsible to the provincial education department (that is, SED) to ensure that educational policies provided by the provincial government are implemented in a true sense and adhere to the criteria established by the SED and allied bodies.

Furthermore, DEAs are also responsible for ensuring that educational services are delivered effectively through an efficiently organized hierarchy of district and sub-district education managers. From a top-down perspective, this hierarchy comprises DEOs, both male and female, DDEOs, both male and female, separately responsible for elementary and secondary education, and Assistant Education Officers (AEOs), both male and female, who work in a collaborative manner to ensure the implementation of policies, resource management according to local context, and the provision of professional training programmes.

Decisions regarding school upgrades, teacher rationalization, and general responses to school-specific issues are made by DEAs. While AEOs assist the DEA in monitoring and reporting, the province has established a parallel structure for performing similar functions. In 2005, the PMIU introduced District Monitoring Officers (DMOs)

⁴ Education and Literacy Department Notification No SO (B&F) E&L/RE-DESIG-POSTS/2014-15 (DISTRICT) / 2014, was issued in pursuance of sub-rule (2) of rule 3 of Sindh Civil Servants (Appointment, Promotion and Transfer) Rules 1974.

⁵ Notification No. SO (Admn.) 15-63/2014/2219-240, 3 February 2014.

who are responsible for monitoring teacher attendance, student attendance, textbook distribution, and more (World Bank, 2019). To assist the DMO, Monitoring and Evaluation Assistants were recruited and deployed across all districts of the province.

Although each province’s district education administration differs in features and terminology, there are many similarities between the three. In each district, a DEO (CEO in Punjab) leads the office, assisted by several deputies and assistant officers responsible for budgets, information technology, sports, monitoring, and administration. There are male and female education officers working within the districts’ single-sex schools.

A summary of the hierarchy, names, and functions of the district education administration by province is presented in ***Error! Reference source not found.***, and additional information by province is presented in 8.3.

District education management roles and responsibilities

Table 0.4. Hierarchy, names, and functions within district education administration by province

Level	Post	Province		
		KP	Sindh	Punjab
District	CEO			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Financial and administrative management. - Monitors Punjab Education Foundation schools, Punjab Education Endowment Fund scholarships, the roadmap fund, Talimi scholarships, and Punjab Examination Commission examinations.
	DEO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Works directly under the supervision of the Director of Education. - Responsible for overall educational administration in the district, budget monitoring and utilization. - Posting, transfer, hiring, promotions, granting leave, and performance evaluation reports. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Oversees all educational activities within the district and implements policies and programmes from the provincial level. - Manages schools, staff, and educational resources across the district. - Supervises the performance of ADEOs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Each district has three DEOs – two for elementary and one for secondary schools.</i> - Reports directly to the CEO and provides transfers and posting recommendations to them. - Manages schools with support from a team of DDEOs and AEOs.
	ADEO		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bridge between DEO and TEOs. - Monitors the functioning of schools within their assigned jurisdiction and ensures implementation of government policies. 	

Level	Post	Province		
		KP	Sindh	Punjab
			- Conducts regular school visits to inspect teaching quality, student attendance, and school records.	
Tehsil	DDEO ADEO ⁶	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Financial management, works as a Drawing and Disbursing officer. - Oversees Middle, High, and Higher Secondary Schools in the district. - Human resource management. - Identifying professional development courses for teachers. - Assisting in the formation of PTCs at school level and their capacity-building. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Manages primary and elementary schools at the sub-district tehsil level. - Ensures government policies are implemented at school level and is involved in indicator-based performance monitoring. - Ensures that necessary data collected from schools are delivered to DEOs.
	TEO		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Manages and supervises schools at sub-district tehsil level. - Addresses operational issues, such as teacher placement and attendance, conducts inspections of schools. - Reports to DEO on the educational status of the Tehsil. 	
Markaz	ASDEO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Visits primary schools in the circle. - Evaluates student learning outcomes along with teacher performance. 		

⁶ Unique to KP

Level	Post	Province		
		KP	Sindh	Punjab
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Checks school records and collects school data. - Develops a list of vacant positions for Class-IV employees (support staff). - Ensures proper working of PTCs. 		
	Markaz Education Officer		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Manages schools within the assigned Markaz and also monitors teaching and administrative functions at school level. - Serves as the primary link between schools and the TEO/ADEO. - Engages with local communities to ensure support for education programmes. 	
	AEO			<p><i>Each AEO, operating at tehsil level, is allocated a Markaz, consisting of 10–15 schools.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Responsible for effective supervision of the respective schools. - Helps teachers develop lesson plans and provides content-based training.

3. Institutional and organizational structures fit for purpose

Coherent institutional and organizational structures ensure that organizations work effectively towards realizing system-level objectives. They define lines of authority and accountability, adequate resources, and multidirectional communication channels, which are essential for efficient coordination and achieving organizational and institutional goals. This enables efficient coordination and helps units to work effectively towards their own objectives and broader organizational goals (IIEP-UNESCO et al., 2021; IIEP-UNESCO, 2022; Klijn et al., 2015; OECD, 2024a). Without such structures, organizations risk confusion of roles, duplication of tasks, and communication breakdowns, leading to inefficiencies and failure to meet objectives. For structures to succeed, clear mandates, effective coordination, sufficient staffing, adequate resources, and autonomy in financial and resource management is essential (Bryson and George, 2024; Ehren and Baxter, 2020; IIEP-UNESCO, 2022; Provan and Kenis, 2008).

This section provides evidence from the three studied provinces about their institutional and organizational structures. It includes policy and institutional frameworks, rules of business, the provision of sufficient human, financial, and technological resources, as well as horizontal and vertical coordination structures. Evidence gathered in this study indicates that middle-tier managers (i.e., DEOs and SDEOs) in all five districts studied across the three provinces face several institutional constraints that impact their ability to contribute to improved education delivery at the district level.

3.1. Institutional and policy frameworks should be strengthened to create an enabling environment for the middle-tier education management cadre

3.1.1. Existing decentralization scheme for local empowerment is inadequate to address challenges in education governance

The devolution of key education functions from the federal to the provincial governments in Pakistan, initiated under the Eighteenth Constitutional Amendment in 2010, marked a significant step towards localizing education governance. However, this devolution has largely stalled at the provincial level, with limited or no meaningful transfer of authority and resources to district or grass-roots tiers. While provinces are now primarily responsible for education policy and planning, the absence of corresponding decentralization within provinces has constrained the potential benefits of localized decision-making, accountability, and responsiveness to community needs. For instance, Punjab's Local Government Act of 2013 laid the groundwork for devolving certain responsibilities within education to district governments, yet the Act has not been fully operationalized due to political, administrative, and fiscal bottlenecks. In Sindh, while education management was nominally transferred to DEOs, real decision-making power and budgetary control remain centralized at the provincial level. Similarly, in KP, despite the presence of local government frameworks, there has been minimal substantive delegation of authority, resulting in continued bureaucratic inertia and weak local accountability.

This partial devolution has placed district education managers (DEMs) in a difficult position – they are held responsible for implementation and performance outcomes without the requisite authority, resources, or clarity

of mandate. As a result, they often struggle with issues such as delayed funding, limited staffing authority, lack of autonomy in school-level decision-making, and inadequate support for localized planning and innovation. The resulting disconnect undermines not only the efficiency of service delivery but also the potential for locally informed and contextually relevant education solutions.

3.1.2. Education management structures are not coherent across districts and provinces

A key challenge in the Pakistani education system is the lack of clear and coherent institutional and policy frameworks for DEOs across districts and provinces. This results in unclear mandates, functions, and performance management systems for DEOs and their counterparts in allied district offices/institutions such as monitoring units and teacher training centres.

Review of grey literature and key informant interviews conducted for this study revealed that while KP and Sindh provinces have introduced specialist DEMCs – KP in 2011 and Sindh in 2014 – the frameworks lack clarity on service structures (such as pay scales, career progression) and performance management for middle-tier education managers.

Unlike KP and Sindh, Punjab has not introduced specialist cadres. Instead, DEAs serve as functional administrative structures. They are governed by the Punjab District Education Authorities (Conduct of Business) Rules established in 2017. However, these rules fail to reflect the evolving demands of middle-tier education management. Punjab faces additional challenges, including appointing non-specialist officials to middle-tier management roles without adequate training in administration, monitoring, human resource management, and financial management.

A significant concern in Punjab’s current arrangement is the structural contradiction between the intent of the original legislation and its implementation. Although the DEAs were envisioned as semi-autonomous bodies with professional educational leadership, they are presently being headed by DCs – bureaucrats from the district administration. This practice runs counter to the spirit of the Punjab Local Government Act 2013 (later updated in 2019),⁷ which aimed to decentralize and professionalize education governance. The appointment of DCs as chairs of DEAs has effectively diluted the specialist focus and managerial autonomy required for responsive and efficient education service delivery.

In KP, most district managers come from the management cadre, with fewer managers appointed from the teaching cadre. In contrast, Punjab and Sindh follow a hybrid approach, often appointing individuals from teaching backgrounds, such as secondary school teachers and head teachers, to managerial positions (see *Table 0.1*). It is important to point out that these appointees, however, often lack sufficient induction training to effectively transition to administrative roles. This issue will be further explored in *Section 0* on

5. Competent and motivated staff.

Table 0.1. Appointment processes for different management positions in each province

Province	Management cadre position	Appointment
Punjab	CEO	Provincial PSC
	DEO	- Provincial PSC - Transfer
	DDEO	- Provincial PSC - Transfer
	AEO	Departmental hiring through competition
KP	DEO	Provincial PSC
	DDEO	Transfer
Sindh	DEO	Provincial PSC

⁷ The Act provided the legal basis for devolving administrative and financial authority to local governments, including the creation of specialist bodies like DEAs for managing education at the district level.

Province	Management cadre position	Appointment
	ADEO	Transfer

Source: Authors.

3.1.3. Recruitment processes are inconsistent and lead to lack of awareness among potential candidates

The recruitment of middle-tier education managers is inconsistent across provinces (see *Table 0.1*). Some officials, such as AEOs in Punjab and school leaders in KP, are hired through provincial PSCs. However, many DEMs are transferred from teaching roles without a clear recruitment process. In Sindh, the DEMC established in 2014 is further divided into three different streams with maximum intake from the teaching cadre: School Executive Services, School Management Service, and School Finance Service (Government of Sindh, 2020a).

Despite the introduction of administrative cadres in KP and Sindh, interviews revealed that many head teachers continue to believe seniority and experience are the primary criteria for promotion to district-level positions:

Head teachers/principals are typically promoted to district-level positions having leadership experience, performance, educational background, professional development, collaboration and communication, community engagement, as well as awareness of district needs.

Head teacher at a government school in KP

The quote above with the list of criteria for selection or promotion to district education administrative positions shows that school leaders are often not aware of the recruitment processes or the requirements for these positions. *Table 0.1*, however, shows that appointment into management positions is always done through formal hiring competition (provincials PSCs), except for roles that combine management with teaching (DDEO in KP and ADEO in Sindh).

This lack of awareness may disadvantage experienced head teachers who do not know the correct pathway to administrative roles. An example from Rwanda (*Box 3.1*) shows how a high-profile recruitment strategy contributes to setting high expectations and a high status for roles. Research suggests that district management functions led by officials from specialist management cadres outperform those led by appointees from the teaching cadre (Ullah et al., 2022). To enhance service delivery, provinces should prioritize recruiting DEMs through specialist cadres. Additionally, there is a critical need for large-scale awareness campaigns in KP and Sindh to improve understanding of recruitment processes and position requirements within district education administration. Strengthening training and policy frameworks across all provinces can ensure better performance and accountability in education management.

Box 0.1. Using transparent recruitment to elevate middle-tier leadership roles – the case of Rwanda

In Rwanda, a national initiative created a new middle-tier role – ‘Leaders of Learning’ – to drive school improvement. These roles are filled through a transparent, high-profile recruitment process run by the Ministry of Education and its partners. Candidates are selected from among experienced head teachers based on clear performance criteria, including school improvement outcomes and leadership capabilities.

Importantly, the recruitment process is highly visible: it involves school visits, community consultations, and structured interviews. This visibility helps set high expectations for the role and elevates its status, encouraging wider interest and competition. Selected leaders continue their roles as head teachers while leading peer learning and capacity-building efforts across districts.

Though these roles come with no financial incentives, their professional status and alignment with national leadership standards make them desirable. A one-year accredited leadership programme supports them in their role and ensures consistent expectations for performance. The course is co-designed and delivered by the University of Rwanda and aligns with national leadership standards.

Source: Childress and Jones (2023); Tournier, Chimier, and Jones (2023).

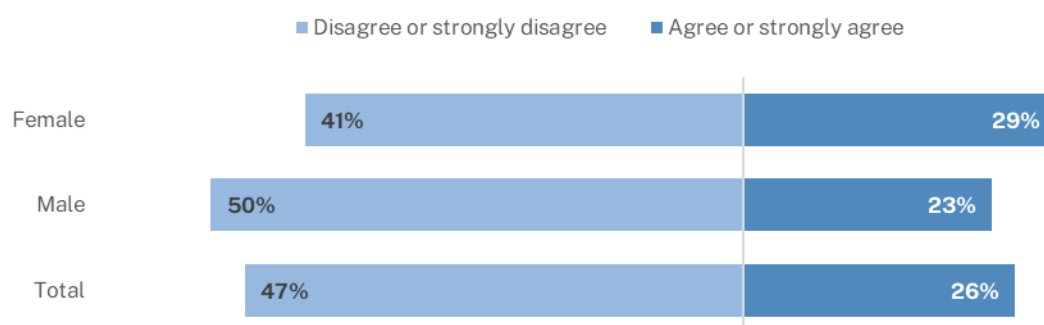
3.1.4. Female middle-tier managers need to be further empowered and offered an enabling environment

Even though the provincial ESPs aim to improve gender parity in schools, most of the priorities and reform efforts are focused on improving the enrolment of girls in schools and enhancing teachers' understanding of gender equity issues. There is not much emphasis placed on enhancing the participation and role of female DEMs.

Separate management roles have been created for managing girls' schools (e.g., DDEO-Female, SDEO-Female, ASDEO-Female, AEO-Female) across all three provinces. However, when looking across all three provinces of focus, women are still under-represented in senior gender-neutral leadership positions (CEO/DEO). Based on data for a district in KP, it is apparent that although SDEOs and ASDEOs are separated by gender because of gender bifurcation of schools, the ADEOs who supervise these positions are not gender segregated and have lower representation of women. As an example, in one district, five ADEOs have been appointed to oversee 579 schools (365 boys-only schools and 214 girls-only schools). It may have been equitable to hire three male and two female ADEOs in this district, but in fact four of the new appointees were male and only one was female. This indicates that the workload for female ADEOs is 1.75 times higher than that of their male counterparts (I-SAPS, 2019).

As shown in *Figure 0.1*, the surveyed women were more likely than men to agree or strongly agree with the fact that they are not provided with equal professional development opportunities compared with men in the same position. While 50% of surveyed men disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement, only 41% of women responded the same way.

Figure 0.1. Perception of equality in professional development opportunities ('Women are not provided equal professional development opportunities compared with men in the same position')

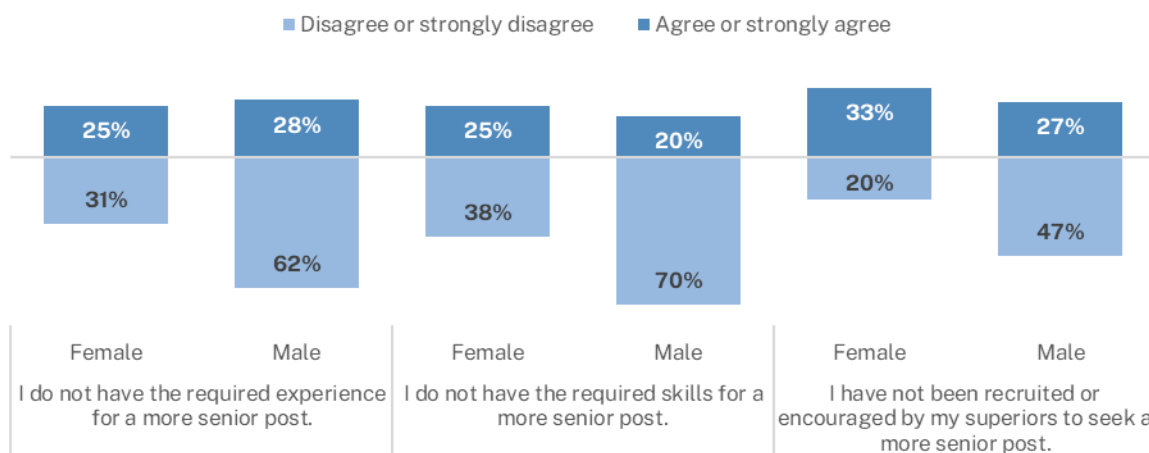


Note: N = 17 for Female, 30 for Male, 13 for Neutral.

Source: Authors' calculations based on IIEP-UNESCO, I-SAPS, and UNESCO Islamabad office (2024a).

The perceived barriers to career progression also show a marked gender disparity, as shown in *Figure 0.2*. Only 20% of surveyed women said they had been recruited or encouraged by their superiors to seek a more senior post, against 47% of men. Women are more likely to attribute this lack of career progression to lack of experience (with twice as many men disagreeing with the assertion that they lack the required experience for the more senior post than women) or that they don't have the required skills for the position (70% of men versus 38% of women).

Figure 0.2. Gendered barriers to career progression



Note: N = 16 for Female, 30 for Male, 34 for Neutral.

Source: Authors' calculations based on IIEP-UNESCO, I-SAPS, and UNESCO Islamabad office (2024a).

Recognizing these challenges, provincial governments have introduced a few initiatives to facilitate effective participation of female middle-tier education managers in district and sub-district decision-making. This includes assigning job quotas to female managers in sub-districts, providing special training opportunities focusing on gender sensitization and empowerment, creating a gender unit in Sindh, and including women on selection panels. The district officials interviewed in this study also confirmed the introduction of new initiatives to improve female participation in district education management, as summarized in one of the interviews:

There are measures in place to prioritize the appointment of women to senior positions. For instance, there are specific quotas and policies designed to ensure that a certain percentage of senior administrative roles are filled by women. However, more proactive efforts are needed to achieve gender parity.

DEO, KP

Among the challenges women middle-tier education managers face is the lack of child care facilities for their own children, meaning they often struggle to balance their professional responsibilities with child care obligations. The absence of accessible child care facilities not only impacts district managers' well-being but also undermines their performance. It is imperative that district authorities consider partnering with child care providers or investing in on-site day care facilities in order to address this critical need and support women's retention and productivity as DEMs.

Another issue faced by women in positions of power is gender bias that reduces the faith of the government and other relevant stakeholders in their leadership. Interviewees at the district level reported that they believed female DEOs, school principals, and head teachers lack the financial management skills required for their roles. Interviewees perceived these women as traditionally 'bad at maths' and highlighted that they use the support of male clerks in creating their annual budgets and dispensing finances. This leads to abuse of power by the clerks, as well as improper budget planning and tracking. However, it must be noted that this perceived incompetence of female leaders was not backed by any statistical evidence, nor any real examples.

In recent years, although efforts have been made to establish policy frameworks that define the functional administrative structure for specialist management cadres, there is still some ambiguity and incoherence in terms of appointment and recruitment of professionals to staff them.

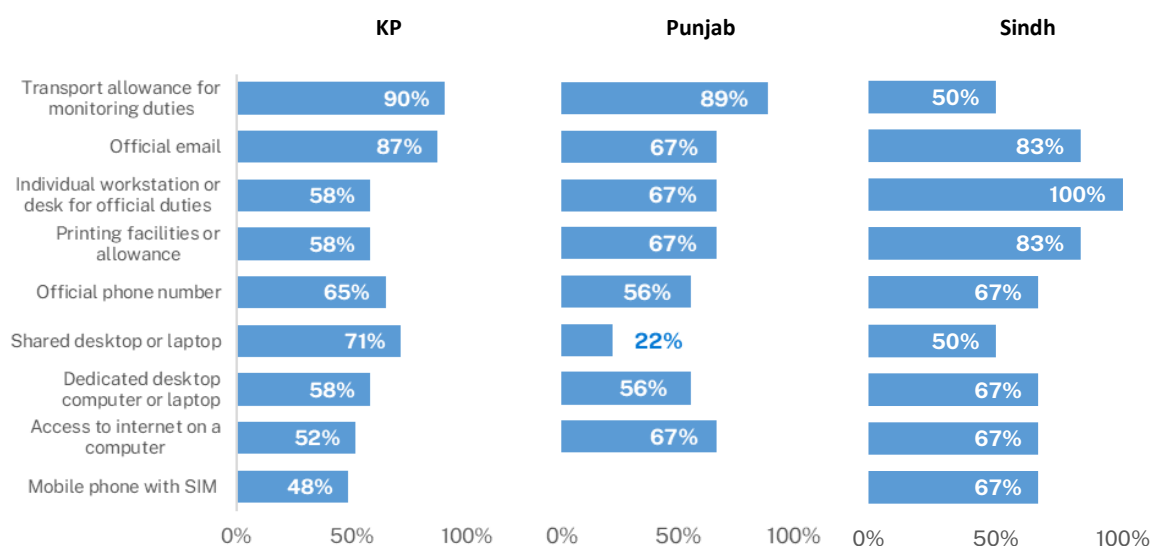
3.2. Human, financial, and technological resources are insufficient and not fit for purpose

Evidence from the key informant interviews also suggests that middle-tier managers often lack sufficient support staff, such as data analysts, as well as resources, transport facilities, and IT equipment, which affects their ability to perform their roles effectively. In KP and Sindh, middle-tier officials highlighted the challenge of the shortage of professional support staff, noting that around 20% of allocated positions are currently vacant. Officials in Punjab also shared their concerns regarding vacant positions and appointed officials not having sufficient capacity to make administrative decisions.

All three provinces reported that district officials had access to some facilities, including official desks, printing facilities, and transportation allowances, but the majority of officials were lacking official desktop computers, internet access, and smartphones that could be used for communication. In some cases, these officials are using their own resources to undertake official functions. It is evident that the absence of these crucial technological resources significantly hampers their ability to perform their duties efficiently. Without official desktops and internet access, officials struggle to communicate effectively and access important information and data available on official portals. This can lead to delays in decision-making, poor coordination, and a decrease in productivity. The study further found an absence of any coherent policy guidelines or protocols regarding provision and use of communication technologies for effectively discharging official tasks.

Figure 0.3 shows the reported level of access to different facilities and resources by province, based on the results from the online survey of district officials. There is a high level of heterogeneity in the available facilities by province, with some provinces reporting almost twice the proportion of access for particular resources compared to others. For instance, in Sindh, 83% of respondents reported having printing facilities, while only 58% declared this in KP. Likewise, 100% of respondents claimed to have individual workstations in Sindh, while only 58% said so in KP, and 67% in Punjab. Notable is the fact that in none of the three provinces do all officials have access to internet (be it via shared or dedicated computers), which can severely hinder the normal development of activities in these organizations (IIEP-UNESCO, I-SAPS, and UNESCO Islamabad office, 2024a).

Figure 0.3. Reported access to facilities and resources by province



Note: N = 279 for KP, 81 for Punjab, 54 for Sindh.

Source: Authors' calculations based on IIEP-UNESCO, I-SAPS, and UNESCO Islamabad office (2024a).

3.3. Some horizontal coordination structures at the district and provincial levels exist but should be formalized and reinforced

While certain structures for horizontal coordination at the district and provincial levels are in place, their scope and functionality remain limited. Limited coordination forums and interdepartmental meetings have facilitated some coordination. However, they are often informal, sporadic, and insufficient to address the persistent challenges in the education sector. Strengthening these structures is essential to ensure effective communication, resource optimization, and goal alignment across departments, districts, and provinces.

3.3.1. Horizontal coordination at the district level is weak

Evidence from this study highlights that middle-tier managers in particular face significant challenges due to weak horizontal coordination. Most district officials across the five districts studied reported moderate levels of collaboration within district offices and departments:

Coordination and collaboration between departments are moderate, with some siloing. Education department collaborates well with student welfare and planning departments, but less with finance and administration.

District official, KP

One official noted that:

There is no specific interaction with other departments except for when the provincial government engages us with other assignments. Such coordination with other departments takes place for election duty, dengue campaign, WASH, etc.

District official, Punjab

This district official also identified ‘communication gaps, conflicting priorities, lack of shared goals, and limited resources’ as the main barriers to effective horizontal coordination. Different district-level offices and allied institutions implement education policies and provide teacher training, monitoring, and student assessment services work in silos and collaborate on a very limited scale. For instance, teacher training institutes prepare their annual calendars without consulting district officials. Similarly, DMOs in Punjab collect school-level data independently of AEOs, leading to duplication of efforts and inefficient use of resources.

In the realm of professional development, DEMs and staff in allied departments rarely coordinate on human resource capacity assessments or training content. Provincial teacher training institutions often design training programmes without input from districts, resulting in overlapping efforts. As one district official noted: ‘DEMs provide on-job mentoring support and orientation sessions to capacitate school leaders and teachers. These efforts are in addition to the CPD opportunities offered by provincial teacher training institutions and their regional offices.’ As will be further explored in *Section 4 on Error! Reference source not found.*, this fragmented approach leads to resource wastage and undermines the effectiveness of training initiatives.

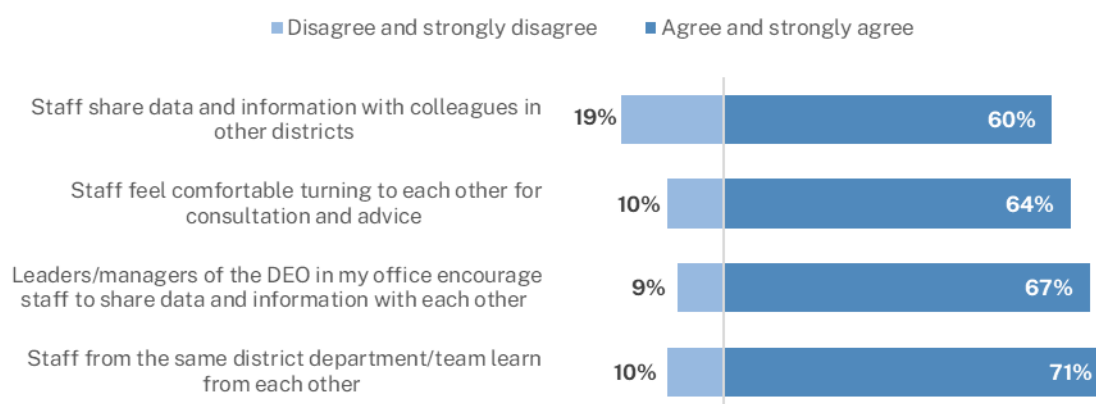
3.3.2. There are no regular platforms for horizontal coordination at the provincial level

At the provincial level, key informant interviews show that coordination mechanisms are similarly limited. Interactions between provincial education departments and allied institutions, such as those responsible for teacher training, assessments, and textbooks, are ad hoc and lack formal written procedures. While quarterly stock-take meetings in Punjab and KP under donor-driven education reform initiatives temporarily facilitated coordination, these forums are not sustained.

Online surveys show, however, that there is a positive assessment of inter- and intra-district sharing practices, with 60% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they share data and information with colleagues from other

districts and 71% similarly share within their own district department or team, as shown in *Figure 0.4*. This information-sharing doesn't necessarily translate into active and effective coordination, and the limited number of responses means that results might not be representative of all districts studied.

Figure 0.4. Inter- and intra-district sharing practices



Note: N = 58 for all questions. Neutral responses are the complement to reach 100%.

Source: Authors' calculations based on IIEP-UNESCO, I-SAPS, and UNESCO Islamabad office (2024a).

Some provincial respondents in this study noted that such coordination was not necessary to carry out their responsibilities, while others cited budget constraints as a challenge. Without regular platforms for collaboration, provincial entities face challenges in aligning their activities, resulting in duplication, inefficient use of resources and expertise, and diminished accountability for achieving national and international goals. As will be further discussed in *Section 0*, this is also a missed opportunity to strengthen the overall learning culture of the education sector.

Interprovincial coordination for middle-tier managers is even weaker. With the devolution of school education governance, the only available means for interprovincial coordination exists in the form of the Inter-Provincial Education Ministers Conference (IPEMC). This conference serves as a national coordination forum where education ministers and secretaries from all provinces and territories of Pakistan, along with the federal government, come together to deliberate on key education policies and reforms. Established to promote policy harmonization in the post-devolution context, the IPEMC aims to ensure coherence across provincial education systems while respecting their autonomy. Chaired by the Federal Minister for Education, it facilitates joint decision-making and review of progress on national and international education commitments, including Sustainable Development Goal 4. However, the forum lacks constitutional backing, and its functionality largely depends on the discretion of the respective governments. With a limited mandate and narrow scope of work, its engagement is confined to discussions among high-level office-bearers, thereby excluding middle-tier managers and allied institutions from meaningful participation. According to respondents in this study, opportunities for interprovincial collaboration are limited and often donor-driven and temporary. This lack of coordination prevents effective sharing of experience and the adoption of best practices across provinces.

The example from Scotland in the United Kingdom (see *Box 0.2*) illustrates how the Association of Directors of Education helps bring together local authorities to enhance horizontal and vertical collaboration.

Box 0.2. Promoting horizontal and vertical collaboration through the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (United Kingdom)

Scotland's 32 local authorities, each under the leadership of a Director of Education, have statutory responsibility for the delivery of quality school education. The Directors of Education are organized in the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES), an independent professional network for leaders and managers in education and children's services in Scotland. The association collaborates with local and national

government and other agencies to inform and influence education policy. It offers a range of services, from annual conferences to network meetings, peer evaluation work, and professional development.

In 2021–24, along with Education Scotland and local authorities, ADES launched the Collaborative Improvement (CI) initiative. This initiative aimed to bring together local authorities to work on shared priorities and exchange effective practices. In turn, local authorities were selected to host a CI exercise and propose a topic of focus for a three-day visit with staff from Education Scotland, volunteers from other local authorities, as well as school leaders and practitioners. This exercise feeds into local authority self-evaluation and improvement planning processes. By the end of 2024, all 32 local authorities had participated in the initiative.

This initiative also allowed Education Scotland and ADES to review a self-evaluation framework, published in 2024, for all local education authorities in a spirit of mutual accountability, encouraging local authorities to work collaboratively and build networks of support and professional dialogue. The framework includes quality indicators for local authorities focused on 1) leadership, direction, and continuous improvement, and 2) improving outcomes for all. It aims to serve as a guide and a means of consistency for local authorities across Scotland.

Source: ADES (2024); OECD (2024b).

3.4. Enhance and streamline opportunities for vertical coordination structures at the provincial, district, and sub-district tiers

The study highlights significant challenges in vertical coordination between provincial, district, and sub-district tiers, emphasizing the need for a more cohesive and streamlined approach.

3.4.1. There is perceived limited responsiveness in establishing vertical linkages with public and private stakeholders, and minimal involvement of district officials in provincial decision-making

Middle-tier managers in this study report limited responsiveness from provincial tiers, which hampers the development of vertical linkages. At the district level, their engagement with other public and private stakeholders is constrained by the requirement to route communication through district administration, delaying necessary actions and responses. Additionally, a perception among middle-tier managers that private-sector processes operate more efficiently further discourages meaningful collaboration between the public and private education sectors.

When asked if they play a role in provincial decisions or setting priorities and goals for the education sector in the district, officials indicated that they are not extensively involved in this process. In Punjab and KP, education plans were developed separately for each district. At the district level, it is evident that there are insufficient coordination and communication between provinces and districts regarding five-year strategic plans. The district strategic planning process in both provinces was led by their respective provincial education departments. According to a World Bank (2019) report, district education plans developed by SED and ESED did not effectively engage district management in planning and setting targets. As a result, the plans failed to achieve their targets and priorities due to weak ownership and poor coordination. District and sub-district management lack clarity about the focus, intent, and planned outcomes of the strategic plans and their targets because of the centralized nature of these strategic planning documents.

Similarly, districts, school heads, and teachers are not consulted in developing curricula, textbooks, or teacher training materials. Communication channels seem to be one directional, going from the top to the bottom, missing out on bottom-up feedback and involvement. Not only can this create frustration and lack of appropriation of new policy, it is also a missed opportunity to create a strong learning culture (see *Section 0*).

3.4.2. Communication between districts and schools is largely effective, and further support would help reinforce and maintain it

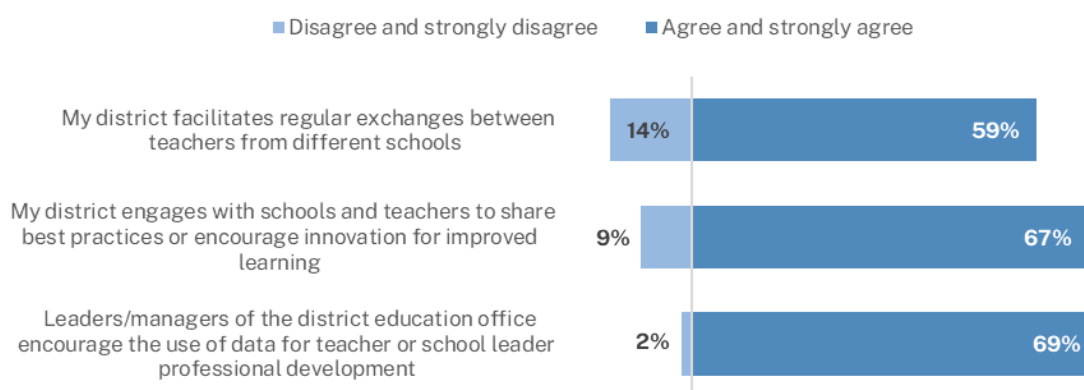
Although the provincial and district tiers face coordination challenges, it is encouraging to see that district education management and schools communicate effectively and coordinate well. During interviews for this study, district officials stated that they monitor schools regularly, collecting data on enrolment, attendance, teacher qualifications, and school infrastructure. This data is used to assess performance, allocate resources, and design teacher capacity-building initiatives. Head teachers in this study highlighted the collaborative problem-solving and professional development support they receive. One head teacher from KP stated:

Yes, I received individual support from personnel at the district level in the form of coaching, mentoring, observation, formative feedback. By providing individual support to principal, district can help principals grow professionally, address challenges, and succeed in their roles, ultimately benefiting students and schools.

Head teacher of a government school in KP

The results from the district survey confirm this, as seen in *Figure 0.5*, with 69% of respondents saying that district leadership encourages them to use data for teacher or school leader professional development, 67% say the district engages with schools and teachers to share best practices, and 59% say the district facilitates exchanges between teachers from different schools.

Figure 0.5. Perception of vertical coordination across provincial, district, and sub-district tiers



Note: N = 58 for all questions. Neutral responses are the complement to reach 100%.

Source: Authors' calculations based on IIEP-UNESCO, I-SAPS, and UNESCO Islamabad office (2024a).

In addition, district officials indicated during interviews that they aim to conduct monthly school visits. However, due to the high number of schools within their jurisdiction, some officials visit each school just once a quarter. School visits from district officials typically include classroom observations, mentoring support for school leaders and staff, reviews of PTCs or school management committees, oversight of school finances, and the development of school improvement plans. However, limited financial resources and the vast geographical spread of schools hinder the effectiveness of these visits and ability to maintain them. *Table 0.2* shows the number of schools and teachers supervised by officials in each district.

Table 0.2. Number of schools and teachers supervised by officials in each district

Province	District	District official	Number of schools supervised	Number of teachers supervised
KP	Swat	ASDEO	80	330
	Upper Kohistan	ASDEO	45	180
	Mohmand	ASDEO	16	35
Punjab	Muzaffargarh	AEO	12	55

Sindh	Tharparkar	TEO	419	791
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Source: Authors, based on data collected from district education offices.

In selected districts, the study noted that the majority of school head teachers enjoy good coordination with district officials. However, in some cases, school heads were not satisfied with the low frequency of school visits by the district managers. They believe that district managers should engage schools and their heads through meetings and visits on a more regular basis.

The complex challenges confronting the middle tier of the education system in Pakistan mean a comprehensive review and nuanced strategy are needed rather than shallow and short-term solutions. Addressing these intricate issues requires a holistic approach, characterized by a commitment to untangle the complexities that hinder effective education governance and management. A critical component of this approach would be the involvement of DEMs in key policy and decision-making processes. This will not only enhance the efficacy of administrative processes but will also ensure a unified vision for educational governance. Moreover, improving coordination mechanisms between different entities within the education landscape is imperative.

Box 0.3. Recommendations – Institutional and organizational structures fit for purpose

1. Policy and institutional frameworks

- Each provincial government should **develop an explicit and coherent policy framework for middle-tier education management**. A district education management framework should not only facilitate coordination and alignment between district education officials and their colleagues in allied district offices/institutions (e.g., monitoring units, teacher training centres/institutions), but also elaborate on clear service structures (i.e., pay scales for officials in various posts, along with opportunities for upward career progression) and performance management systems.
- To empower middle-tier managers, provincial governments **should revise the current decentralization scheme to further delegate functions, responsibilities, and resources to district education offices**. Districts should be delegated responsibility for hiring teachers to fill vacant positions and providing basic facilities to schools for improved learning environment and outcomes.
- To make separate DEMCs fully functional, provincial education departments should take all necessary measures to remove bottlenecks. **Necessary amendments may be made to existing recruitment policies and service rules related to the promotion and posting of education managers within shortest possible time-span.**
- To safeguard legitimate rights and to address valid concerns of the teaching cadre vis-à-vis the management cadre, **reforms aimed at improving the functionality and performance of the management cadre should be carried out in close consultation with all stakeholders, but particularly taking on board the views of the teaching cadre.**
- Ensure the availability and adequacy of human, financial, and technological resources that are fit for purpose.
- Adequate policy frameworks for middle-tier managers should also consider staff shortages and solutions to attract qualified candidates to vacant roles.

2. Recruitment, career progression, and human resources

- **To harmonize recruitment processes, provincial education departments may develop their own competency frameworks** in collaboration with international development partners and national policy think tanks such as PIE. These frameworks will help align recruitment,

appointment, and professional development processes, in particular by outlining different managerial roles, promotion and career progression pathways, and potential opportunities for professional development of education managers.

- **To ensure transparency and merit-based recruitment of education managers at all levels, provincial PSCs should be entrusted with hiring for all vacant and new managerial positions.** Meanwhile, provincial education departments should devise clear career progression paths for new and existing education managers.
- To enhance efficiency in filling vacant district manager positions, it is recommended that the appointment and recruitment process be subject to a clearly defined time limit. **Relevant departmental policies should establish a specific time-frame within which the recruitment must be completed. This measure will prevent unnecessary delays and ensure timely staffing of critical management roles. Furthermore, hiring managers should be held accountable for any vacancies that persist beyond the stipulated time-frame, thereby promoting responsibility and adherence to the recruitment schedule.**
- **To minimize operational disruptions caused by prolonged hiring delays and shortages of suitable candidates,** it is recommended that officials from the teaching cadre be temporarily appointed to management positions. These appointments should follow a fitness-cum-seniority criterion, serving as an effective interim solution to ensure leadership continuity until permanent recruitment is completed.
- Provincial education departments should ban or at least discourage transfer of DEMs on deputation to other departments – especially managers appointed through PSCs.

3. Gender equity and inclusion

- To promote gender equality, **provincial education departments should perform a gender audit to assess existing capacity and implementation gaps.** This may lead to development of gender-responsive management policy with particular attention on recruitment of female managers to ensure adequate gender representation in gender-neutral positions.
- To safeguard gender interests and to add a gender focus to various reform initiatives, **provincial education departments may establish gender support units at provincial and regional levels. These support units may serve as grievance redressal forums as well as being a torch bearer to highlight gender equity issues.** In addition, the units can help EMISs to collect, analyse, and disseminate gender-related data through various publications and make it available to decision- and policy-makers when needed.

4. Technological resources

- Provincial- and district-level education departments should allocate crucial technological resources (including desktops, smartphones, and internet access) for officials to properly carry out their functions.
- Coherent policy guidelines or protocols regarding the provision and use of communication technologies for effectively undertaking tasks should be devised urgently.

5. Horizontal coordination

- Formalize and reinforce horizontal coordination structures at the district and provincial levels to achieve efficiency and improved outcomes. To improve horizontal coordination among

district education offices, a virtual forum to discuss challenges and good practices should be established by the respective provincial education departments.

- After devolution of key education functions, there is very little opportunity for interprovincial coordination among middle-tier managers. To remove this barrier, provincial governments may **constitute interprovincial education sector technical working groups for cross-provincial learning and sharing best practices.**
- At the district level, **existing platforms such as District Review Committees and District Education Groups can serve as coordination and collaboration networks at the district level.** The education departments in consultation with stakeholders should carefully define their scope of work, membership, and meeting frequency, etc.
- To improve the existing disjointed coordination and collaboration approaches, provincial education departments should constitute formal multi-tier coordination mechanisms for intra-provincial sharing of knowledge and best practices. These mechanisms can be established in the form of multi-tier coordination committees and by nomination of focal points/persons for each tier at provincial and district levels.

6. Vertical coordination

- **Enhance and streamline opportunities for vertical coordination structures at the provincial, district, and sub-district tiers.**
- The absence of well-established workflow processes and reporting lines makes middle-tier managers' job cumbersome. **Provincial education departments should document standardized workflow processes with clear reporting lines to improve work efficiency of middle-tier education managers.**
- To fill the existing horizontal and vertical coordination gaps, **provincial education departments may outline plans for regular meetings with other subordinate organizations at the provincial level. Similarly, a vertical coordination loop may be established for regular interaction with district education offices across districts.**
- To improve coordination and collaboration at the district level, **an education coordination committee may be formed in each district led by the district administrative head (that is, the DC).** These committees may have representation from all relevant departments at the district level. Regular quarterly meetings may be convened to extend needed support that DEMs (middle-tier managers) require from other departments within the district.

7. Strategic engagement of middle-tier managers

- To align education policy and planning with realities on the ground and for their effective implementation, **provincial education departments should put greater emphasis on involving middle-tier managers in setting priorities, sector policy and planning, teacher training, exams and assessments, etc.**

4.

For middle-tier officers and managers to take strategic action, their priorities, roles, and responsibilities must be clearly indicated. Research shows that without this clarity, they may resort to setting ad hoc priorities and adhering to strictly formalized rules, rather than taking initiative to foster instructional improvements or support (George, Walker, and Monster, 2019; IIEP-UNESCO et al., 2021).

4. Clarity of roles and responsibilities

As discussed in the earlier sections of this report, provinces in Pakistan have established distinct management cadres to clarify the mandates, roles, and responsibilities of the district-level offices. The literature reviewed in this study (Academy of Education Planning and Management, 2015; World Bank, 2019; see *Section 2* for details), however, highlights significant inconsistencies in the nomenclature (e.g., using different job titles for the same or equivalent administrative positions), structure, and mandates of district-level management across Punjab, Sindh, and KP. These inconsistencies have led to overlapping responsibilities, duplication of efforts, and gaps in the mandated functions across offices – a situation that has also been documented in the wider literature (Burns and Köster, 2016; George, Walker, and Monster, 2019; Klijn et al., 2015).

This section looks at whether the roles and responsibilities of organizations are clear to the staff within them, and whether organizational activities go beyond their agreed roles and responsibilities. This helps to identify where there are overlaps or duplications of roles and responsibilities both within and beyond the organizations (Bryson, George, and Seo, 2024; Klijn et al., 2015; Kools and Stoll, 2016; Yang, Watkins, and Marsick, 2004). In Pakistan, changing priorities have led to misalignment of roles and responsibilities across the education system, and to different organizations offering similar services.

4.1. Overlap in the roles and responsibilities of some offices and institutions leads to duplication of efforts

4.1.1. Expanded mandates of provincial and district education authorities have led to several overlaps within offices and tiers

Alignment of roles and responsibilities across the system is essential to address potential conflicts or overlaps between organizations who might offer similar services, and it is important to keep in mind that these might change, formally or informally, over time (Burns and Köster, 2016; Klijn et al., 2015).

In Punjab, the roles and responsibilities of provincial education authorities and DEAs have expanded following the devolution of key education functions to the provinces. However, comprehensive rules of business that clearly define mandates, operations, and responsibilities remain lacking. Such rules typically provide a framework for public administration, especially in terms of operations, definitions, and constraints related to a specific office. They serve as a clear guide to recruitment policies, promotion and career progression pathways, terms and conditions of service, responsibilities for each designation and post, accountability and performance evaluation processes, and more. Their absence has caused significant operational ambiguities. For instance, AEOs as well as Monitoring and Evaluation Assistants in Punjab are tasked with similar monitoring and data-collection responsibilities, creating redundancy.

A similar situation exists in Sindh, where identical functions such as monitoring and data collection have been assigned to multiple offices and management tiers without clear delineation of roles.

In KP, the lack of coordination is evident in the previously independent operations of the Independent Monitoring Unit and the EMIS. Both entities collect education data separately, with no formal mechanisms for coordination or sharing of resources, further exemplifying the inefficiencies caused by unclear mandates. With the merger of the Independent Monitoring Unit and the Education Monitoring Authority (KPEMA) provided some segregation in data-collection domains. As of now, the EMA conducts an annual school census and maintains digital dashboards at the provincial and district levels to perform certain monitoring activities. Working in parallel, EMIS focuses on collection of more comprehensive datasets for analysis, planning, and

reporting purposes. Ideally, all these functions (monitoring, planning, and reporting) can be performed by one institution; however, bringing clarity regarding the functions of various organizations may be considered a step in the right direction.

What's more, DEMs are also responsible for conducting school visits for monitoring and data collection, but this key task appears to be overlapping between different positions and departments at the district and sub-district levels. For example, in Punjab, AEOs and Monitoring and Evaluation Assistants work under DEAs and DMOs, respectively, performing similar monitoring and data-collection duties. Overlapping mandates and limited understanding of job responsibilities not only minimize horizontal collaboration among middle-tier officials but further contribute to unnecessary competition among key offices and managers. This lack of cooperation can lead to inefficient use of resources and staff due to duplication of efforts. Moreover, it results in lack of coherence and missing links in the data collected by different district-level offices and officials, leading to ineffective decision-making at the middle tier.

4.1.2. Overlapping mandates among multiple provincial and allied institutions add unnecessary complexity

A World Bank (2019) study highlighted significant overlaps, unclear mandates, and gaps in coordination among allied institutions within the education sector across all three provinces. In Punjab, the PMIU, Punjab Examination Commission, and the SED share overlapping responsibilities, since they all collect data about student assessment and school performance. In Sindh, multiple institutions tasked with professional development have overlapping functions, including the Provincial Institute of Teacher Education (PITE), STEDA, the Directorate of Human Resources and Training, and Directorate of Teacher Training Institutions. Similarly in KP, the EMIS and the Independent Monitoring Unit independently collect education indicator data without formal coordination or sharing of resources, adding complexity and leading to inefficiencies. This focus on access and use of data is further explored in *Section 7*. These challenges underline the need for updated and comprehensive rules of business (or mandates) to eliminate overlaps, streamline responsibilities, and enhance the efficiency of education management structures and offices across all three provinces.

In Wales (United Kingdom) and Latvia (see *Box 0.1*), reviews of middle-tier roles and responsibilities were undertaken to identify overlapping mandates and (re)define the role of the middle tier in relation to school improvement and quality assurance.

Box 0.1. Reviewing the roles and responsibilities of the middle tier for school improvement

Wales (United Kingdom)

In 2023, the Welsh Government initiated an independent and comprehensive review to clarify the roles and responsibilities of organizations and partners within the education system, including the middle tier. The review consisted of a widespread survey as well as meetings with school leaders, the managing directors (or Leads) of the current five regional consortia/partnerships, officer representatives from the 22 local authorities, as well as university representatives and key national partners.

The review aimed to identify areas of duplicated mandates, address any gaps in provision, and provide clear descriptions of responsibility and accountability for each entity involved. It also explored how different organizations within the education system could collaborate effectively to support learners and education professionals.

Source: Welsh Government (2023, 2024).

Latvia

In 2023, the Latvia Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) asked the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to undertake an institutional capacity assessment of its education system, with a focus on the MoES, three national agencies, and its 43 municipalities.

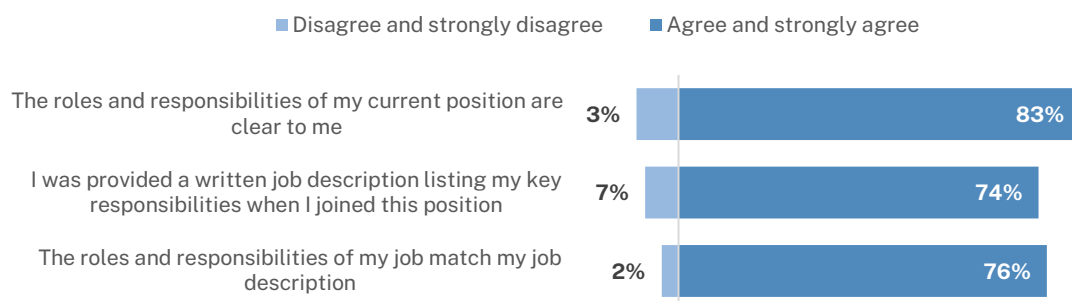
The assessment covered five levers. It found the lever ‘clarity of roles and responsibilities’ to be in an established stage of development. Indeed, the roles and responsibilities of organizations within the system were quite well defined, and staff responding to the survey largely indicated that their roles and responsibilities were clear to them. However, these were not always respected, and several organizations tended to go beyond their mandates. Furthermore, while a new Education Law had clarified the new roles and responsibilities of municipalities for monitoring and school improvement support, these changes were not always known and well understood by staff, schools, and other stakeholders in all municipalities, risking misunderstanding and inaction. It was recommended that the MoES, the association for Latvian municipalities, and the management of municipal departments of education should collaborate to better disseminate the new Education Law to ensure that changes in roles and responsibilities are actually enacted. It also recommended that one national agency should focus on school quality assurance, while another should focus on the provision of school improvement support.

Source: OECD (2024a).

4.2. Ambiguity contributes to gaps in the allocation of roles and responsibility

Respondents to the survey generally reported that the roles and responsibilities of their positions were clear to them, and that roles and responsibilities of their job match their job description (see *Figure 0.1*).

Figure 0.1. Agreement with statements regarding the allocation of roles and responsibilities



Note: N = 58 for all questions. Neutral responses are the complement to reach 100%.

Source: Authors' calculations based on IIEP-UNESCO, I-SAPS, and UNESCO Islamabad office (2024a).

However, in contrast with these findings, many participants in the key informant interviews expressed uncertainty about the full scope of their duties. When asked about their day-to-day responsibilities, most district officials listed administrative, monitoring, and reporting responsibilities, but did not mention their role as teaching leaders and community liaisons.

4.2.1. The share of administrative tasks undermines the capacity of staff to undertake teaching and learning support roles

Across all three provinces, officials commonly identified school supervision, monitoring visits, and data collection as their primary responsibilities. However, one-third of respondents said they are unable to fully perform their tasks due to the overwhelming burden of administrative duties, such as managing budgets/salaries, preparing reports, and handling paperwork. One sub-district education management official emphasized this challenge in an interview:

The DDEO job description is to look after the middle school and to take charge of the district education office in the absence of the DEO. However, most of my official hours are spent on arranging the salary and other financial matters of the schools.

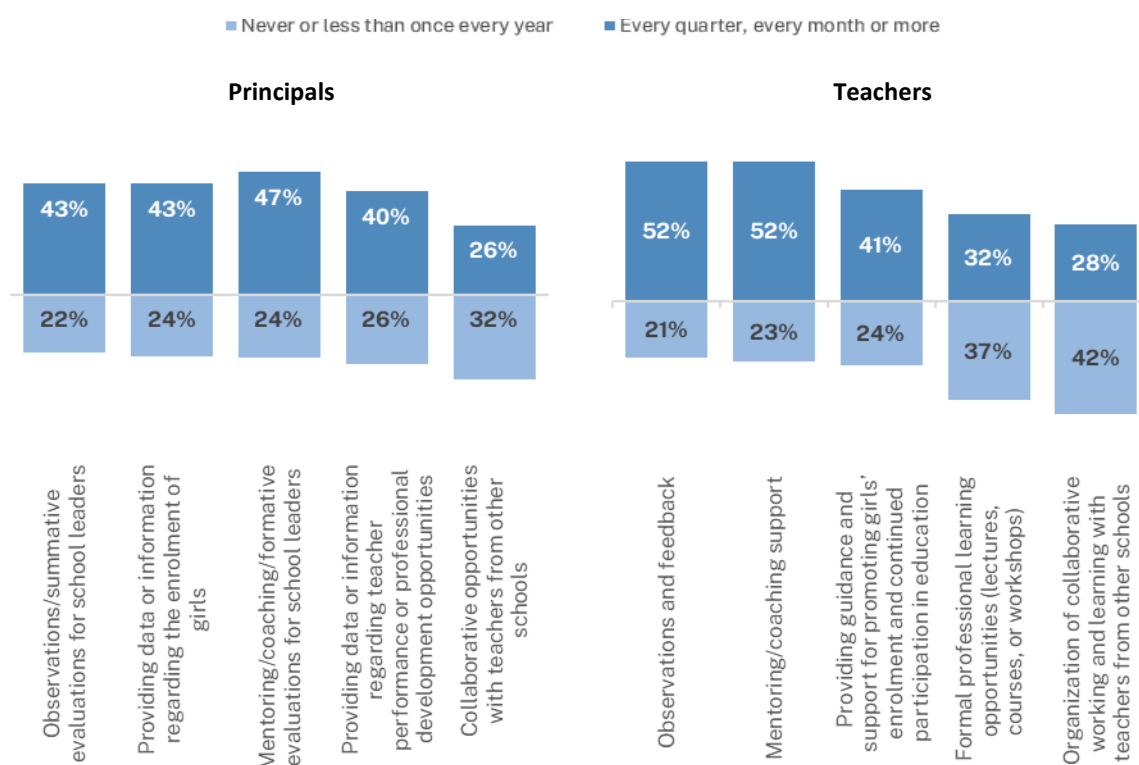
District official, KP

When asked to list their regular tasks, most district officials only highlighted administrative responsibilities and only one-quarter mentioned their mentoring role in supporting teaching and learning. This lack of understanding creates significant challenges in improving educational outcomes. Without recognizing their role as mentors, officials miss opportunities to effectively support and develop teaching staff effectively, creating a disconnect between administrative policies and classroom practices that ultimately has an impact upon student achievement.

What’s more, middle-tier education managers in all three provinces are frequently assigned additional tasks unrelated to the education sector, including population censuses, polio campaigns, dengue eradication efforts, and election duties. These responsibilities further stop them from focusing on their core roles such as supporting teaching and learning to improve education service delivery.

In terms of different types of support given to staff, there are disparities between the frequencies of receiving such support reported by principals and by teachers, as shown in *Figure 0.2*. A higher proportion of teachers reported having infrequent opportunities to collaborate and learn with teachers from other schools than did principals (a difference of 10 percentage points in those saying that such opportunities happen less than once every year or never). A higher proportion of teachers also reported that they receive frequent observations and feedback (quarterly, monthly, or more) compared with principals, and the same is true for mentoring and coaching support.

Figure 0.2. Perception of types of support provided



Note: N = 138 for principals, 141 for teachers. ‘Once every year’ and ‘Once every six months’ responses are the complement to reach 100%.

Source: Authors’ calculations based on IIEP-UNESCO, I-SAPS, and UNESCO Islamabad office (2024b, 2024c).

4.2.2. Middle-tier managers at the district level have limited autonomy to assume finance roles and responsibilities

One major challenge for middle-tier managers is the ad hoc approach to addressing problems, rather than implementation of systematic and sustainable solutions. Although legal restructuring of the administration in 2000 and 2010 delegated strategic planning responsibilities to districts, officials across provinces reported limited involvement in identifying issues, setting priorities, or creating targeted responses.

District officials noted their inability to influence decisions at the provincial level, which they view as a missed opportunity – something also noted in *Section 3* on 3. Institutional and organizational structures fit for purpose. Strategic plans and financial allocations are devised at the provincial level without adequate consultation, leaving districts unable to tailor plans to their unique challenges. For instance, the five-year district education plans in Punjab and KP were developed under the leadership of provincial departments, with little engagement from district management.

A World Bank (2019) report highlighted that district education plans developed by the SED in Punjab and ESED in KP failed to achieve their targets due to weak ownership and poor coordination.

Middle-tier managers also lack discretionary control over spending resource distribution within their jurisdictions. Provincial officials determine criteria for resource allocation, leaving districts with insufficient funds for critical functions like monitoring. An official in Sindh highlighted this issue:

As a matter of fact, needs are not being met adequately, there are budgetary issues, and DEO and TEO offices do not have adequate transportation facilities and POL [petroleum, oil, and lubricants] funds. The provincial government ignores district-level requirements, which makes it impossible to meet result-oriented targets set in district and provincial strategic plans.

District official, Sindh

Box 0.2: Recommendations – Clarity of roles and responsibilities

- **Clarify the roles and responsibilities of offices and institutions to avoid duplication of efforts.**
- To streamline governance structures and overlapping mandates, **provincial governments may form a task force or working group comprising of education policy and governance experts in their respective provinces to take stock of issues and challenges faced by education managers working at different levels.** These commissions should review fragmented structures, imbricated mandates, employment policies, and management practices to come up with workable solutions to improve education service delivery at provincial, district, and school levels. They can also **work together to promote best practices and work through common challenges across provinces.**
- With regard to addressing challenges faced by DEAs in Punjab, there is a need to **provide these DEAs with necessary administrative and financial autonomy.** In the case of Punjab, placing DEAs under the DC makes them less effective,⁸ as the DC is responsible for multiple departments at the district level; hence with diluted focus, it is difficult to dedicate the time and leadership required to lead the education sector.
- **Clarify the roles and responsibilities of middle-tier staff to avoid role ambiguity and gaps.**
- In order to harmonize roles and responsibilities of middle-tier managers, **provincial education departments may revisit the existing job descriptions to make them realistic and aligned with the diverse roles they perform, including to reflect their responsibility in driving**

⁸ To ensure DEAs work as independent bodies, the District Education Authority Act 2017 requires the CEO to act as Principal Account Officer and Chief Operating Officer, but the Act has not yet been fully implemented.

learning improvement efforts. The extended scope of work under revised job descriptions may also add responsibility to deal with emerging trends, for example public–private partnerships, inclusivity, and gender aspects (see *Section 8.3*).

- While revising job descriptions, the current structure of district education offices should also be reviewed from an organizational development perspective. Within these offices, human resources, general administration, finance, and training sections may be established to improve workflow and efficiency.
- In addition to restructuring district education offices, two separate positions may be created at tehsil/taluka level (DDEO – Field and DDEO – Admin) to give further clarity of roles and responsibilities and ultimately improve learning outcomes.
- For simplified financial management and providing middle-tier managers with the space to focus on other key areas, **provincial education departments may introduce financial management information and e-procurement systems tailored for the education sector.** These systems should automate budget planning, financial reporting, and procurement processes, providing education managers with real-time insights into their finances.
- To ensure effective utilization of available funds, the education budget should be made non-lapsable, as funds are usually released during the last quarter of the financial year and district managers find it difficult to utilize them within a short period of time. District managers’ fears around being audited also work as a discouraging factor in the timely utilization of these funds.
- District education offices should be empowered through the delegation of greater financial authority, including control over Account IV (District Budget), to ensure more effective and locally responsive use of funds.
- Provincial education departments should introduce e-procurement systems to streamline administrative processes and reduce the burden on middle-tier education managers. In the case of Punjab, although an e-procurement system has recently been deployed, its effective operation requires timely and targeted training of education managers to build the necessary capacity and ensure smooth implementation.
- In order to facilitate classroom learning, provincial education departments should reassess the current role of middle-tier education managers with the following considerations:
 - Provincial education departments may **provide clear policy discourse and requisite resources to ensure middle-tier managers effectively participate in classroom observation, mentorship, and peer learning activities.**
 - Through dedicated training, middle-tier managers should be enabled to perform classroom observation, mentorship, and peer learning. The administrative workload of middle-tier managers should also be minimized to encourage them to participate in such activities.
 - Alternatively, provincial education departments may **consider establishing a separate mentorship stream (example of school leaders from KP) within middle-tier management to support teachers and school heads to improve classroom learning.** If a separate management stream (like in KP) is not viable, then job descriptions should be revised and

specific time allocated for each of these tasks, including dedicated time for school visits to support learning.

- It is further recommended to capacitate and empower head teachers to take on these roles, given their consistent presence within schools and the cost-efficiency of utilizing existing human resources without incurring additional expenditure.

5. Competent and motivated staff

A successful education management system heavily relies on effective service delivery by competent and motivated staff across various tiers of management. Evidence shows that competence, motivation, incentives, and better learning environments have positive bearings on the overall performance of education managers and teachers, and are linked to achieving improved student learning outcomes. Without competent and motivated personnel, local education officers may struggle to fulfil their functions and impact teaching and learning effectively (Dogaru, 2015; OECD, 2012, 2023a). The issue is not about individual blame but systemic challenges such as poor candidate selection and lack of career incentives. Transparent recruitment, accessible and ongoing professional development, and attractive career incentives are strategies to maintain a motivated and capable workforce. Job satisfaction, work–life balance, and well-being are also important but often neglected (Caillier, 2016; Gouédard, Kools, and George, 2023; Hansen and Høst, 2012).

In almost all provinces in Pakistan, DEMs lack smooth career progression, clear mandates, tailored induction, and in-service professional development opportunities and performance incentives to keep them motivated and performing better. These challenges are further compounded by reluctance at provincial government level to delegate the required administrative and financial autonomy to district education offices (see *Section Error! Reference source not found.* on *Error! Reference source not found.*). In the absence of such motivational factors and performance incentives, middle-tier education managers struggle to find reasons to be more industrious and perform their tasks to the best of their abilities, resulting in the education sector in general underperforming. To improve this, the situation necessitates a governance and policy framework that harmonizes service structures with clear mandates and performance-based career progression together with comprehensive inductions and in-service professional development. Like any other top-performing organization, education departments should also recognize the performance of DEMs by acknowledging and incentivizing their services.

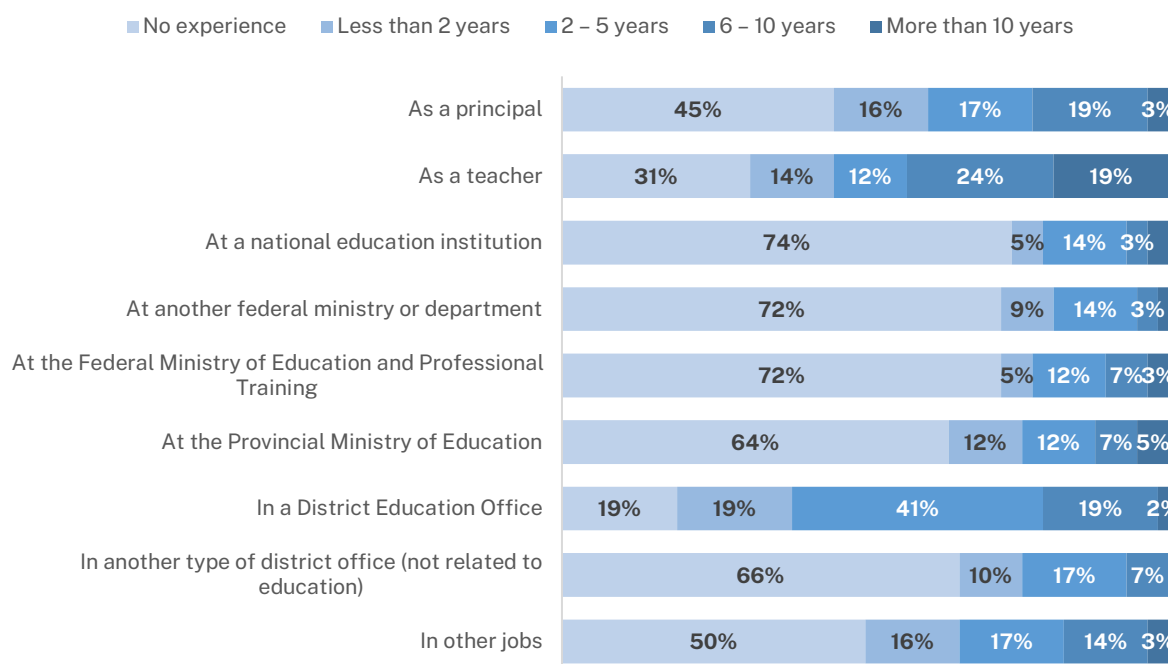
5.1. Current appointment and induction mechanisms do not set up middle-tier managerial staff for success

5.1.1. Most middle-tier managers are appointed without prior experience in management positions

The study found mixed responses regarding the performance of the DEMCs and administrative systems experimented in the three studied provinces – Punjab, Sindh, and KP. In most cases, middle-tier education managers are appointed or promoted from teaching positions without adequate specialist management training or prior experience in administrative roles. This practice often proves unproductive as managers are not well equipped to address critical issues such as student retention and learning outcomes.

This study has looked at the years of professional experience by position and/or organization (see *Figure 0.1*). Results indicate that a significant proportion of middle-tier education managers come from a teaching background. For example, 55% of respondents reported having more than two years of teaching experience, while 39% had at least two years of experience as school principals prior to their current role, with 22% claiming to have at least six years. Respondents who spent the longest time as teachers or school principals before moving into the middle tier typically reported lower levels of formal education. Additionally, less than 15% of respondents reported to holding a degree in management, with the majority (65%) having degrees in teacher education or educational sciences (IIEP-UNESCO, I-SAPS, and UNESCO Islamabad office, 2024a).

Figure 0.1. Years of experience of district officials by position and/or organization



Note: N = 58 for all questions.

Source: Authors' calculations based on IIEP-UNESCO, I-SAPS, and UNESCO Islamabad office (2024a).

5.1.2. Most middle-tier managers do not receive adequate induction training

Inadequate induction training for teachers taking on managerial roles is another notable issue. International development partners such as UNESCO, UK-Aid, Plan International, USAID, UNICEF, and the British Council, along with local civil society, have implemented various training initiatives to enhance the managerial competencies of DEOs. Such training has covered areas such as budget management, gender-sensitive planning, and monitoring education quality. However, most of these initiatives were ad hoc or one-off events, and they were not institutionalized within the relevant allied provincial institutions responsible for CPD.

Out of all three provinces, only the middle-tier officials interviewed in KP confirmed that they have received specialist training related to their management positions. This training was provided through the PITE and DCTE in the province. In contrast, only one official interviewed from Sindh reported receiving training from the RSU, whereas none of the middle-tier officials in Punjab claimed to have received specialist training for their management role. The survey findings further illustrate this disparity. While 70% of all respondents reported receiving specialist training before assuming their current positions, the proportions varied significantly across provinces: 77% in KP, 69% in Sindh, and only 50% in Punjab (IIEP-UNESCO, I-SAPS, and UNESCO Islamabad office, 2024a), as shown in *Table 0.1*.

Table 0.1. Reported participation in specialist training before beginning current position, 2024

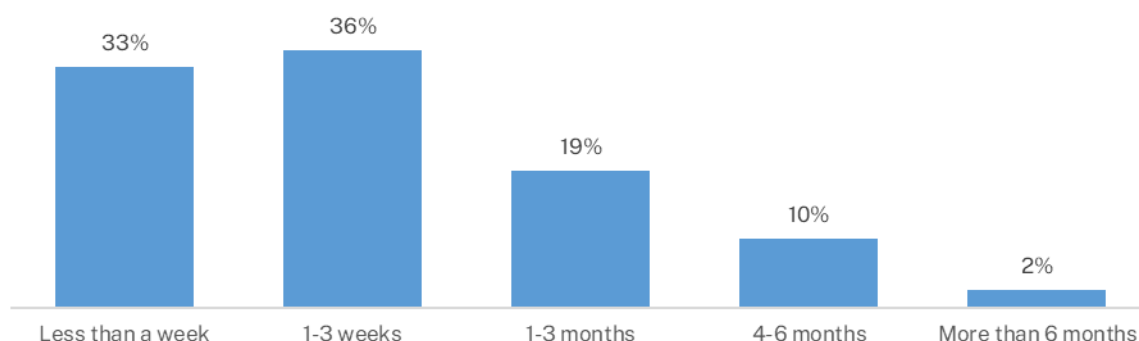
	KP	Punjab	Sindh	Total
Did not receive specialist training	23%	50%	31%	30%
Received specialist training	77%	50%	69%	70%

Note: N is 58 for all questions.

Source: Authors' calculations based on IIEP-UNESCO, I-SAPS, and UNESCO Islamabad office, 2024a.

Moreover, in the majority of cases (71%), training programmes last three weeks or less, which arguably does not give new managers sufficient time to absorb and retain the amount of information that is expected of them before taking on their new roles (see *Figure 0.2*).

Figure 0.2. Length of training received before taking up current position



Note: N = 42 for all questions.

Source: Authors' calculations based on IIEP-UNESCO, I-SAPS, and UNESCO Islamabad office (2024a).

The lack of adequately experienced and trained staff in district education management positions appears to be one factor contributing to poor district performance on key education quality indicators. Having prior experience in management is crucial because it equips staff with the skills needed to effectively oversee operations, make informed decisions, and implement strategies that improve educational outcomes. Managers with relevant backgrounds are better prepared to handle the complexities of educational administration and can provide more targeted support to teachers and schools. This experience fosters a more efficient and productive environment, ultimately benefiting student retention and learning achievements in schools across the districts and provinces in Pakistan.

Officials at the provincial level also affirmed during interviews that the lack of specialist training and previous experience in administrative roles were key challenges faced by education management personnel at the district level. The provincial officials suggested that more training and support should be provided to education management personnel to help them develop the skills necessary to manage effectively. Furthermore, it was suggested that emphasis should be placed on ensuring that district and sub-district education managers are adequately qualified and experienced to take on these roles.

5.2. Tenure insecurity, unclear career progression, and lack of incentives for middle-tier staff impact job performance and motivation

5.2.1. Frequent and arbitrary transfers of middle-tier officials at the district and provincial levels may have negative implications for education sector management and performance.

Another critical issue impacting middle-tier staff is tenure insecurity. Frequent transfers and postings within districts or to other districts have negative implications for education sector management and performance. One-third of DEMs interviewed across the three provinces indicated that their service tenures were not secure. For example, while some officials in KP reported a minimum tenure of three years was required for a district cadre position, they noted that most administrators were transferred within a year. Interviewees from all districts noted that it was common for middle-tier officials to be moved to other assignments within their district, or to another district in their province. Evidence from the study showed that while turnover rates vary from district to district, the tenures of middle-tier managers occasionally span only a few months. Officials from KP and Punjab observed that this situation hinders efficient planning, adversely affecting districts' overall education service delivery.

District officials indicated that job security is influenced by multiple factors, including adherence to provincial instructions, maintaining good relations with local political figures, and having positive relationships with pressure groups such as teacher unions. They highlighted that postings and transfers are frequently influenced by provincial decisions, performance evaluations, and, at times, political actors. For example, one official in KP stated:

Postings and transfers are determined by provincial-level decisions. The secretariat handles the transfer of DEOs, considering factors such as experience, performance, and sometimes political influences.

District official, KP

The issue of tenure insecurity and frequent transfers does not seem to be limited to the district level. Several interviews conducted at the provincial level revealed similar challenges faced by provincial officials. KP provincial officials reported that frequent postings and transfers of staff have a detrimental effect on the efficiency of their department. Although some of the positions have a minimum tenure of three years, changes in institutional structures and policy priorities, as well as political interference, have played a major role in the frequent posting and transfer of provincial education officials.

Officials in Punjab and Sindh pointed out that although they have job security, there is no position or designation security, since officials in key positions are frequently transferred and posted to different provincial education offices and allied institutions without their managers or departments being consulted. It is their opinion that the transfer policy is inadequate, since there appear to be no set factors or reasons except political interference that lead to transfers.

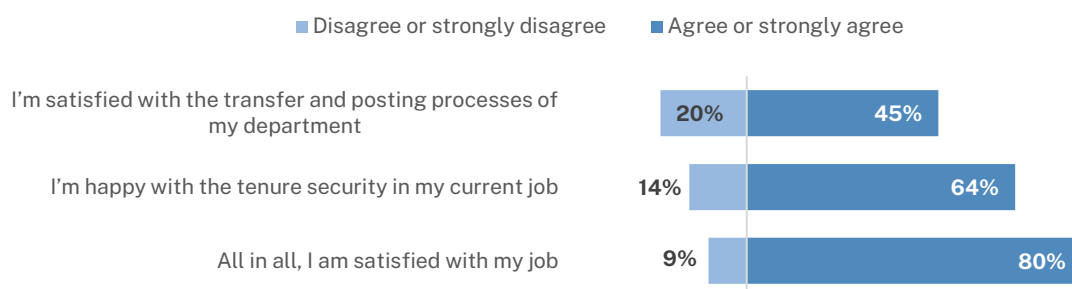
Political interference is a major challenge and, at times, the sole reason behind the premature transfer of education managers. If this could be better managed, it would give us a real opportunity to perform and uphold merit.

Middle-tier manager, Sindh

To be effective, provincial officials stressed the importance of institutional memory and the fact that it takes time for the staff to become familiar with the dynamics of their position. In a significant number of cases, provincial education officials are transferred from one position to another before they are able to become fully familiar with the requirements and priorities of their current position. In this context, facilitating the successful implementation of policies becomes challenging for officials. To address this issue, provincial education officials should have a longer tenure in their positions so that they can gain a better understanding of the dynamics of their role and the needs of their stakeholders. This would help them to better implement policies and achieve the reform agenda and goals set by their respective departments.

Contrary to the findings from the semi-structured interviews, the district officials who responded to the online questionnaire reported a high level of job satisfaction, with 80% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they are satisfied with their jobs, and with only 14% reporting that they disagree or strongly disagree with the assertion that their current job offers them tenure security. This is more nuanced in terms of respondents' opinions of the transfer and posting processes in their departments, where only 45% said they were satisfied with them, and one in five respondents felt the contrary (IIEP-UNESCO, I-SAPS, and UNESCO Islamabad office, 2024a). Note that these findings are significant given the reticence of survey participants to respond negatively to questions with a socially desirable response.

Figure 0.3. Reported feeling of job security, transfer and posting processes, and overall job satisfaction



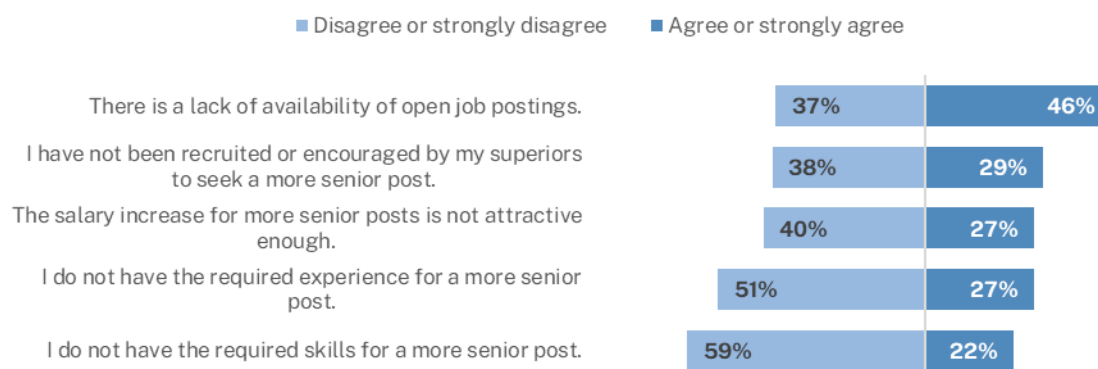
Note: N = 46 for all questions. Neutral responses are the complement to reach 100%.
 Source: Authors' calculations based on IIEP-UNESCO, I-SAPS, and UNESCO Islamabad office (2024a).

5.2.2. Lack of career advancement opportunities and lack of incentives may negatively impact district officials' morale and engagement

At the district level, tenure insecurity is made even more challenging by a lack of career advancement opportunities for officials. There is a risk that such lack of career progression opportunities may negatively impact district officials' morale and engagement. It is important to recognize that when middle-tier managers feel that their growth is stunted, they are less motivated to do their best in the job. In the long run, this may result in greater dissatisfaction among officials as well as a decline in their efficiency.

This is further confirmed by the findings from the online survey. Almost half of all respondents reported the lack of available open job postings as a barrier to career progression, as shown in Figure 5.4. Many respondents felt they were unable to progress to more senior posts despite having the required skills (59% disagreed with the notion that they are not sufficiently skilled to step up) and experience (51% disagreed that they lacked adequate experience for career progression).

Figure 0.4. Perceived barriers to career progression

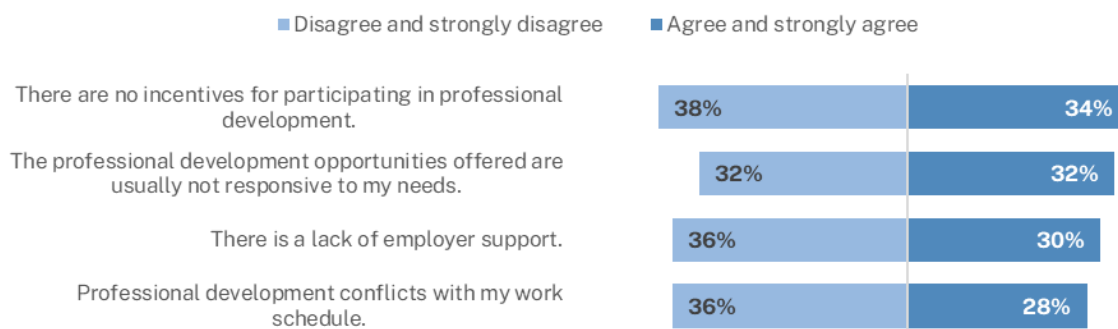


Note: N = 46 for all questions. Neutral responses are the complement to get to 100%.
 Source: Authors' calculations based on IIEP-UNESCO, I-SAPS, and UNESCO Islamabad office (2024a).

Moreover, managers in the middle tier are rarely provided with opportunities for career advancement, performance incentives, or continued professional growth. According to participants in the district-level interviews, their efforts and services are rarely acknowledged through rewards and incentives, despite always working hard and completing all their assigned responsibilities. District officials interviewed in this study, except for those in Mohmand district, expressed that their provincial government does not offer regular incentives or rewards for improving education indicators and services. As opposed to being evaluated based on how well they improve education services, they are evaluated according to how well they perform all the other administrative tasks and indicators assigned by their provincial managers, district administrations, and political leaders. The disconnect between actual responsibilities and performance evaluation processes makes district officials feel undervalued. This, in turn, potentially leads to a decline in the quality of education services.

The online survey of district officials confirms this, with the same proportion of respondents saying that they have no incentives to participate in professional development to those that disagree with this statement. This, considering the bias towards giving socially acceptable answers, means that the issue is even more pressing. Likewise, a considerable number of respondents said that the professional development opportunities offered do not respond to their needs, that they do not have employer support, or that such opportunities tend to conflict with their work schedule, as shown in *Figure 0.5*.

Figure 0.5. (Dis)incentives for professional development



Note: N = 47 for all questions. Neutral responses are the complement to reach 100%.

Source: Authors' calculations based on IIEP-UNESCO, I-SAPS, and UNESCO Islamabad office (2024a).

Unlike district officials, head teachers and schools in districts receive performance incentives for improving learning outcomes and education indicators. During interviews, district officials in KP and Punjab noted that teachers and schools receive key performance incentives and rewards for improving learning outcomes as well as enhancing student attendance and retention rates. Some of these incentives include teacher recognition and awards (such as being named 'star teachers'), school performance bonuses, professional development opportunities, and resource allocation based on school needs. These incentives are designed to encourage teachers and schools to focus on improving learning outcomes. They are also meant to recognize and reward teachers and schools for their efforts and achievements. Providing incentives such as performance bonuses, recognition awards or certificates, and professional development opportunities to DEMs could help foster motivation and encourage a stronger focus on improving the quality of education services.

5.3. Middle-tier staff need to be provided with relevant and sustainable continuous professional learning

Ensuring quality learning in the classroom is a shared responsibility among teachers, head teachers, and DEMs. As learning leaders, middle-tier managers play a critical role in improving education quality and service delivery. However, empirical evidence from this study indicates that their current responsibilities are predominantly focused on administrative tasks, such as enrolment drives, monitoring teachers' attendance, managing textbook supplies, and overseeing postings and transfers. This focus on administrative matters leaves little room for more impactful activities, such as observation of classroom practice, conducting learning assessments, providing teacher training, and mentoring school leaders and teachers (see *Section Error! Reference source not found.* on *Error! Reference source not found.*).

This study demonstrates that DEMs require capacity-building in administrative, planning, and financial management. However, the officials from districts Swat (KP), Muzaffargarh (Punjab), and Tharparkar (Sindh) confirmed that, currently, there are no training or professional development opportunities available to them. These officials also highlighted that there are no department-wide professional development plans or strategies in place that consider the capacity needs and priorities of middle-tier managers (see *Section 0* on *6*. Strong learning culture).

Professional development opportunities that align with the learning leadership and mentoring roles of middle-

tier managers are urgently needed. These managers are essential in the administration, planning, financial management, and delivery of education services at provincial and district levels. Effective performance in these functions requires thorough understanding of government rules of business, planning and budgeting processes, and procurement procedures. However, interviews conducted during this study highlight a significant gap in the availability of ongoing learning opportunities, with no clear professional development plan or vision in place for middle-tier education managers. The example in *Box 0.1* describes efforts in Guyana to create a leadership academy to strengthen leadership at the district and school levels.

Box 0.1. Enhancing the effectiveness of the middle tier through tailored professional development in Guyana

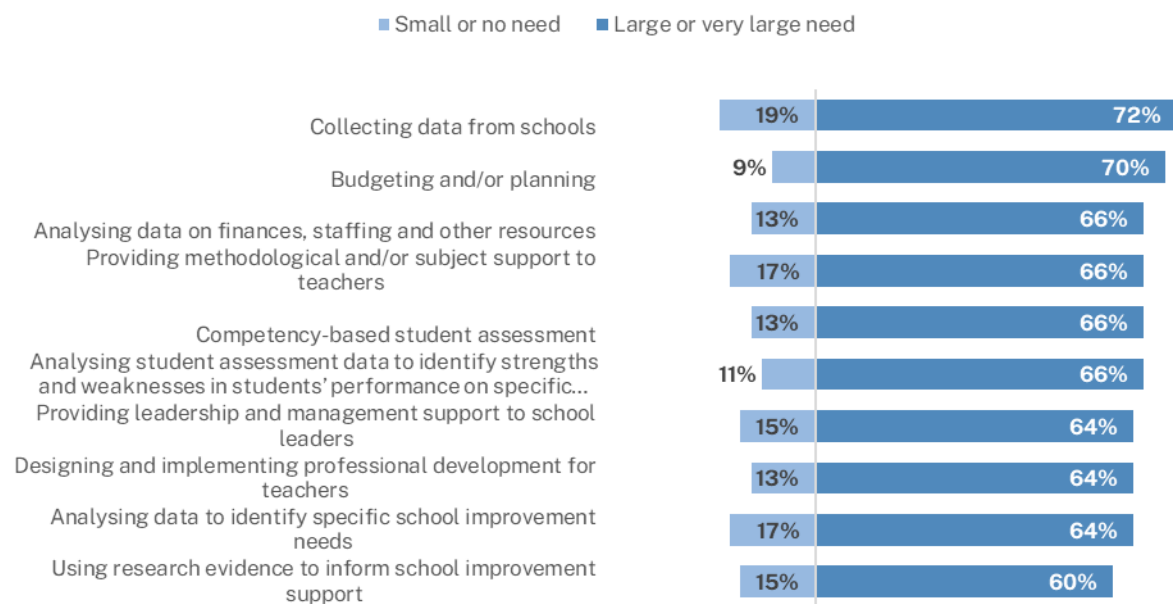
From 2025 to 2028, the Ministry of Education in Guyana will implement middle-tier reform to strengthen district and school leadership. Supported by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), this initiative is part of a broader systematic effort, outlined in a Partnership Compact. The reform focuses on professional development of the middle tier, including the creation of a leadership academy, as well as revision of job descriptions, career paths, and office structures. More specifically, it is expected that leaders at the district level will be equipped and held accountable for leading transformation, be able to use data and evidence for decision-making, and be provided with quality support from the central and regional levels, and that districts and schools will be inclusive and culturally responsive. Additionally, it is expected that the resource allocation formula for districts and schools will be revised, alongside measures to improve collaboration and coordination, both between decentralized levels and horizontally at the local level. The overarching aim is to expand educational access, particularly for the most disadvantaged children and young people in Guyana.

Source: Guyana (2023).

It was also highlighted by officials from all districts in the three provinces that the existing professional development programmes offered by staff development institutes/departments focus mostly on teacher training. They also believe that the current professional development mechanisms are not sensitive to the capacity requirements and expressed needs of middle-tier managers. In their opinion, middle-tier management serves as the backbone of the public education sector, but existing CPD models largely undermine the professional development needs of the management cadre.

There is, however, a high reported demand for different types of professional development, as shown in *Figure 5.6*, with more than 70% of respondents indicating a large or very large need for professional development in collecting data from schools as well as budgeting and/or planning.

Figure 0.6. Expressed need for professional development



Note: N = 47 for all questions. Neutral responses are the complement to reach 100%.
Source: Authors' calculations based on IIEP-UNESCO, I-SAPS, and UNESCO Islamabad office (2024a).

Earlier studies by the World Bank (2019) and Asian Development Bank (2021) have highlighted capacity and skill development areas, such as school-level monitoring and mentoring, data-driven and needs-based strategic planning and target setting, whole-school improvement planning, budget preparation and execution, and IT-based approaches for middle-tier education managers, as the primary areas for improvement. There is also a need to develop the capacity of head teachers in school leadership, school budgets and financial records, and departmental rules and regulations to improve the delivery of education services by the middle tier.

Together with these traditional domains, middle-tier managers need to be oriented on other emerging trends, including but not limited to education in emergencies, resilience, public–private partnerships, participatory planning and budgeting, and community engagement. Such advanced training would fully equip middle-tier management to address multifaceted education sector challenges. Training programmes aimed at improving various capacities of middle-tier managers (planning, financial, procurement, mentoring, decision-making, etc.) will have a positive bearing on the quality of education service delivery and improved learning outcomes at district levels. It will also enable district managers to provide meaningful inputs to provincial and sub-district managers on planning processes and effective budget utilization.

Despite reform efforts undertaken by all three provinces – including the Sindh Education Management Reforms (2014), the KP Education Management Cadre (2011), and the formation of DEAs in Punjab (2017) – a diverse set of challenges continue to limit the effectiveness of middle-tier education managers. Encouragingly, the research also indicates an awareness of these challenges within provincial education departments. Specifically, the SED in Punjab and the ESED in KP are actively working on various initiatives (see examples in *Box 5.2*) to address issues related to professional development, and the disconnect between middle-tier management and the quality of education services delivered.

Box 0.2. Examples of provincial initiatives

- In KP, the rollout of digital dashboards has provided DEMs with real-time access to school performance data, facilitating evidence-based decision-making.
- Punjab has implemented e-procurement and a Human Resource Management Information System to enhance administrative transparency and help streamline postings and transfers.
- Sindh, meanwhile, has introduced the School Monitoring System and the digitized tracking mechanism, enabling managers to monitor teacher presence, infrastructure issues, and textbook delivery more systematically.
- Additionally, all three provinces are also experimenting with online training platforms and performance appraisal systems aimed at building managerial capacity at the district and sub-district levels.

In this context, the policy recommendations (*Box 5.3*) have been developed to inform and strengthen these ongoing reform processes.

Box 0.3. Recommendations – Competent and motivated staff

1. Devise appointment and induction mechanisms that set up middle-tier staff for success.

- To avoid discontinuity and learning losses, provincial governments could **link the age of superannuation of middle-tier managers, school leaders, and teachers with completion of the academic year**. Provincial education departments should initiate the hiring process well before

the superannuation of managers and teachers to discourage the current trends of positions lying vacant for months and even years. Timely availability of new managers and teachers will also discourage the practice of ad hoc posting (additional/current charge).⁹

- Provincial education departments can adopt different management models as they deem fit in their local context; however, **all middle-tier managers, regardless of their nature of posting (permanent or temporary) and the cadre they belong to (management or teaching), should receive induction training prior to taking up a new position.** This policy should be equally applicable to direct hiring or intake from the teaching cadre, or in case of temporary transfer to a management position.
- To **keep induction training programmes going, they should be funded by government resources alone**, whereas CPD training may remain open for government as well as donor funding.

2. Improve career progression processes and tenure security of middle-tier staff.

- To address the issue of frequent turnover, provincial governments **may guarantee an appropriate ‘tenure security’ to key provincial management staff and DEMs by amending the Appointment, Promotion and Transfer (AP&T) rules.**¹⁰ Provision of such tenure security should remain subject to periodic review by independent evaluators to assess the impact of the tenure policy on educational outcomes.
- Provincial education departments should **devise clear career progression paths for new and existing education managers.**

3. Provide relevant and sustainable CPD opportunities for middle tier staff.

- CPD programmes should **focus on building knowledge and capacities of middle-tier managers in terms of service rules and procedures, policy and planning, financial management, and procurement.** A hybrid training model (physical + online) may be established using available resources for delivering such training.¹¹
- While designing training programmes, education departments and donors should **carefully consider length and content, as short-duration training is generally perceived as counterproductive** for learning and adopting new management techniques.
- To keep middle-tier managers up to date with the latest developments and emerging trends (education in emergencies, inclusivity, gender, public–private partnerships, community/civil society engagement), **provincial institutes for professional development should design and run periodic refresher training sessions.**¹² Such sessions can also be planned around important events – e.g. budget preparation sessions or assessment cycles.
- Professional development institutes should devise a follow-up mechanism to ensure post-training application of learning.
- Education departments should discourage isolated and fragmented training programmes being run by various government and donor organizations.

⁹ In case of vacant positions, the additional or current charge practice provides authorities with an opportunity to appoint a junior official to a senior position. The junior official can hold that position for months and sometimes years. This practice can also cause favouritism or nepotism in some cases.

¹⁰ Punjab Civil Servants A&CS Rules (1974), Sindh Civil Servants AP&T Rules (1974), and KP AP&T Rules (1989).

¹¹ Training resources (manuals) on financial management and good governance are available from the PIE, formerly known as AEPAM.

¹² Such institutes include QAED in Punjab, DPD in KP, and PITE in Sindh.

6. Strong learning culture

A strong learning culture is one that actively demonstrates and encourages both individual and organizational learning, and where both gaining and sharing knowledge is prioritized, valued, and rewarded. Ideally, the learning culture should become part of the organizational and institutional ecosystem. Building a learning culture in public-sector organizations is crucial for developing and retaining professionals in a fast-changing work environment. It is made possible when organizations actively prioritize knowledge acquisition and equitable access to growth opportunities for all staff members. Hence, creation and maintenance of strong organizational learning cultures is important for better provision of public services and improving the skill set of those in leadership positions.

A well-developed learning culture prioritizes continuous learning, knowledge-sharing, personal development, and adaptability. Key characteristics include open communication, continuous improvement, curiosity, innovation, leadership support, and collaborative learning. These attributes create a safe space for feedback and enquiry, with leaders modelling and promoting a commitment to learning. The benefits of a robust learning culture include improved employee satisfaction, retention, problem-solving capabilities, and organizational resilience (Kools and George, 2020; Kools and Stoll, 2016; Senge et al., 2012; Yang, Watkins, and Marsick, 2004).

Research highlights the importance of fostering a learning culture among managers and professionals, enhancing their effectiveness in supporting educators and leadership (Anand and Brix, 2022; Kim, 2021; Kim, Watkins, and Lu, 2017; Lee and Jin, 2023). Without quality professional learning, collaboration, and innovation opportunities, middle-tier personnel may struggle to adopt best practices and implement new policies, limiting their impact on instructional leadership and overall teaching outcomes (Burns and Köster, 2016; Viennet and Pont, 2017).

Promoting robust and sustainable learning cultures within organizations requires a well-thought-out plan that should be included into broader workforce planning systems. Management assistance may have a substantial impact on the effectiveness of learning and development, and it is becoming increasingly important for managers to develop and maintain their teams and departments by implementing measures. However, incentive structures for learning and development need to be aligned with the learning needs of the organization and the employee. For example, learning can be considered in performance evaluations, growth plans, and promotion decisions (OECD, 2023b).

This section analyses the learning culture among middle-tier education managers in Pakistan and how they drive improvements in teaching at school level across the three provinces. It examines collaboration opportunities within and outside the office, including horizontal and vertical collaboration structures (see *Section 3*), and assesses the extent of cross-sectoral collaboration with allied institutions. It also reviews the professional development and learning plans available to the middle tier and whether managers are enabled to promote enquiry, innovation, and the use of research and good practice. Finally, it documents what managers actually do to drive learning improvements – that is, practices oriented towards improving teaching and support.

6.1. Encourage staff to engage in collaborative working and learning within and across organizations

6.1.1. Some coordination aspects exist, but they should be further encouraged at all levels

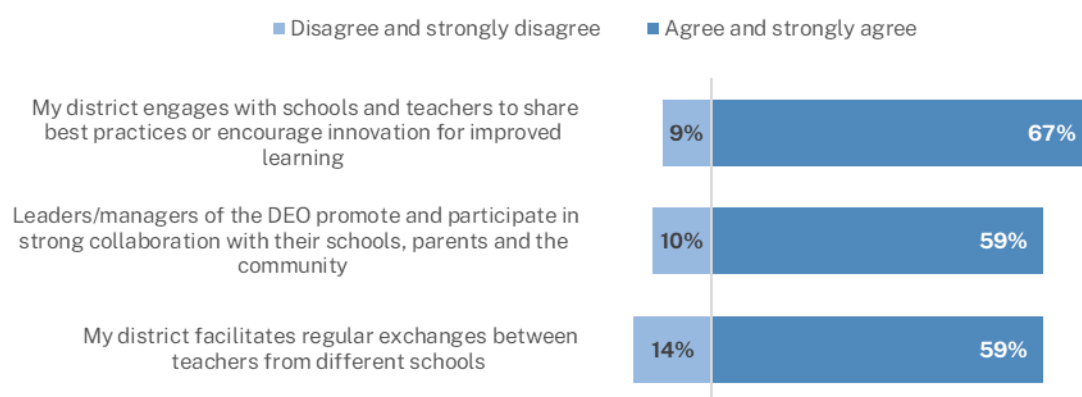
In all three provinces, there are some collaborative opportunities that allow middle-tier education managers to establish and support a learning culture at the district and school levels. For instance, as discussed in *Section 3*, the education department maintains some level of communication and coordination among its officials through

monthly meetings of the District Education Review Committee in KP, District Review Committee in Punjab, and District Education Group in Sindh. Some districts have also established communication channels with district officials and school heads through WhatsApp groups.

However, except for these WhatsApp groups and progress review and coordination meetings, no regular knowledge-sharing and collaboration opportunities or mechanisms exist within the middle tier between different departments and allied education support institutions. Based on interviews conducted with district officials across all three provinces, district officials believe that weak communication channels, conflicting priorities, limited resources, and inadequate training in teamwork and knowledge-sharing practices are the most common obstacles to effective collaboration.

At the school level, district officials that responded to the online survey tended to agree that opportunities for exchange exist and strong collaboration is promoted by the DEO, with participants encouraged to share innovations for improved learning, as shown in *Figure 0.1*.

Figure 0.1. Sharing culture at the district and school levels

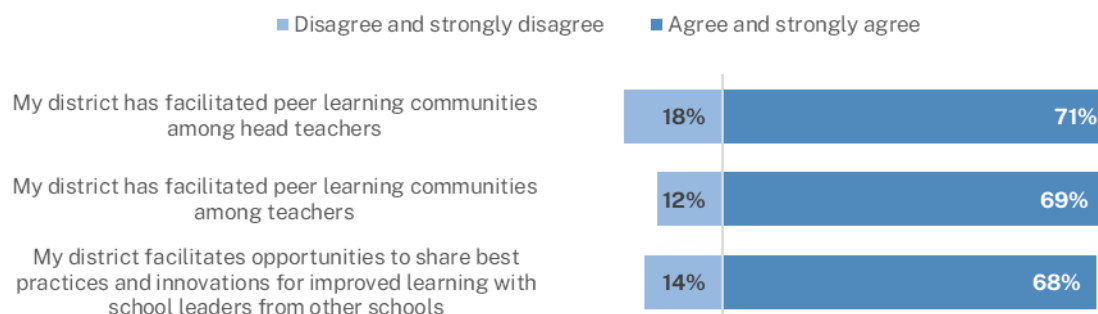


Note: N = 58 for all questions. Neutral responses are the complement to reach 100%.

Source: Authors' calculations based on IIEP-UNESCO, I-SAPS, and UNESCO Islamabad office (2024a).

This perception is confirmed by the principals' survey, in which around 70% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the district does facilitate these opportunities, both among teachers and head teachers, as shown in *Figure 0.2*. However, this view is not shared by teachers: when asked how often district personnel organize collaborative working and learning with teachers from other schools, 28% say this never happens, 13% say that it happens less than once a year, and only 29% say that this happens every quarter or every month (IIEP-UNESCO, I-SAPS, and UNESCO Islamabad office, 2024c).

Figure 0.2. Perception of the sharing culture at the school levels by surveyed principals



Note: N = 136 for all questions. Neutral responses are the complement to reach 100%.

Source: Authors' calculations based on IIEP-UNESCO, I-SAPS, and UNESCO Islamabad office (2024a).

6.1.2. A lack of communication and knowledge-sharing by the provincial education departments hinders opportunities to share best practices at all levels

Another significant challenge facing DEMs is the lack of communication and knowledge-sharing by the provincial education departments. In all three provinces, there are no regular opportunities for coordination, knowledge-sharing, and communicating best practices between provincial- and district-level education managers. Officials in KP reported that they communicate with the ESED regarding human resource issues, but the interaction is mostly on a needs basis and there is no formal mechanism in place for sharing ideas or best practices. District officials in all three provinces shared that they get the opportunity to interact with provincial officials only when they are invited to meetings and discussions on the data and progress on education indicators. DEMs also share the minutes and photographic evidence of their monthly meetings (i.e., District Education Review Committee in KP, District Review Committee in Punjab, and District Education Group in Sindh) with the provincial education department. Additionally, in Punjab the provincial education department conducts periodic meetings to review district rankings and targets.

This lack of collaboration between multiple offices at the district level as well as across tiers (i.e., province and districts) can result in fragmented approaches and a lack of synergy in decision-making. It is expected that by enhancing collaboration between different departments within the middle tier, education policies can be implemented more effectively, and education quality can be improved.

A successful education management system relies on effective coordination between different departments and governance levels for promoting collaborative learning and reducing inefficiencies by avoiding duplication of efforts. However, in almost all provinces across Pakistan, inadequate coordination within district offices and the absence of formal cooperation mechanisms among provinces, districts, and schools pose obstacles to quality service delivery. It is due to the lack of a consistent administrative framework and structure in the education landscape of Pakistan that several challenges related to cross-tier and cross-departmental coordination and coherence arise. These challenges are further compounded by provincial government reluctance to delegate autonomy to districts. To improve coordination, it might be beneficial to implement a governance and policy framework that harmonizes structures and communication mechanisms across administrative tiers, departments, and provinces. Additionally, establishing formal interprovincial, interdepartmental, inter- and intra-district forums to facilitate regular communication and collaboration (see *Section 0*) can help to address communication and coordination challenges. Moreover, providing districts with more autonomy and resources to coordinate and communicate with other departments and stakeholders at the devolved level, while ensuring accountability, can also enhance local decision-making and optimize educational service delivery.

6.2. There is a need to devise a CPD plan and learning opportunities for middle-tier education managers

A strong learning culture also incorporates established opportunities for staff, in this case middle-tier managers, to benefit from continuous learning and professional development (Gouédard, Kools, and George, 2023; Kools and George, 2020; Senge et al., 2012). Some professional development opportunities have been initiated, but it is crucial that they are structured and sustainable. International development partners such as UNESCO, Save the Children, Plan International, the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), and USAID have implemented different training packages for DEMs across Pakistan in recent decades. Most of these initiatives, however, were implemented through a single session or a series of training workshops. Provinces could benefit by scaling up and institutionalizing these packages as part of comprehensive professional development plans for middle-tier managers.

Provincial-level interviewees reported that at present, the DPD in KP, QAED in Punjab, and PITE in Sindh are responsible for the professional development of teachers and DEMs in their respective provinces. Additionally, promotion-linked training is also offered by these provincial institutions.

Interview participants from Punjab noted that the government provides allowances for higher degrees in research (such as M.Phil. and Ph.D.). However, these allowances do not meet the needs of professional

development. A lack of professional growth opportunities hinders the development of these managers and their ability to effectively perform their duties.

The training programmes currently provided by DPD in KP, QAED in Punjab, and PITE in Sindh are limited in duration and not linked to any competency framework. In all three provinces, however, the provincial-level officials interviewed failed to acknowledge the lack of induction and professional development training as one of the major challenges facing district-level managers on a regular basis, even though this lack of training results in poor management of resources and inadequate staff development. District-level managers are often left without the necessary support and guidance to effectively do their jobs. This leads to a disconnect in communication and coordination between the provincial and district tiers.

A review of policy frameworks (such as the in-service training framework of PITE in Sindh and induction training programmes in KP) shows that there are a few opportunities available in each province that could be further enhanced to achieve professional and competency development targets. For instance, in the three provinces, the duration of middle-tier management induction training ranges from three days to four weeks. The duration of induction training for education managers also varies from province to province. In order for these trainings to be meaningful and result-oriented, a comprehensive needs assessment is required, as well as connection of such trainings to a competency framework to make them more effective.

Provincial governments may benefit from the previously designed training packages and resources from international development partners. Building upon the earlier work of these partners, provincial governments can design advanced training and professional development packages for district and sub-district education managers.

6.3. Strengthen a culture of enquiry, experimentation, and innovation in the middle tier

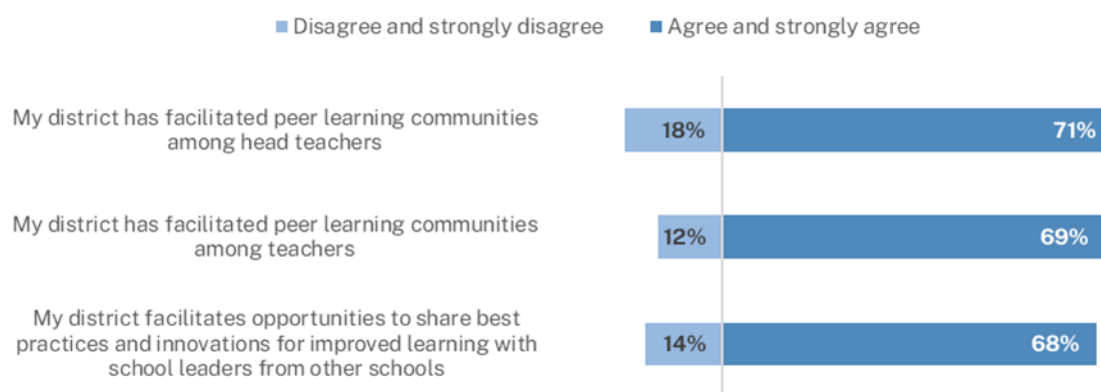
Middle-tier managers operate in a work environment that currently does not promote a learning culture within the organization. In this study, key informant interviews and discussions indicated that middle-tier managers are rarely given the opportunity to foster enquiry, innovation, and the application of current research and best practices. In each province, lack of autonomy and strict hierarchical structures in the middle tier restrict opportunities to demonstrate creativity and implement best practices. Providing middle-tier managers with adequate resources and support is essential for encouraging innovation and enquiry, and facilitating the practical use of research findings. The current education service delivery apparatus does not support these outcomes, as noted by one middle-tier manager in Sindh:

We are often asked to contribute to research studies, but once these researches are completed, we never see them again. There's a culture of non-sharing. Throughout my career, I have rarely had the chance to engage in any organized cross-sector or interprovincial learning.

Middle-tier manager, Sindh

Overall, responses to the online questionnaire for district officials show that innovation is encouraged in the surveyed district offices, with most participants claiming that staff are open to thinking and doing things differently, to experiment and innovate, as well as to take risks, as shown in *Figure 0.3*.

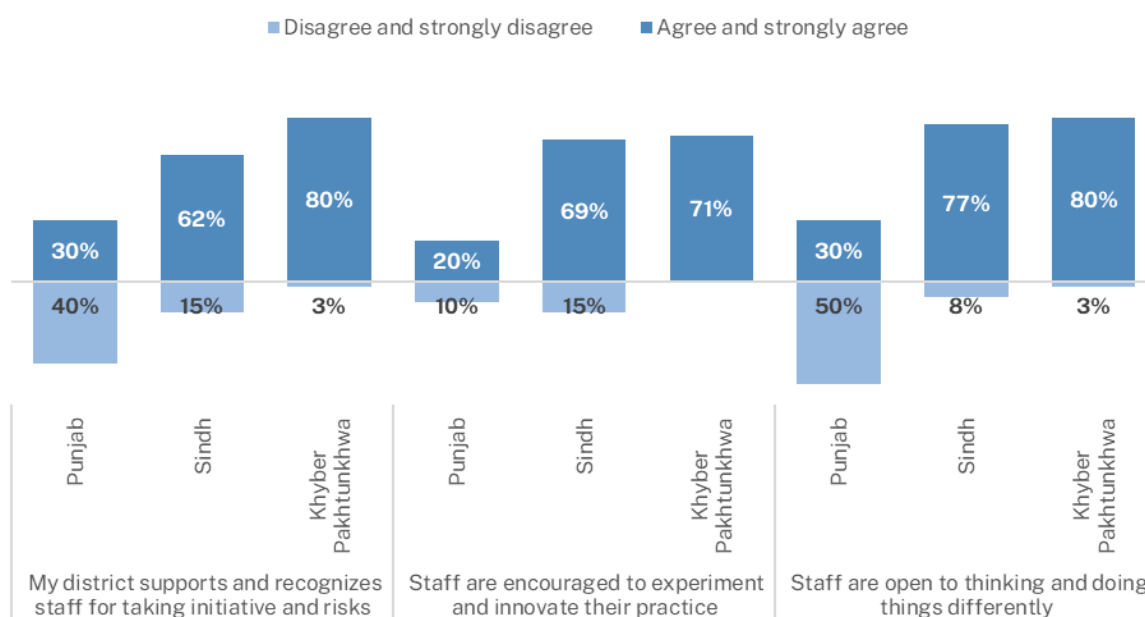
Figure 0.3. Innovation and best practice culture



Note: N = 136 for all questions. Neutral responses are the complement to reach 100%.
 Source: Authors' calculations based on IIEP-UNESCO, I-SAPS, and UNESCO Islamabad office (2024a).

When breaking down these responses by province (Figure 0.4), a stark difference is found: respondents from Punjab are much less likely than those from Sindh or KP to say that they are encouraged to be innovative, think differently, or take initiative.

Figure 0.4. Innovation and best practice culture responses by province



Note: N = 10 for Punjab, 13 for Sindh, 35 for KP. Neutral responses are the complement to reach 100%.
 Source: Authors' calculations based on IIEP-UNESCO, I-SAPS, and UNESCO Islamabad office (2024a).

There is no quick fix to bridge the capacity and competence shortfalls that exist within provincial and district education departments. Isolated and random capacity-building training available to provincial and district managers does not deliver the desired results. Currently, stand-alone training opportunities offered to district officials often lack any follow-up mechanism, reducing the scope for any improvement. The onus cannot be placed on the supply side only as the demand side often does not respond to available capacity and skill development opportunities. DEMs are neither receptive to learning new techniques nor ready to integrate them into their work practices. In some cases, respondents admitted that they are so entrenched in their work habits that even change management training has little influence on them in terms of adapting to new practices and technologies.

In the absence of structured induction and professional development opportunities, most middle-tier managers learn either through peer interaction or by doing. When these practices are followed for years, short two- or three-day trainings rarely succeed in convincing us to change or adopt new approaches and technologies.

DEO, KP

In Norway (see *Box 0.1*), municipalities are encouraged to strengthen their culture of enquiry and innovation and to collaborate with other municipalities and universities.

Box 0.1. The follow-up scheme for municipalities in Norway

Norwegian schools are successful in many areas, but differences still exist in quality between schools across and between municipalities. While local authorities have responsibility for quality and competence development, the Norwegian Directorate of Education identifies struggling municipalities and provides them with support through a 'follow-up scheme'. External supervisors and state administrators support municipalities to set goals, plan measures, and find relevant expertise to enhance quality in their schools.

The scheme spans three years and includes support for using and understanding a wide range of data, identifying the municipalities' strengths and challenges, and developing partnerships with experts such as universities and other stakeholders to discover good practices that can be adapted to the local context. Municipalities benefiting from the scheme are expected to set high ambitions and develop shared knowledge and new practices that lead to better learning outcomes. They must ensure that they are committed to continuing the quality of their work after the scheme has ended.

Source: Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (2022).

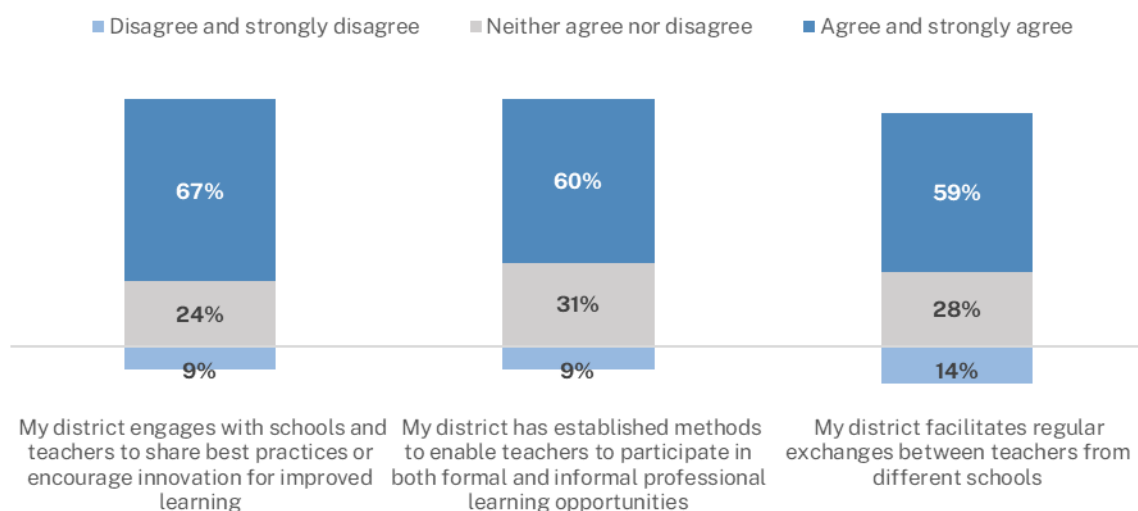
6.4. Incentivize support strategies for principals and teachers

There exists consensus across respondents to the district survey that multiple strategies are in place to support principals and teachers in the corresponding district, as shown in *Figure 0.5*, including the sharing of best practices and innovations for improved learning, sharing spaces between teachers from different schools, and the dissemination of formal and informal professional learning opportunities, with only about 1 in 10 respondents disagreeing that these spaces exist.

I feel encouraged to the proposed ideas and innovations. The district has a supportive culture, with opportunities like teacher innovation grants, staff meetings and workshops, collaborative planning time, a dedicated innovation committee. This environment motivates me to suggest new ideas, such as project-based learning and innovative professional development opportunities for improved learning.

District official, KP

Figure 0.5. Existence of support strategies from districts for principals and teachers



Note: N = 58 for all questions.

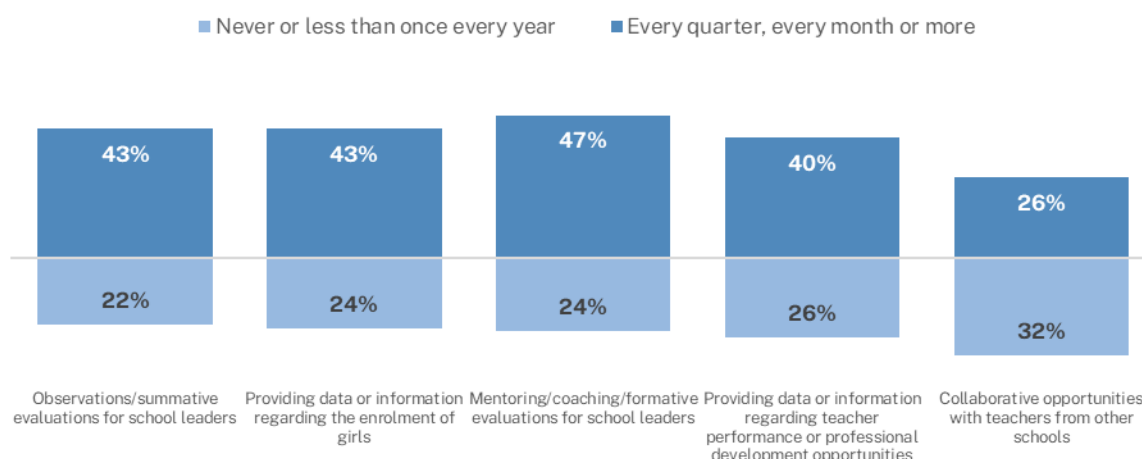
Source: Authors' calculations based on IIEP-UNESCO, I-SAPS, and UNESCO Islamabad office (2024a).

However, the principals' and teachers' survey results reveal a more nuanced picture. While nearly 60% of district respondents agree or strongly agree that their districts facilitate regular exchanges between teachers from different schools (Figure 6.5), far fewer principals and teachers report frequent cross-school collaboration. Only 26% of principals (Figure 6.6) and 28% of teachers (Figure 6.7) indicate that collaborative activities with staff from other schools occur regularly (every quarter, every month, or more often). In contrast, 32% of principals and 42% of teachers report that such activities either never take place or occur less than once a year.

Absolutely, I am receiving guidance and support from the district education office. Whenever the DEO visits the school, we have a good conversation about improving the school. The district education office staff also always assist me in enhancing school management.

School principal, KP

Figure 0.6. Frequency with which support is provided by district personnel to schools, according to principals



Note: N = 136 for all questions. 'Once every year' and 'Once every six months' are the complement to reach 100%.

Source: Authors' calculations based on IIEP-UNESCO, I-SAPS, and UNESCO Islamabad office (2024b).

Likewise, while 60% of district respondents agree or strongly agree that the district has established methods to enable teachers to participate in both formal and informal professional learning opportunities, only 40% of principals reported that the district provided data on teacher performance or professional development opportunities on a frequent basis (every quarter, every month, or more), and 32% of teachers said they are offered professional learning opportunities on a similarly frequent basis. While just 9% of district respondents

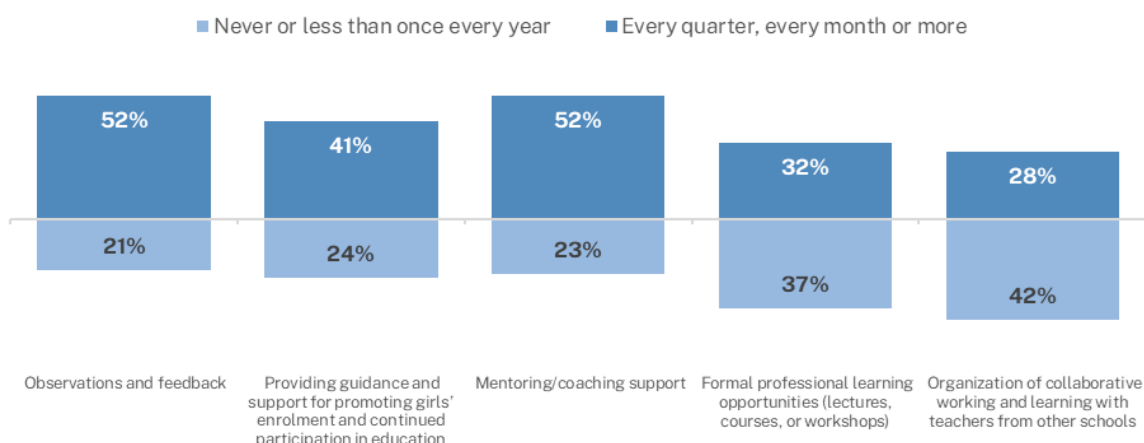
believe that such professional learning opportunities do not exist, 37% of teachers report that these opportunities never or almost never happen, and 26% of principals reported that they receive data on such opportunities and teacher performance less than once a year or never.

We assess teacher evaluation data to identify areas for professional growth and development. We use this data to plan targeted training programmes, provide coaching, and support teacher improvement.

District official, KP

Finally, it should be noted that 52% of the teachers responding to the online survey reported very frequent support from district personnel through observations and feedback, or mentoring/coaching support (Figure 6.7), with 43% of responding principals reporting the same (Figure 6.6).

Figure 0.7. Frequency with which support is provided by district personnel to teachers, according to teachers



Note: N = 141 for all questions. 'Once every year' and 'Once every six months' are the complement to reach 100%.

Source: Authors' calculations based on IIEP-UNESCO, I-SAPS, and UNESCO Islamabad office (2024c).

Box 0.2. Recommendations –Strong learning culture

1. Encourage staff to engage in collaborative working and learning within and across organizations.

- To improve coordination and knowledge-sharing among middle-tier managers, **online 'learning hubs' should be established by the provincial education departments**. These hubs may serve as a catalyst to discourage a culture of 'working in silos' and provide a platform for mutual learning opportunities.
- Where online learning hubs encounter internet availability issues, education departments may consider establishing resource rooms with audiovisual aids and static IT modules as an alternative.
- To provide middle-tier managers with opportunities for collaborative learning, **provincial education departments should make available fully functional learning and coordination forums for interdistrict, intra-provincial, and cross-sector learning**.
- Provincial education departments may also **formulate standard operating procedures for sharing information and promoting necessary coordination, collaboration, and learning**.

2. Devise a CPD plan and reinforce learning opportunities for middle-tier managers.

- For effective education sector management and improved service delivery, **provincial education departments, through relevant organizations, should design and implement specialist CPD training programmes for middle-tier education managers.**
- These CPD plans should be published and followed by all relevant officials with mandatory participation.
- CPD training should be open for government as well as donor funding. **All CPD training should be linked to appropriate needs assessment and strict adherence to prescribed selection criteria.**

3. Strengthen a culture of enquiry, experimentation, and innovation in the middle tier.

- To give middle-tier managers more autonomy to foster innovation and experimentation, **hierarchical restrictions should be reduced and managers provided with adequate resources, authority, time, and encouragement to apply research findings and best practices.**
- To move beyond one-off capacity-building training events, **professional development programmes that include follow-up mechanisms should be implemented**, ensuring that new skills and techniques are integrated into daily practice.

4. Incentivize support strategies for principals and teachers.

- To enhance the frequency and consistency of support activities for teachers and principals, **DEMs should prioritize providing professional learning opportunities, mentoring, and feedback** to schools.
- To foster a stronger culture of collaboration and trust between DEMs and schools, **DEMs should introduce feedback loops to align strategies with school-level realities.**
- Education departments should provide incentives in the form of financial bonuses and appreciation certificates to the best-performing middle-tier managers. Manager performance can be measured against key performance indicators. The district performance scorecard model in KP is a good example and could be followed by other provinces.

7. Effective use of data and research evidence

From enrolment numbers to resource allocation and student assessment results, data plays a crucial role in effectively managing the education sector to improve learning outcomes. Over the years, all three provinces have experienced a paradigm shift towards data-driven educational planning and management. This approach prioritizes the use of data to inform decision-making, leading to better sector management and improved service delivery. By collecting and analysing education data, education managers can make informed decisions, optimize resource allocation, and develop strategies to improve overall sector performance. Data is also instrumental in identifying learning gaps and deploying early interventions to provide additional support to schools.

Data can be collected from various sources, including household-based surveys, censuses, as well as more specific education data including school-based surveys, assessments, enrolment and teacher counts, and infrastructure data (IIEP-UNESCO et al., 2021; OECD, 2013; Sigdel, 2022). The various components of assessment and evaluation, from student assessment and teacher and school leader appraisals to school evaluation and system-level monitoring, are an essential part of education data (OECD, 2013).

Some countries and jurisdictions have created EMISs to support monitoring and progress of education. However, lack of infrastructure and adapted systems can hinder their efficient use. In practice, middle-tier officers lack access or the skills and tools to utilize EMISs effectively (Manyengo, 2021; OECD, 2022; Yigezu, 2021). With a shift to decentralized education systems, and an increase in the provision of data, there is a risk that data collection is being duplicated or in some cases not used. Centralized and user-friendly education data and information systems can ensure that data is easily accessible and shared among stakeholders at all levels.

This section of the report examines the access and resources available to middle-tier managers in the education sector. It also investigates whether middle-tier managers possess the skills or tools to properly utilize and analyse data and whether research and data are systematically employed to inform decision-making or policy implementation. Additionally, this section explores whether a well-developed, data-driven evaluation process exists to identify strong- and weak-performing schools.

7.1. Improve middle-tier education managers' access to relevant, consistent, and timely education data

7.1.1. Although efforts are being made to design systems, middle-tier managers tend to use their own administrative data, and do not collect data on learning outcomes, teaching practices, or teacher training

Data are essential for effective sector planning. Through careful data analysis, managers can identify specific areas for improvement, set measurable goals, and monitor progress over time. Data-driven planning and decision-making ensure that reform interventions are targeted, grounded in evidence, and impactful for student outcomes.

Recognizing this, governments across the country have established EMISs to collect and analyse comprehensive datasets. Various national and provincial stakeholders have been involved, such as the national EMIS at the federal level, PMIU in Punjab, EMA in KP, and RSU in Sindh. However, interviews revealed that, owing to multiple factors, a significant number of education managers have restricted access to such systems and they are unable to use the data for planning and decision-making.

For instance, most middle-tier managers across provinces rely on direct data collection from schools, particularly regarding enrolment, human resources, and facilities, because they have restricted access to the data generated by their provincial systems. Moreover, they seldom use data to assess student learning outcomes, observe classroom practice, or implement teacher training. Officials in Punjab and KP shared that they use data on education quality indicators but could not provide specific examples of how such data have informed improvements. In Sindh, district officials confirm that student learning data are not used in decision-making. As one district official noted:

Unfortunately, data gathered by the district education office is not taken seriously; rather details intimated by the team of monitoring and evaluation officials is given official importance.

District official, Sindh

7.1.2. Multiple EMISs create overlap and confusion

The availability of data from multiple sources further complicates the work of middle-tier managers. Currently, education data is produced by the national EMIS and the Economic Survey of Pakistan at the federal level. Meanwhile, provincial EMISs and RSUs perform similar tasks within their geographical jurisdiction. Additionally, provincial chief ministers maintain exclusive dashboards updated by district administrations, generating large amounts of data against a variety of key performance indicators.

Further complicating matters, development partners and international and local organizations maintain their own databases and periodically disseminate information products and reports. Instead of providing middle-tier management with precise, relevant, and actionable data products, this proliferation of information sources creates confusion about which data source to use, refer to, or quote.

To ensure timely and reliable decision-making, provincial education departments and allied institutions must streamline data flows and provide a comprehensive, accurate, and relevant dataset for middle-tier managers.

7.1.3. Missing link between data-driven evaluation processes and school improvements

Formal data-driven evaluation processes to identify strong- and weak-performing schools exist but remain uneven in their implementation and effectiveness. The most notable mechanism is the School Information System in Punjab, which collects real-time data on school inputs such as teacher attendance, student enrolment, and infrastructure. In Sindh, the Sindh Student Learning Outcomes Assessment provides data on student achievement levels to inform instructional practices and policy planning. Similarly, in KP, the EMA collects monthly data on key school performance indicators including teacher attendance, student attendance, and infrastructure status, which has strengthened transparency and enabled more responsive administrative actions. However, these efforts are often fragmented and lack integration into a holistic school evaluation framework to facilitate DEMs to quickly identify weaknesses and perform corrective measures. Moreover, the use of this data by provincial and district managers for targeted interventions, policy decisions, and accountability remains limited, with little emphasis on linking performance outcomes to school improvement plans or resource allocation. While the foundation for a data-driven evaluation system exists, its potential is yet to be fully realized in a coherent and impactful manner.

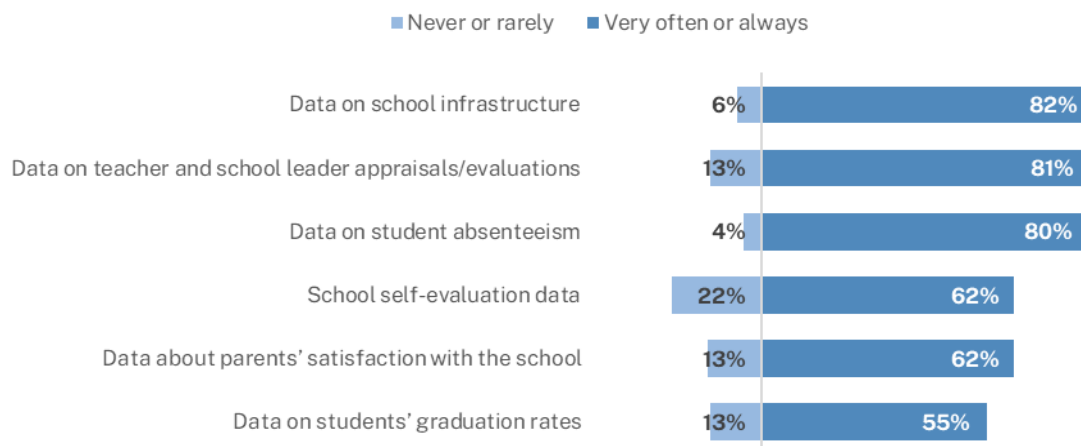
7.1.4. Current aggregated education data are sometimes irrelevant to middle-tier managers' daily tasks

The study highlights several issues with the current data systems and products that discourage middle-tier managers from using them. Interviews with district officials revealed that middle-tier managers consider the current aggregate education data, typically averaged across district or sub-district levels, irrelevant to their daily tasks. They require more precise, tailored, and user-friendly datasets relevant to their assigned schools. Extracting insights from complex datasets is considered a challenge, aggravated by the lack of adequate analysis and recommendations accompanying the data.

The findings from the district online survey show that, contrary to what was reported during the face-to-face interviews, district officials say they frequently use all types of data, be that data related to students (e.g., student

absenteeism), to human resources (e.g., school staff job satisfaction), to other resources (e.g., availability of internet connection), and on other data and materials (e.g., school improvement plans). *Figure 0.1* shows the top three and bottom three data categories according to their reported use frequency, ranging from never or rarely to very often or always. Even for the category that was reported as being used very often or always by the fewest respondents (data on students' graduation rates), it was still reported as such by more than half of the respondents. This is an additional example of the socially desirable response bias in the survey, with participants tending to give a response that they perceive to be 'correct'.

Figure 0.1. Top three and bottom three data categories (out of 22) according to their reported use frequency

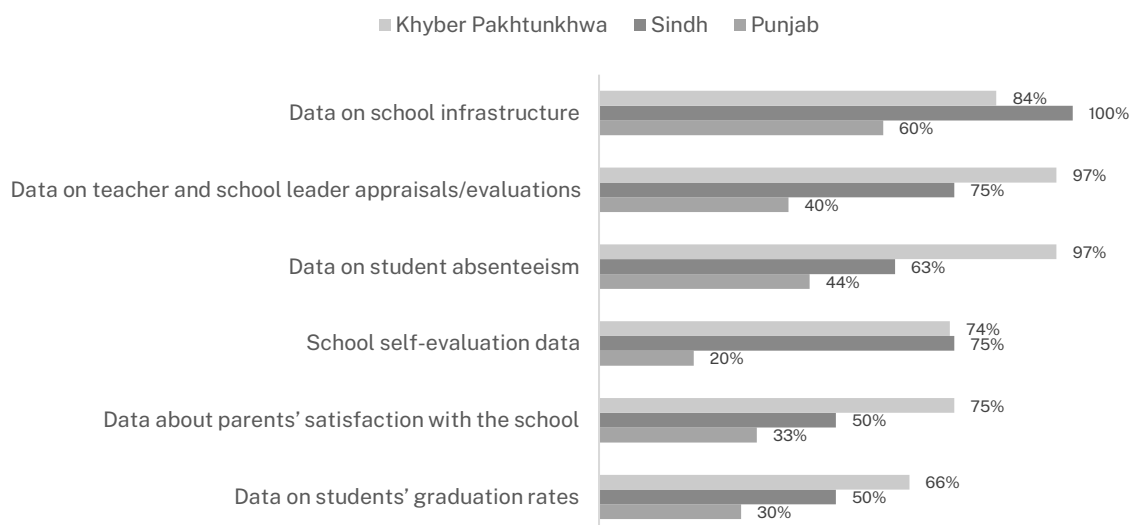


Note: N = 49 for all questions. 'Sometimes' is the complement to reach 100%.

Source: Authors' calculations based on IIEP-UNESCO, I-SAPS, and UNESCO Islamabad office (2024a).

Interestingly, this socially desirable response bias has clear provincial determinants, with far fewer survey respondents in Punjab reporting that they use these data source very often or always, as shown in *Figure 0.2*. A higher share of district officials in KP said that they use such data, followed by Sindh. There are also some areas where strong differences exist, like the use of school self-evaluation data, where only 20% of respondents from Punjab answered 'Very often' or 'Always', compared with around 75% of respondents from the other two provinces.

Figure 0.2. Top three and bottom three data categories according to their reported use frequency, by province



Note: N = 49 for all questions. Results show the proportion of 'Very often' and 'Always' responses relative to the total number of answers per data type.

Source: Authors' calculations based on IIEP-UNESCO, I-SAPS, and UNESCO Islamabad office (2024a).

7.1.5. The gap between data collection and dissemination makes data less relevant and effective for middle-tier managers

This study points out another systematic challenge related to the timely availability of education data to middle-tier managers. Although national and provincial EMISs, along with other organizations, collect data in collaboration with middle-tier managers, the subsequent analysis, findings, and recommendations are only occasionally shared with them. Often, data analysis and dissemination take so long that middle-tier managers find the data unfit for planning and monitoring purposes. Most data sources operate on yearly collection cycles, with additional delays in analysis, approvals, and dissemination.

Denmark has developed a strong EMIS platform that garners all education data in one place and provides municipalities and regions with adapted and user-friendly reports and graphs (see *Box 0.1*).

Box 0.1. Building a strong EMIS platform: the Danish Data Warehouse

The Danish Government manages education statistics through the Danish Data Warehouse (Data Varehuset), a tool launched in 2014 to support municipalities and schools in monitoring primary education quality. Over time, it expanded to include secondary, vocational, early childhood, adult, and continuing education, becoming the primary tool for education data. The Data Warehouse publishes a yearly written status report with key indicators on public schools. This forms the basis for ongoing dialogue between the government, municipalities, and other stakeholders involved in the development of public schools.

At the municipal level, the Data Warehouse plays a key role in education governance. It provides municipalities with access to predefined reports, graphs, and interactive maps containing statistical information. A core feature is the municipal-level quality report designed as a management tool to facilitate dialogue between municipal councils and administration, school principals, and teachers regarding quality development and student performance. The report also supports school boards supervising school activities.

As an open and dynamic tool, the Data Warehouse presents data at national, regional, municipal, and school levels. It also supports parental choice, offering interactive dashboards and comparative tools to assess school performance over time. Additionally, it enables school leaders and municipalities to benchmark their schools against similar institutions, helping them identify strengths, address weaknesses, and implement measures for school improvement.

Source: Gouédard (2021); OECD (2024a); Styrelsen for It og Læring (2024).

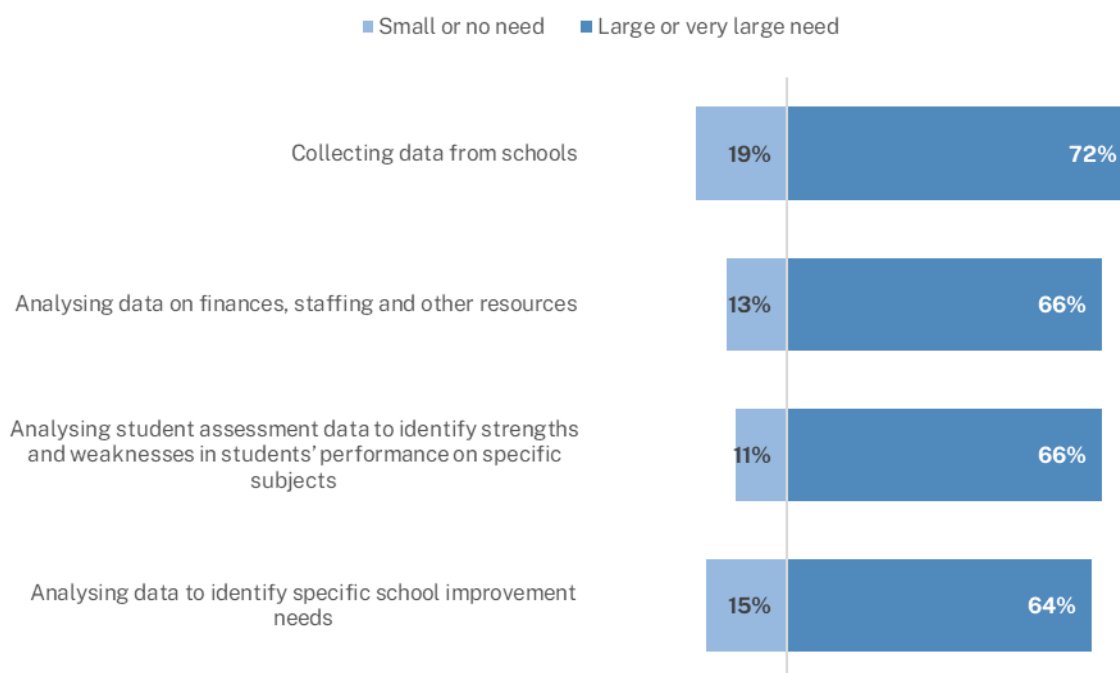
To address the gap between data collection and dissemination, the provinces must ensure that data are readily available and up to date. The best way to achieve this is to implement automated data-collection solutions that are quick, efficient, and user-friendly. In addition, the provincial department of education should ensure that all relevant stakeholders receive timely updates on data analysis and findings. This will enable informed decision-making and help ensure that any necessary changes are made to the system in a timely manner.

7.2. Strengthen middle-tier education managers' data analysis capacity and skills

Another challenge highlighted by this study is the lack of training and support for middle-tier managers for analysing and interpreting data at the district level. Professional development activities seldom focus on building IT and data analysis skills. District offices generally employ data entry operators who assist with data collection, but the offices lack dedicated data analysts. Middle-tier managers and school leadership often lack the necessary IT infrastructure, including personal computers, software, and internet access.

When asked about their learning needs, middle-tier managers overwhelmingly reported having large or very large needs in relation to data collection and analysis (see *Figure 7.3*).

Figure 0.3. Learning needs related to data collection and analysis



Note: N = 47 for all questions. 'Not relevant for my job' and 'Moderate need' are the complement to reach 100%. 'Not relevant for my job' was only chosen by one respondent.

Source: Authors' calculations based on IIEP-UNESCO, I-SAPS, and UNESCO Islamabad office (2024a).

The study also uncovers patterns of resistant behaviour among middle-tier managers in terms of learning and using new technology and skills to improve management practices (see *Section 0* on 6. Strong learning culture). The international examples in *Box 0.2* and *Source: Elwick and McAleavy (2015)*

Box 0.3 show how Brazil and the city of London have trained middle-tier staff to collect, analyse, and use data to improve teaching and learning in their schools.

Box 0.2. Training district leaders to use data for school improvement in Brazil

The Instituto Unibanco's Jovem de Futuro (JdF) is a training programme in Brazil that helps school and district leaders align goals and use data for school improvement planning. Implemented in partnership with the state departments of education, it provides schools, regional departments, and the central department with a methodology and tools to support their management work.

JdF's actions are structured around five dimensions: governance, technical advice, training, mobilization, and knowledge management. It includes extensive training hours for regional, district, and school leaders, focusing on increasing student learning and graduation rates, setting performance rates and developing school action plans. Leaders are trained to collect and use data effectively, including optimizing the education management platform via mobile phone access (Vinha et al., 2020).

Evidence shows that the programme has led to a 30% increase in student learning and improvements in test scores for mathematics and Portuguese. It is also considered cost-effective, at about 5% of public expenditures per student (Paes de Barros et al., 2019). Leaders reported increased confidence in using data for planning and felt supported through peer exchange opportunities (Vinha et al., 2020).

Use of data to promote school-to-school collaboration in Rio de Janeiro

In the city of Rio de Janeiro, a series of data-driven reforms were enacted between 2008 and 2013 to pair weak-performing schools with the best-performing schools that served similar functions. At the level of the municipality, Education Secretary Claudia Costin introduced bi-monthly student assessments that serve to identify these schools. High-performing schools, labelled 'Godmother schools', worked collaboratively with less effective schools to plan school improvement. The package of reforms associated with this intervention produced encouraging results for the city, with Rio de Janeiro schools improving at a greater rate than those nationwide. In 2013, the city had a 97% literacy rate for Grade 6 students, exceeding Costin's own target of 95% literacy rate three years early.

Source: Elwick and McAleavy (2015)

Box 0.3. Using data to improve teaching and learning in London

The city of London in the United Kingdom undertook a series of reforms between 2002 and 2011 to raise learning standards in its poorest-performing government schools. Local authorities gathered and used systematic analysis of school-level performance data to identify schools designated as 'outstanding' to open their doors and share their practices with other teaching professionals in the district. These were identified as teaching hubs and traditional 'off-site' professional development was replaced with peer-to-peer coaching.

School performance data was also used to pair school leaders with leaders in underperforming schools working in similar school contexts. This helped share professional knowledge and understanding of challenges and improvement needs based on recent personal experience.

These education reforms, and school-to-school collaboration in particular, were considered to be successful. The impact was particularly noticeable in 119 schools that had been identified in 2002 at the start of the reforms as being most in need of support, under a programme called Keys to Success (KTS). Between 2008 and 2011 the increase in the percentage of secondary students reaching the expected level (five GCSEs at A*–C, including English and mathematics) was higher in KTS schools than the national figure (17.2% increase compared to 10.1%). In participating schools, the overall number reaching the expected level increased from 45% in 2005 to 61% in 2011, higher than the national average (58% in 2011).

Source: Hutchings et al. (2012); McAleavy and Elwick (2022); OECD (2023a)

To summarize, current working practices of middle-tier managers rarely promote the use of data to inform education policy, planning, budgeting, and management practices at the district level. The study also did not find widespread data usage for effective implementation and monitoring of education reforms and driving learning improvement initiatives by middle-tier managers.

Box 0.4. Recommendations – Availability and use of data and evidence

1. Improve middle-tier managers’ access to relevant, consistent, and timely education data.

- National and provincial EMISs may consider splitting collected data into multiple categories. Urgently sought data should be provided in real time to middle-tier managers for its effective utilization and to avoid duplication of efforts and save on already limited resources. In addition to EMISs, the School Information System and Human Resource Management Information System in Punjab and digital dashboards in KP may be further tweaked to address middle-tier education managers’ data needs.
- To enable middle-tier education managers to easily access and interpret relevant data, provincial education departments may direct relevant authorities to integrate monitoring and evaluation with assessment results to help develop user-friendly digital dashboards and real-time reporting. This may enable middle-tier managers to make informed and timely decisions based upon a reliable data source.
- The current situation with multiple data sources is leading to data redundancy, inconsistency, and analysis challenges, making the job of middle-tier managers even more complicated. Provincial education departments may consider establishing a single, comprehensive database for improving education decision-making and service delivery at the grass-roots level.
- To generate a holistic picture of education sector performance, national and provincial data management authorities, in consultation with middle-tier education managers, should broaden the scope of existing data-collection methodologies to better reflect qualitative aspects along with quantitative data in their databases.

2. Strengthen middle-tier education managers’ data analysis capacity and skills.

- Use of IT can help middle-tier education managers to improve their work efficiency and reduce workload. Provincial education departments should prioritize not only the provision of required IT equipment to all education delivery managers at the provincial, district, and school levels, but also deliver the necessary training to enable education managers to access and utilize the data for educational planning and decision-making. Based on this assertion, technology-related modules should be embedded in training programmes (both induction training and CPD).
- Efforts are required to capacitate education managers, especially middle-tier managers, to use data for planning and management purposes. To further encourage the use of data by middle-tier managers, a data analyst position may be created at the district level to assist in extracting relevant data from available sources and establishing and maintaining a district dashboard.

8. Appendix

8.1. Study limitations

This study offers important insights into the capacity of middle-tier education management across selected districts in Pakistan. Nevertheless, several methodological and practical limitations must be acknowledged.

A central limitation of the study relates to its geographic scope. Due to financial constraints within the broader project design, the province of Balochistan could not be included in the main data-collection phase. This affected the national representativeness of the findings and, by extension, the external validity of the conclusions. To partially address this gap, a representative from Balochistan was included in the national validation workshop. This official's input helped test the broader applicability of the study's findings, but the absence of systematic data from that province remains a shortcoming.

Additionally, limitations in terms of access to administrative data constrained the study's ability to assess staffing numbers and staffing coherence. While the survey asked about the number of staff per office, it was not possible to obtain figures on sanctioned versus filled positions. This prevented the calculation of staff-to-school or staff-to-student ratios, thereby limiting the analysis of human resource distribution patterns across districts.

8.1.1. Survey-related limitations

The survey instrument was designed to capture perceptions from district and sub-district officials, as well as school-level actors. However, its length proved burdensome for many respondents, particularly given their demanding professional workloads. This may have resulted in skipped items or reduced attention towards the end of the questionnaire. Another challenge was related to internet access. In some districts, unreliable connectivity made it difficult for respondents to complete the online survey independently. To address this, the research team conducted in-person survey interviews and entered the responses manually. While this improved response completeness, it also introduced a potential risk of interviewer bias. Drawing on their prior experience with education sector fieldwork, the interviewers were accustomed to adopting a neutral and non-directive approach, helping to minimize the risk of interviewer bias.

Cultural factors also influenced the survey results. In regions where survey participation is not a common practice, some respondents appeared hesitant despite reassurances of anonymity. This hesitancy likely contributed to the high prevalence of neutral answers across many items, complicating interpretation of attitudinal trends. Moreover, due to the open distribution of the survey (e.g., via WhatsApp groups), it was not possible to calculate an accurate response rate. While the total of 335 responses provides useful system-level insights, the limited sample size within each district constrains the generalizability of the findings across district contexts, thus posing a limitation to their external validity. However, it is important to note that in the context of the Pakistani education system – where district-level data on education administration are rarely collected at this scale – this constitutes a substantial and valuable dataset.

8.1.2. Qualitative data limitations

The qualitative component of the study, consisting of key informant interviews and FGDs, played a central role in uncovering deeper dynamics within the education system. However, the depth and openness of responses varied. In some cases, time constraints or institutional hierarchies appeared to influence how freely participants shared their views. This variation introduces a risk of social desirability bias, particularly among respondents with formal responsibility, potentially compromising internal validity. To mitigate these risks, interviews were anonymized, and findings were triangulated with survey and documentary evidence.

The stakeholder workshop held in April 2025 was a critical step in testing and refining the study's conclusions. It brought together 47 participants from various levels of the education system. However, the validation process was not without its limitations. First, unfortunately, participants from Sindh could not travel to the workshop and had to join online. Although stakeholders from Sindh actively participated via virtual means, the online format may have limited the richness of engagement and informal exchange that typically occurs in face-to-face settings. Despite these challenges, the workshop created a rare and valuable moment of cross-provincial dialogue. Participants worked in groups to refine recommendations, exchange successful practices, and collectively reflect on capacity development priorities, thus enhancing both the quality and legitimacy of the study's final outputs.

8.1.3. Conclusion

In sum, while the study applied a robust and context-sensitive methodology, the limitations outlined above should be taken into account when interpreting the findings. These constraints, particularly regarding sampling, representativeness, and coverage, affect the extent to which conclusions can be generalized across all districts and provinces, thus posing limitations to external validity. Nonetheless, the triangulation of multiple data sources, the iterative refinement of research instruments, and the inclusive stakeholder validation process collectively strengthen the study's overall rigour and credibility. Within a context where district-level data on education administration are rarely collected at this scale, the study represents one of the few comprehensive mappings of middle-tier actors and functions across diverse provincial settings. It thereby provides a strong empirical foundation for future policy dialogue and the strengthening of education system governance.

8.2. Provincial allied institutions and their mandates

KP provincial allied institutions:

The roles and responsibilities of the provincial allied institutions in the education sector in KP are listed in the following.

Directorate of Curriculum and Teachers Education (DCTE):

- Responsible for provision of qualified and professionally well-oriented teachers for a high quality of education
- Curriculum development in accordance with research initiatives and inclusive approach towards progressive teacher education
- Observing best practices to meet the national and international high education standards
- Promoting critical thinking and skills in teachers for designing and implementation of curricula
- Help in identification of evolving tendencies, challenges, and prospects in education

Directorate of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE):

- Responsible for management of financial issues at provincial and district level with internal and external audits of projects
- Monitoring, assessment, and supervision of school, teacher, and student performance, along with implementation of educational policies for quality education
- Preparation of seniority list and staffing for provincial cadre posts along with postings, transfers, and promotions
- Responsible for preparation of provincial development plans along with merging of district development plans for the coming 5–10 years
- Development of proposals and feasibility reports for the provision of new schools and procurement and preparation of PC-1 planning for projects in the districts
- Responsible for pensions, court cases, and enquiries along with granting leave and promotions

Directorate of Professional Development (DPD):

- Responsible for planning and design of inclusive induction programmes for teachers along with manuals and training materials
- Provision of funds, human resources, and materials essential for the execution of induction programmes
- Establishing and implementing evaluation procedures that help in assessing the impact of induction programmes and making essential modifications if needed
- Managing Teachers EMISs and resolving any issues, and ensuring the efficiency of the system in meeting goals

Elementary Education Foundation:

- Responsible for connecting and inspiring the community at the grass-roots level to promote ownership of elementary education programmes
- Introduction of new community and non-formal schools with the aim of raising literacy rates particularly among women by hiring new qualified teachers
- Supporting training of new teachers through different programmes to improve the quality of education
- Responsibility to introduce an innovative and skill-oriented education programme to help underserved areas and underprivileged children
- Provision of loans and funds to non-governmental organizations and also to individuals for establishing new educational institutions
- Strengthening of the elementary education system in alignment with government education policies to implement necessary measures for promotions, funding, and human resources in the province

Education Management Information System (EMIS):

- To gather information and data on student attendance, enrolment, and performance across the educational landscape
- Ensuring equitable presence of teaching staff, addressing deployment gaps in teacher allocation within the province
- Ensuring the transparency and availability of data regarding education and making such data accessible to stakeholders, policy-makers, instructors, and the wider community
- Help in assessing the efficiency of educational policies and interferences along with their impact on implementation of reforms to formulate future strategies
- Help in targeted interventions in specific identified areas where there is a need to enhance the efficiency and quality of education
- After comprehensive analysis of data and information, it helps education officials in formulating policies and making well-informed decisions to support the educational landscape
- Help in effective planning and resource provision to address the critical needs of the education sector

Education Sector Reforms Unit (ESRU):

- Maintain a close and healthy working environment with stakeholders and partners including national and international donors and civil society organizations at the provincial and district levels for the development and implementation of education reform policies
- Advising stakeholders on education policies, governance, and management in a timely manner, particularly on improving quality of education
- Responsible for maintaining a healthy relationship with ESED on governance and development of policies in the education sector

- Ensuring the provision of education to students in accordance with their capacity utilizing IT and implementation and monitoring of national curriculum framework
- Provision of professional development opportunities to administrative, managerial, teaching, and support staff following relevant criteria with the help of DPD and DESE
- Responsible for conducting surveys for data collection on issues relating to governance and access to education, and preparing policies and recommendations for improvement based on those findings

Independent Monitoring Unit:

- Responsible for enhancing social accountability and providing access to information on key indicators
- Raise community awareness on infrastructure and also highlight education service delivery at all tiers
- Improving educational outcomes and governance, and improved arrangement of resources through public accountability
- Continuous monitoring of performance and tracking progress in the education sector
- Responsible for collecting data on key performance indicators and ensuring their uploading to digital monitoring dashboards and other EMIS platforms on a monthly basis
- Provision of support and facilitation for education reforms along with the provision of data to ESED and allies

Private School Regulatory Authority:

- Responsible for ensuring standards and procedures are appropriately met by private schools through proper licensing and registration
- Confirming that private schools are complying with the code of ethics set by the authorities on educational and regulatory policies, as well as health and safety standards, by conducting timely inspections and audits
- Monitoring the fee structure to ensure it is affordable, educating students by following set curriculum, and encouraging use of the latest teaching techniques through technology
- Gathering data on private schools regarding teacher attendance and performance, student enrolment and retention, and infrastructure availability to facilitate quality education
- Responsible for engaging the community for collaboration between schools and parents for effective educational outcomes and implementation of government policies

Planning Office/Chief Planning Office:

- Responsible for strategic planning of long- and short-term policies on education in alignment with provincial education policies
- Formulate 5–10-year development plans for the education sector
- Take initiatives on proposing, designing, and allocating education sector development projects along with preparation of feasibility reports for those projects
- Ensuring the availability and preparation of education sector budgets, their effective allocation, and optimal use at provincial and district levels
- Ensuring compliance with foreign-funded projects through coordination and monitoring at provincial and district levels, and confirming the requirements are properly met
- Preparation of initial and final reports on foreign-funded projects and their impact on the education sector to ensure transparency

Punjab provincial allied institutions:

The following are the key provincial allied institutions in the education sector in Punjab, along with their roles and responsibilities.

Children Library Complex:

- Responsible for providing knowledge as well as teaching skills and values to children aged between 4 and 14 years
- Provide specialist educational assistance to children aged 4–18 years with additional needs
- Organizing sports and recreational activities to promote healthy competition, teamwork, and discipline among students
- Fostering social, mental, and physical health alongside academic knowledge
- Provide teachers with professional support and resources for effective teaching practice

Directorate of Public Instruction (DPI):

- Responsible for the implementation and execution of governmental directives and policies by the competent authorities
- Supervise and monitor elementary and secondary education across the province
- Help in coordinating in-service training programmes for teaching and non-teaching staff
- Coordinate with allied institutes for data collection, conducting exams, appraisal of foreign-funded projects, and provision of data to government officials
- Manages leave requests of the teaching and non-teaching staff from pay Grade 1 to Grade 18
- Help in the preparation of budgets and validation of receipts with Accounts General, Punjab

National Museum of Science & Technology:

- Responsible for the promotion of scientific and technological education to students
- Organize workshops and seminars on science and technology to effectively enhance scientific knowledge among the population
- Collaborate with different institutes to conduct research in the fields of science and technology
- Provide assistance to decision-makers on issues around scientific and technological education

Punjab Curriculum & Textbook Board (PCTB):

- Responsible for provincial education curriculum development
- Enacting government education policies for the production and supply of educational and teaching materials and textbooks for primary, secondary, and intermediate education along with the teacher training courses
- Responsible for provision of supplementary material for textbooks and controlling the dissemination of textbooks and other materials
- Help in the publication of up-to-date teaching and training materials for students and teachers
- Help in conducting research to update curricula, textbooks, and teaching-related materials to keep up with the latest trends
- Arranging exhibitions of education textbooks and training materials

Punjab Examination Commission:

- Responsible for developing and distributing examination papers along with conducting and managing exams for students in grades 5 to 8
- Help in developing assessment and evaluation tools to monitor students' learning outcomes
- Responsible for collecting data from research to effectively upgrade the curriculum and teaching techniques
- Collect data through examinations to evaluate district, school, and student performance, and devise a concrete policy for improvement
- Deliver workshops and training sessions for teachers and administrative staff to enhance their capacity for improving the quality of education in the province
- Conduct research activities with the aim of improving assessment techniques following the latest trends and practices

Punjab Education Foundation:

- Responsible for improving the learning outcomes of students through implementation of unique educational initiatives and increase literacy rates in the province
- Facilitate public–private partnerships between public- and private-sector schools to improve access and quality of education, especially in marginalized areas
- Provide incentives to facilitate students, teachers, and institutions for better education outcomes
- Provision of technical assistance to schools and institutions for implementation and replication of policies and innovative programmes
- Provide scholarships to students from low-income families to help them continue their education

Punjab Education Initiatives Management Authority:

- Responsible for improving the quality of and access to education through effective policy implementation by the Punjab government
- Supervise and oversee different educational initiatives designed to nourish the provincial education system along with students' outcomes
- Monitor educational projects and assesses their effect, ensuring they achieve the set goals, which assists in decision-making
- Propose technical guidance to institutes to adopt the latest techniques to enhance operational effectiveness

Programme Monitoring and Implementation Unit (PMIU):

- Collaborate with the SED as the monitoring and implementation wing of the department
- Collect, monitor, and manage data to provide updated information to the department for decision-making on school performance, teacher attendance, student enrolment
- Responsible for preparing and distribution of educational project reports, focusing on notable accomplishments and pointing out areas for improvement
- Guarantee that financial resources are utilized effectively, corresponding to identified requirements
- Help in designing and provision of concrete policy recommendations to the department for improved educational outcomes
- Assuring adherence to educational policies and compliance with the guidelines by monitoring the performance of educational leaders

Punjab Teachers Foundation:

- Responsible for the welfare of teachers by providing them with benefits like financial support, health insurance, and retirement plans to help improve their well-being and job satisfaction
- Help the children of teachers to access quality education by providing them with scholarship programmes
- Help in engaging the community to promote the consciousness among the public, stressing the importance of education
- Award benefits and incentives to highly skilled teachers to help improve job retention

Quaid-e-Azam Academy for Educational Development (QAED):

- Responsible for designing and conducting training of pre-service and in-service teachers to capacitate them with essential skills
- Offer training to DEMs and school leaders for improved leadership quality and supervision capacities
- Undertake research on policies with the aim of enhancing educational strategies for innovative teaching and learning approaches

- Responsible for monitoring the implementation of its educational and teaching programmes in alignment with educational goals
- Help in capacity-building of institutions and staff through various programmes and technical support

Punjab Daanish Schools & Centres of Excellence Authority:

- Help in ensuring the provision of high-quality education to students, meeting national and international standards through qualified teachers
- Responsible for providing education to students from marginalized areas to bridge the educational gap
- Overseeing boarding services for students from remote areas, ensuring they have an adequate living and learning environment
- Foster an upstanding and committed generation of leaders, aiming to eradicate social discrimination and poverty

Sindh provincial allied institutions:

The roles and responsibilities of the provincial allied institutions in the education sector in Sindh are listed below.

Directorate of Curriculum, Assessment and Research (DCAR):

- Designing, developing, and updating of the curriculum for all educational levels and incorporating the reviewed curriculum
- Conduct and publish research on educational trends and practices to update the curriculum and policies
- Contribute to education policy formulation and ensure implementation throughout the province
- Advise SELD on the latest innovations and assessment processes on best educational practices
- Coordinate with allied provincial institutes to ensure coherence in educational practices

Directorate of Literacy and Non-Formal Education:

- Responsible for the provision of non-formal education opportunities in the province to improve literacy rates
- Development and execution of non-formal education initiatives appropriately customized to the needs of students
- Identification of best practices and innovative approaches regarding non-formal education and their implementation

Directorate of School Education (DSE):

- Responsible for ensuring the implementation of rules and regulations regarding educational initiatives in the province
- Provide strong leadership in all educational matters, including curriculum development, teacher training, and effective implementation of policies
- Responsible for overseeing education service delivery in schools
- Develop and maintain a positive relationship with staff at the regional and taluka levels for successful education sector outcomes
- Ensure school compliance with educational regulations at the provincial and district levels
- Overseeing and ensuring the distribution of financial resources to bolster educational initiatives

Provincial Institute of Teacher Education (PITE):

- Responsible for the implementation of pre-service and in-service teachers' education and their CPD to enhance educational outcomes
- Assist SELD in long- and short-term education sector policy formulation

- Enhance the professional skills of teachers and administrators through capacity-building programmes
- Support innovative teaching methods and practices to enhance student learning outcomes
- Regularly monitor teacher performance, suggest training programmes for improvement, and determine subsequent training needs
- Conduct quality research into teachers' education for enhanced learning outcomes
- Collaborate and coordinate with both national and international organizations to promote improvement in teachers' education by sharing best practices

Reform Support Unit (RSU):

- Responsible for assisting in policy formulation and implementation to improve quality of education
- Frequently monitor and assess the efficacy of educational initiatives to ensure coherence with objectives and make critical modifications
- Establishing an effective and comprehensive monitoring mechanism to monitor the impact of educational services and their impact on the educational landscape
- Collect, manage, and analyse educational data and track performance to help improve policy decision-making
- Coordinate with different governmental, non-governmental, and private organizations to ensure the effective implementation of educational policies

Sindh Education Foundation:

- Responsible for the provision of access to quality education, especially in underserved and marginalized areas of the province through various initiatives
- Develop actionable plans to assist and improve the educational landscape for enhanced educational outcomes
- Assist in conducting research on issues related to education and advocate legislative reforms to enhance the provincial educational landscape
- Help in developing and disseminating educational material, curriculum guidelines, and other learning resources aiming to enhance quality education
- Frequently monitor and evaluate educational initiatives and programmes to assess their significance and efficiency
- Design and implementation of tailored programmes on girls' education, non-formal education, and preschool education.

Sindh Textbook Board:

- Responsible for developing and revising textbooks for multiple educational levels, complying with the approved guidelines set by the educational authorities for grades 1–12
- Validation and authorization of textbooks and content ensuring the absence of biases and imperfections, and the material not being compatible with educational demography
- Involve subject experts, teachers, and various stakeholders in the preparation of textbooks, ensuring the content is well aligned with education policies
- Develop additional educational resources to enhance the learning process, including manuals, teachers' guides, and digital applications

Sindh Teachers Education and Development Authority (STEDA):

- Responsible for developing and implementing policies for teachers' education and professional development in line with national and provincial educational goals
- Design an updated curriculum for pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes in accordance with the contemporary standards and educational needs
- Developing and implementation of teacher CPD training programmes to advance their skills and knowledge

- Fostering impartiality and equity in teacher education initiatives, ensuring equal access to training and professional development opportunities

Directorate of Inspection & Registration of Private Institutions Sindh:

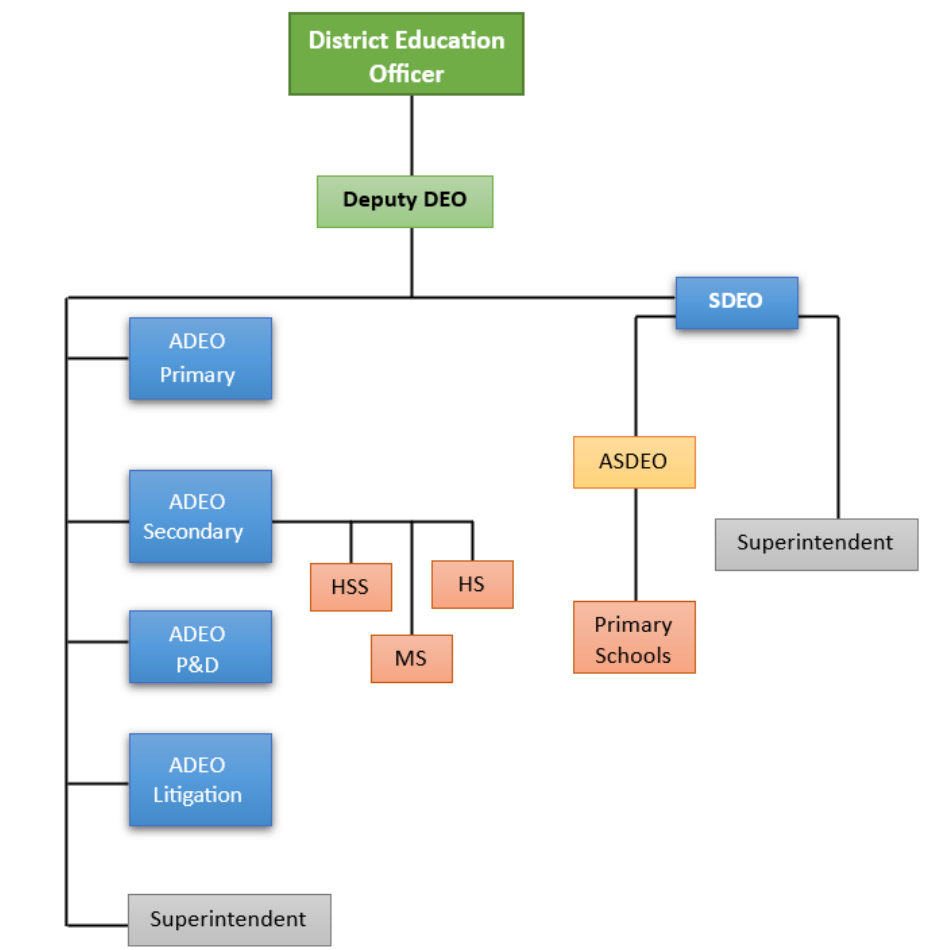
- Responsible for managing the certification of private educational institutes as well as ensuring compliance with government rules and regulations
- Regularly monitoring and inspection of private institutions to make sure they comply with educational standards, following the infrastructure regulations and teaching practices for better educational outcomes
- Responsible for monitoring the fee structure of private institutions and implementing rules and regulations within the framework of government law
- Collect data from private institutions on student enrolment, teacher attendance and qualification, along with infrastructure, and reporting to the relevant officials

8.3. District education management roles and responsibilities

District education management hierarchy in KP

In KP, each district education office comprises a DEO, DDEO, ADEO, SDEO, and ASDEOs. The district education management structure is presented in *Figure 8.1*, followed by descriptions of the mandate of each role in KP.

Figure 8.1. District education administration set-up, KP



District Education Officer (DEO): The DEO works directly under the supervision of the Director Education who is in direct connection with the Secretary Education. The DEO is the main responsible person for the educational administration and management at the district level, dealing with schools from primary to high secondary levels. The DEO also oversees the overall management of the education system along with exercising supervisory powers to monitor educational activities at the district level. Budget monitoring and utilization also falls to the DEO who is responsible for expenditures and comparing them with the previous year. Further, posting, transfer, hiring, promotion, granting leave, and performance evaluation reports are also in their mandated responsibilities. The post of DEO is further segregated into DEO-Male and DEO-Female, to ensure educational needs are properly met in terms of gender-specific requirements and issues. DEOs are also responsible for the infrastructure and inspection of schools on a regular basis, and ensuring timely submission of PC-1 documents.

Deputy District Education Officer (DDEO): The DDEO plays a pivotal role in the financial management of the district education office and the middle schools that fall under the jurisdiction of the office. The DDEO also works as a Drawing and Disbursing officer who is responsible for all financial activities regarding fund disbursement, financial operations, expense management and accountability in the educational foundations. The DDEO office prepares the annual budget for the district office and allocates funds to cover salaries and development and operational budgets.

Assistant Director Education Officer (ADEO): The ADEO has different posts within education management based on specific responsibilities, such as ADEO Planning & Development, ADEO Establishment, ADEO Sports, and ADEO Litigation. Among these, ADEO Establishment is responsible for overseeing the middle, high, and high secondary Schools in district, and they report directly to the DDEO or DEO. Their core responsibilities include oversight of educational activities performed at the district level, human resource management, and ensuring countersignature of the annual evaluation report by the DEO/DDEO. The ADEO is also responsible for identifying professional development courses for teachers and maintaining their records, assisting in the formation of PTCs at school level and their capacity-building.

Sub-Divisional Education Officer (SDEO): The SDEO is responsible for activities in specific sub-districts and tehsils within the district. They have their own designated areas where they perform their managerial duties in ensuring that policies are implemented at the grass-roots level of the designated area. The SDEO is also responsible for the approval and submission of receipts related to travel allowance and other reimbursement as per their authority, and submit these to the district education office for approval. The provision and disbursement of free textbooks to public schools via the ASDEO is also a major responsibility of the SDEO.

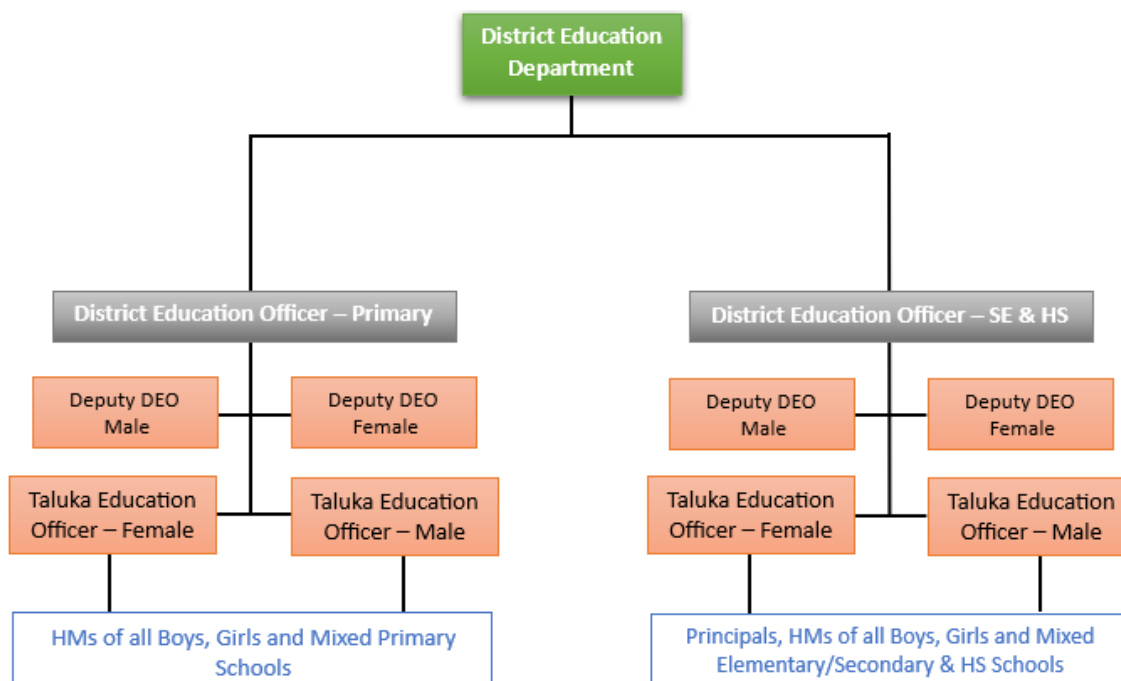
Assistant Sub-Divisional Education Officer (ASDEO): The ASDEO works directly under the supervision of the SDEO/ADEO who is responsible for educational activities at the primary school level in the designated sub-district/tehsil. Their duties include visits to the primary schools in the circle to evaluate student learning outcomes along with teacher performance. The ASDEO also checks the registers of student and teacher attendance, stock and funds register, PTC accounts and funds. They also assess and prepare a list of staff who need training for professional development, as well as having responsibility for developing a list of support staff vacancies (drivers, cleaners, security guards, etc.), collecting school data and an annual school census, and ensuring proper functioning of PTCs in all primary schools.

District education management hierarchy in Sindh

At the district level in Sindh, the district education office is led by the DEO. These DEOs are further divided into DEO Primary and DEO Elementary, Secondary and High Secondary. DDEOs support the DEO in the district to ensure effective management of educational activities. DDEOs are also further sub-divided into DDEO Primary and DDEO Elementary, Secondary and High Secondary. DDEOs are supported by Taluka Education Officers (TEOs) at the sub-district level.¹³ The district education management structure in Sindh is presented in *Figure 8.2*.

¹³ Taluka is the administrative sub-division in the districts in Sindh. In the rest of the Pakistan this administrative sub-division of the district is called Tehsil.

Figure 8.2. District education administration set-up, Sindh



The roles and responsibilities of each cadre are explained below:

DEO: The education management sector of Sindh at the district level has multiple vital tasks that involve provision of administration and guidance on educational initiatives and their alignment with provincial goals. This entails development and execution of robust district education plans that comply with provincial guidelines. Moreover, DEOs also need to establish strong coordination with different government bodies, stakeholders, organizations, and educational institutes for better quality arrangements and delivery, ensuring the proper utilization of resources, addressing challenges in a timely manner to enhance educational outcomes. DEOs conduct regular monitoring and evaluation of the schools in their respective districts to ensure that the quality of education is improving. Allocation of resources is also a vital task performed by DEOs. They also collect and analyse data on student performance, teacher recruitment and training, and they oversee administrative activities at the school level.

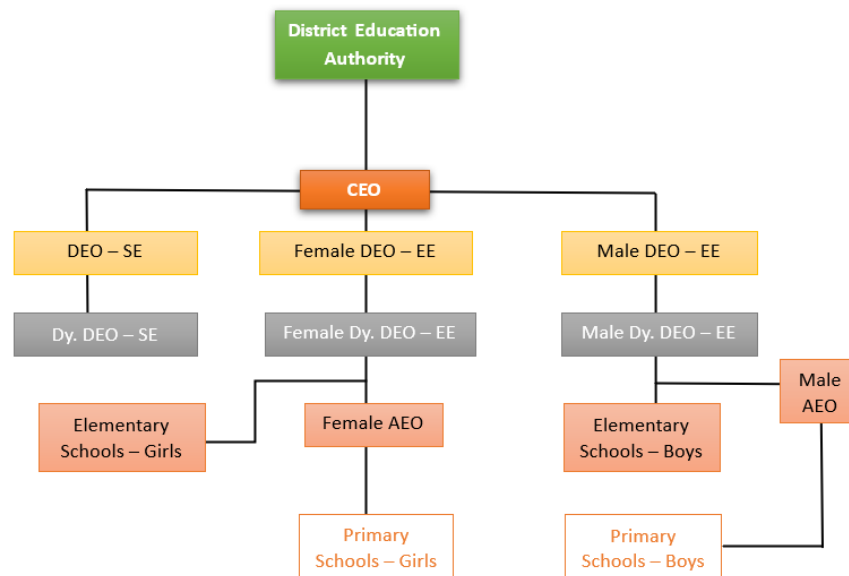
DDEO: DDEOs are responsible for assisting the DEO in managing administrative tasks on a daily basis for the smooth functioning of the educational system. The DEO designates the DDEO with monitoring responsibilities for certain educational initiatives and ensuring their effective implementation and compliance with district objectives. Conducting regular meetings and school inspections, and providing feedback to officials on the tasks assigned for the continuous improvement of quality education is also a vital role played by the DDEO.

TEO: The TEO is responsible for managing and overseeing educational activities within their assigned sub-district taluka. At the local level, they implement educational policies, visit schools around 10–15 times a month to monitor teacher and student performance. They also assist school leaders/principals in managing administrative tasks. TEOs also provide capacity and mentoring support to teachers to improve their skills and practice. Collection of data on school performance and student learning outcomes along with provision of reports to the DEO to share valuable insights is also a task performed by TEOs in their respective talukas. They also help in tracking developments and their impacts on the educational landscape of the taluka. TEOs are also responsible for engaging with the local community, parents, and stakeholders to gather support for education reforms and implementation of sector policies.

District education management hierarchy in Punjab

DEAs are established in the districts of Punjab to manage education planning, budgeting, learning leadership, and monitoring. Each DEA is led by a CEO and a DEO. A DDEO manages the tehsil level, while AEOs manage the markaz/union council level. In order to meet the needs of gender-specific schools, DEOs, DDEOs, and AEOs are divided into male and female categories. The detailed structure and breakdown of the district education delivery managers in Punjab is shown in Figure 8.3.

Figure 8.3. District education administration set-up, Punjab



CEO: Being a key performer and implementor of government education policies at the district level, the CEO holds the executive powers to oversee the effective performance of all the educational offices within the districts in Punjab. They are mandated to execute provincial education policies from district to the sub-district level in an equal manner by scheduling timely meetings with education officers to discuss the educational challenges and bottlenecks they face during implementation. Along with implementation powers, the CEO also manages and allocates development funds to the districts and sub-districts, ensuring and supervising the execution of educational arrangements are aligned with local needs. Data and information regarding schools and their performance is also updated to the provincial authorities by the CEO, who is in direct contact with them. As an executive implementor, the CEO also assists and provides support to the DEOs, DDEOs, and AEOs in a timely manner to ensure cohesion and effective performance for optimum education service delivery, nurturing a profound educational environment throughout the province.

DEO: The DEO in Punjab is a supervisory position in the DEA, responsible for monitoring the implementation of educational policies throughout the district in accordance with provincial regulations. DEOs are categorized into male and female, and are posted to lead elementary and secondary education departments, ensuring gender-unbiased access to education in the district. They supervise teaching staff, plan initiatives and activities in schools at the district level, and manage resources, ensuring that budgets are effectively allocated and utilized for educational improvement. They prepare and execute district education plans in coordination with schools and higher authorities for a uniform educational policy, ensuring that policies meet the educational standards for a conducive learning environment.

DDEO: The DDEO plays a supportive role in the DEA and is responsible for organizing and managing district education plans and activities. They monitor the performance of schools in their district by paying regular visits to ensure the effective functioning of the schools and report back to the district officials. They are also responsible for educational policy implementation, coordinating and collaborating with district staff to address

challenges at the school level that require improvements, and monitoring teaching practices to ensure the effective implementation of the curriculum provided by higher authorities. They also ensure transparency in educational finances and monitor educational expenditures along with enrolling and identifying OOSC in coordination with the local community to bring such children into the educational landscape.

AEOs: Being an integral part of district education offices, AEOs serve as liaising agents or facilitators between the provincial, district, and sub-district levels. The main tasks they perform are ensuring the execution of educational policies reinforced in such a way that they meet local needs and provincial regulations. They also perform mentoring duties for teachers at the school level while paying regular visits to schools and continuously engaging with them for effective implementation of educational policies and addressing challenges promptly. They monitor school performance through various indicators provided by provincial government along with the teacher performance. They highlight underperforming teachers and suggest professional development training to ensure better outcomes, and manage PTC funds through accurate record-keeping. AEOs continuously interact with teachers, principals, and students to facilitate them in promoting quality education.

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This report presents the findings of a capacity assessment of the middle tier in Pakistan, conducted as part of the global initiative promoted by IIEP-UNESCO to better leverage the potential of the education system's middle tier.

The middle tier plays a critical role in translating education policies into practice, coordinating support for schools, and fostering equity and instructional leadership.

