

**RESEARCH PAPER****When Teachers Are Heard Through Others: Mediated Voice, Agency, and Reform Legitimacy in Pakistan's Education Policy****<sup>1</sup>Atifa Saleem, <sup>2</sup>Prof. Dr. Anjum Bano Kazmi and <sup>3</sup>Muhammad Abdullah Farooq Javed**

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**Corresponding Author:** mafjaved2025@uop.edu.pk**ABSTRACT**

The research examines the mediation, constraint, or marginalisation of the voices of secondary school teachers in the education policy reform process in Pakistan with reference to the channels of communication between teachers and policymakers. Teacher involvement is well known as the key to legitimate and effective policy reform. Nevertheless, in most Global South setups, teacher views are often channeled through administrative lines instead of being aired outright which casts doubts on the authenticity of the teacher voice and the level of professional agency in the policy making procedures. The design used was a qualitative case study design. Semi-structured interviews with twelve teachers of secondary schools and four policy makers were used as a source of data, which was complemented by the review of documents and non-participant observations. Data interpretation was performed with the help of the thematic analysis. The findings have shown that the voices of the teachers are mostly mediated by the school administrators but not directly integrated into the policymaking process. The consultation process can be filtered and formal feedback mechanisms are usually restricted thus limiting any meaningful participation of teachers through hierarchical structures of communication. However, agency is exercised through informal and localised resistance that takes place among teachers. Institutionalisation of policy processes should incorporate direct teacher consultation strategies and open channels of feedback. By reinforcing participatory communication systems, reform legitimacy can be improved and meaningful teacher agency in policymaking accomplished.

**KEYWORDS**

Teacher Agency, Teacher Voice, Education Policy Reform, Policy Communication, Distributed Governance, Global South

**Introduction**

The policy changes in many educational institutions, most notably in the Global South, are often based on the top-down approaches that give preference to administrative, political, or donor-influenced views rather than to the contributions of educators (Rind and Abowitz, 2024). Even though the role of teachers is to bring change within the classroom, they are rarely involved in designing or evaluating the reforms. Their voices are rarely heard and they are usually mediated by someone like the government, NGO or policy consultants. This introduces a gap between the policy goals and classroom realities, which raises crucial questions about teacher autonomy, expression, and professional credibility (Bascia and Maharaj, 2022; Cochran -Smith, 2021; Linville, 2020).

The case in Pakistan is quite instructive. Despite consecutive educational policies emphasizing the importance of teacher development and stakeholder contact (Ahmed et al., 2021), the implementation is still not satisfactory and the teachers themselves are often

only nominal (Shaikh and Benedetti, 2024). Single National Curriculum (SNC) and other reforms have been lamented due to lack of teacher ownership that limits the flexibility and applicability of teachers in schools (Pasha, 2022; Shakir et al., 2024). Moreover, teacher unions and professional associations often have inadequate structural power in policy spaces, and thus, the voice of the profession becomes more of an individual one (Rehman et al., 2024; Mpsi, 2023).

This paper applies the theory of social cognitive proposed by Bandura (1986) to the understanding of the teacher agency as a dynamic interaction between personal efficacy, contextual structures, and social systems. It is also informed by the theory of policy enactment postulated by Ball et al. (2012), which views teacher as an active policy agent that interpret and translate the policies in specific institutional settings and does not view them as a passive implementation agent. These theoretical frameworks offer a thorough analysis of the impact on communication deficiency on introducing the reforms and the professional activities that teachers can or cannot accomplish.

Even though the literature about the structural and political barriers to effective policy implementation in Pakistan has been identified in past (Ali et al., 2024; Aziz et al., 2021), the communicative and relational elements of the reform have received limited attention, including the representation, distortion, or total silence of the teacher voice. To fill this gap, the study poses the following research questions:

## **Literature Review**

Cochran-Smith (2021) contends that teacher training and reform efforts are often placed in accountability systems that are confining and exclude the opinion of teachers, thus constraining their agency and affecting the mediation of their voices in the policy sphere. The intersection of teacher voice, agency, and educational policy has been a particular area of interest to research over the past decades, particularly as more concerns are expressed about the hierarchical nature of reform and pragmatic disengagement of politicians and practitioners (Sinclair and Brooks, 2024). Scholars argue that teacher participation in the development of policies is essential to the processes of democratic legitimacy and relevance and sustainability of change (Bascia and Maharaj, 2022; Linville, 2020). However, empirical evidence on numerous settings suggests that the perspective of teachers is often filtered, selectively presented, or marginalised in the decision-making process especially in low-income and middle-income countries (Rehman et al., 2024; Mpsi, 2023).

## **Voice and Policy Participation of teachers**

The concept of teacher voice is the ability of educators to have substantial involvement in policy debates and decision-making processes that can affect their professional practice (Lauritzen, 2023; Hargreaves, 2021). It has been found that institutional hierarchies, bureaucratic processes, or political gatekeeping tend to undermine the voice of teachers. The educational research into the area of educational reform has repeatedly shown that teachers are rarely perceived as drivers of change. In their systematic review of the role of teacher change agency, Brown et al. (2023) observe that teachers are largely portrayed as agents of top-down change, and little attention is given to their potential to be agents of bottom-up change. This framing depicts a larger policy tendency to have authority and innovation outside of the classroom, to reinforce hierarchical structures of decision-making.

In the context of Pakistan, Javed et al. (2025) found that distributed leadership in semi-government schools is often driven by delegation instead of empowerment and the role of teachers in innovation depends on the interpretive role of the school leader. All these points combined suggest that professional voice of teachers is being not entirely absent in reform processes; quite on the contrary, it is often filtered through management or policy

hierarchies, which leads to mediated inclusion and begs the question of the credibility and validity of the change in education. Pakistan traditionally designs and implements education changes without continuing consultation with educators, although the policy directives theoretically included consultation with educators (Ahmed et al., 2021; Akram and Yang, 2021). The adoption of the Single National Curriculum (SNC) has been criticised as promoting ideologically flattened ideals to the detriment of the varied realities that exist in the classrooms (Shaikh and Benedetti, 2024; Pasha, 2022).

Fullan (2020), Hargreaves and Fullan (2015) and others are experts in global policy discussion, and they have vociferously argued in support of the professionalisation of education through greater participation in policy change. Their approach argues that teachers should be co-constructors of change and not merely implementers of instructions handed down. Failure to involve teachers in such processes often leads to reform efforts that do not have any legitimacy or traction in schools (Marsh et al., 2020; Green and Koebele, 2024).

### **Understanding Teacher Agency**

Teacher agency is a complex notion based on the ability of teachers to be intentional and make choices that determine their professional courses (Bandura, 1986). Socioculturally, agency is not an individualistic feature but is influenced by the institutional, political and discursive contexts with which educators are working (Ball et al., 2012; Cochran-Smith, 2021). In policy-making, agency relies on the possibilities of expression, professional autonomy, and acknowledgment in the policymaking sphere.

In Pakistan, a variety of systemic issues limit agency of teachers, such as standardised curricula, hierarchical schooling systems, and reform programs funded by donors, which regularly preclude teacher participation (Rind & Abowitz, 2024). Even though some studies have investigated the issue of decision-making at the classroom level among teachers (Shakir et al., 2024), little has been done about how teachers make sense of their role in the larger policy system and how they navigate it.

Also, the teacher unions in Pakistan, which could potentially become platforms of collective voice, are either institutionalised illegitimate or marginalized in the period of crucial reforms (Rehman et al., 2024; Mpisi, 2023). This leads to the so-called depoliticisation of educators as Giroux (2020) explains the process where instructors are deprived of their intellectual and transformative roles.

### **Policy Mediation and the Role of Intermediaries**

The role of intermediaries as the people who often represent teachers without meaningful reflection of their lived experience contributes to a serious problem of real teacher participation in policy reform (Boeskens & Nusche, 2021; Althaus et al., 2022). These actors might also add significant experience, but their involvement will only reproduce hierarchical structures of communication with no frontline opinion reflected.

This problem is especially apparent in the case of Pakistan, where the discourse of policies is often based on the sum of statistics, the priorities of donors, or commentaries by experts of the elite without touching the ground level reality (Ali et al., 2024). In turn, reforms can be technically feasible in theory but not appealing to the educators who have to implement them.

### **The Global South Perspective**

Recent education policy research in the Global South has proposed context-sensitive approaches that focus on their professional knowledge and denounces the blind application

of foreign models (Aithal & Aithal, 2020; Kumar, 2021). Scholars claim that the transformational efforts in countries like Pakistan should be based on the social, cultural, and political peculiarities of the educational system including its colonial past and modern privatisation trends (Rind & Abowitz, 2024; Aziz et al., 2021).

Although there is an increased concern on participatory governance, teacher involvement has not been implemented well. Lack of clearly defined and organised channels through which teachers can be provided with feedback results in what Abbott et al. (2019) describe as symbolic participation, where consultation happens and influence is limited.

### **Conceptual Framework**

A consistent conceptual framework use is informed by this study, including two major theoretical areas: a social cognitive theory developed by Bandura (1986) (that focuses on human agency) and a policy enactment framework introduced by Ball et al. (2012). Taken together, these views help to better comprehend the nature of communication gaps in defining teacher agency in the education policy change, especially in centralised and hierarchical systems like the one in Pakistan.

### **Social Cognitive Theory and Teacher Agency**

The social cognitive theory of Albert Bandura offers a general understanding of human agency, which is the ability of a person to act independently and to make decisions that have an influence on his or her life and environment (Bandura, 1986). In this regard, agency is not rather an individual characteristic, but rather a factor that is determined by the mutual interaction of behavioural, environmental and personal factors. Bandura defines three basic types of agency, including individual, proxy, and collective. These modalities of agency play a critical role in the education policy field in understanding how educators seek to shape policy decisions either directly by representing or indirectly by using mediators or mass action.

Where the consultation between teachers is limited or nominal, teachers tend to use proxy agency, where they place the representation of their interests into the hands of school administration, nongovernmental organisations or trade union representatives. This delegation fails to ensure a proper and meaningful representation and even weaken teacher voice or limit agency. This is specifically relevant in Pakistan where hierarchical arrangements and centralised reforms constantly constrain access by teachers to policy spaces (Rehman et al., 2024). The paradigm by Bandura explains how limitations to direct involvement may influence the self-efficacy, ownership, and professional involvement of teachers.

### **Policy Enactment Theory**

Ball et al. (2012) suggest a policy enactment theory that put emphasis on policy formation to the mechanisms by which educators assess, negotiate and realize policy in terms of practice. This view takes teachers as active participants in policy, rather than as passive receivers, whose reactions to policy are determined by context, culture and institutional norms. Ball et al. (2012) distinguish between policy as text, which means the formal written documents of policy, and policy as discourse, which means the meanings, interpretations, and practices, which derive out of the written documents. In this perspective, teachers therefore act as implementers within the educational contexts, as they constantly negotiate, read and sometimes challenge policy. Their interpretations are not only influenced by the perspectives and experiences that they have but also by the communication of policies and by whom.

This lens cannot be neglected in the analysis of the mediated communication of policy reforms in Pakistan because most often the teachers are mediated through intermediaries, such as the bureaucrats, consultants, or NGO staff, whose interpretations may not be aligned with the real experiences of teachers. The framework of enactment allows investigating the effects of such mediation on the professional identity of teachers, their instructions, and their perceived autonomy (Cocharane-Smith, 2021; Linville, 2020).

### **Bridging the Frameworks**

Together, these theories provide a holistic understanding of the structural conditions and human experiences that affect teacher agency in the process of policy reform. The paradigm proposed by Bandura focuses on the internal and societal processes that either support or hinder the process of agency development, whereas the framework suggested by Ball is based on the contextual implementation and the impact of institutional and discursive environments. This two-fold emphasis is particularly relevant in systems like the one in Pakistan where the official systems often discourage face-to-face interaction, but teachers find means to read between the lines and enact the policy. The overall purpose of the study is substantially underpinned by a unified conceptual framework that disproves the fact that teacher perceptions are well-represented by the policy reform, simply due to the fact that the intermediaries have been consulted. It gives a more detailed discussion of who the representatives of teachers are, how they are articulated, and what it contributes to their professional liberty and effective implementation of changes in education.

### **Material and Methods**

The qualitative case study was intended to analyze the effects of teacher agency on the communication gaps in the education policy reform in Pakistan. It was based on an interpretivist paradigm that led to a detailed study of the lived experience of the teachers, their policy communication, as well as how their voices are suppressed or encouraged. The contextual sensitivity, diversity of participants, and rigor of the analysis were achieved through the methodological design.

### **Research Design and Sampling Strategy**

The researcher used a purposive sampling technique to recruit participants who could provide a significant amount of contextually-sensitive information relevant to the research questions. They were chosen among twelve teachers in 6 secondary schools in Punjab and 6 secondary schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and four education policymakers in the head office. It was focused on semi-government schools which are governed by partial governmental control. These schools represent a balance between fully public and private schools where a valuable context is offered to analyse the process of communication and enactment of policy reforms in complex governance structures.

The selection of teachers was done to ensure different subject areas, gender identities, and teaching experience to ensure a diverse opinion. These policy makers included the top officials of the headquarters and the members of the curriculum and reform committees. Every subject voluntarily agreed to take part in the research.

### **Data Collection Methods**

Semi-structured interviews, document analysis and observations were used as the three key methods of data collection. The primary source of data was in the form of comprehensive, semi-structured interviews. The face-to-face interviews would be carried out at the beginning of January to April 2025 in sessions of 45-60 minutes. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed word to word and informed consent of the respondents. The interview methodology was constructed based on the conceptual framework and

included aspects of experiences of policy communication, perceptions of representation, and scenarios in which the participants felt that their agency was either assisted or inhibited. The format was flexible to enable the exploration of the emergent themes.

The last five years of policy documents, circulars, implementation guidelines and minutes of meetings were collected and read in order to understand the formal communication and representation process. The records were useful in establishing official narratives and omissions in regards to teacher involvement in reform activities. Facilitated non-participant observations were also conducted in specific school staffrooms and teacher professional development meetings in order to understand the informal discussions about a policy communication and the mundane execution of reforms. Field notes were captured and used to improve and support the interview information.

### **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed through the six steps thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2012). The method began by familiarisation where there were repeated reviews of all transcripts, field notes, and documentation to attain an in-depth knowledge. The first codes were written inductively and then resulted in the drawing up of the broad themes. The evaluation and refinement of themes were done to ensure internal consistency and external uniqueness. The entire coding was done in a manual mode to maintain a direct relationship to the data.

The discussion was on how the responses of teachers were expressed about their experiences of being heard or represented, the mediating factors, and how this impacts on their professional agency. Policy makers were also interviewed at the same time to help find out any conflict or lack of communication.

### **Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations**

Several measures were taken in order to make the research trustworthy. Member checking was also done through the publication of preliminary results to selected members in an effort to ensure that the interpretations are accurate. The combination of data i.e. interview, documents and observation made the analysis more credible and profound. Two independent scholars who have expertise in the education policy landscape in South Asia were used to conduct peer debriefing and critique emerging interpretations.

The institutional review board of the university where the main researcher, gave ethical approval to the study. The study objective was well-informed to the participants, the voluntariness of their participation and their right to pull out at any time. Informed consent was obtained in writing and the subjects assured confidentiality and anonymity. All names used in the study are fictional in order to protect the identity. All data were stored in password-protected folders and used only for academic purposes.

### **Results and Discussion**

Based on the analysis of the interviews and policy texts and observations in schools, this section outlines three major themes. All the themes are founded on the interviews with educators and policymakers and supported by documentary materials and field notes. Pseudonyms are also used to prevent confidentiality.

#### **Theme 1: Mediated Voices - When Policymakers Speak for Teachers**

A similarity that was apparent in both of the provinces was that education reforms were often structured in terms of how the officials perceived the needs of the teachers and not the opinion expressed by the teachers themselves. Even though the officials occasionally

mentioned consultation with stakeholders, teachers described them as either shallow or non-existent.

Saira, a senior teacher from Punjab, reflected: *"They say they talk to us before making changes, but I have never been invited or even heard of any such meeting. Sometimes they send a form, like a survey, and that's it. We don't even know what happens to it. It feels like they're just ticking boxes."* Similarly, Ahsan, a secondary teacher in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, said: *"I heard from my headmaster that a policy is changing, but we were not asked. It's always like someone up there is deciding for us, and then we're expected to just go along. We don't get to ask why or suggest what works in our classes."*

Policymakers interviewed acknowledged that teacher consultation is often indirect. One policymaker noted: *"We rely on reports of Principals (school leaders), but direct consultation with teachers is logistically difficult. We do our best with what's feasible."*

This hierarchical structure was confirmed by observation data on the school meetings. The teachers were rarely informed about the new policy developments unless the latter directly affected the curriculum or assessments. In one of the schools in Peshawar, staff conference on curriculum changes was held by the principal alone and the teaching staff did not give their contributions. A review of the existing curriculum reform reports (e.g., Single National Curriculum Implementation Framework, 2021) showed that the consideration of the stakeholder input is mentioned without specifying the groups consulted and the methods of the feedback integration.

This topic highlights the gap in claims of participative policy reform and policy practice. Though the governments might feel that they are acting in the best interest of the teachers, the teachers perceive these reforms to be imposed on them. This goes in line with the concept of policy-as-discourse by Ball et al. (2012), in which implementation often communicates with, but not alongside practitioners. The perceived neglect of the teachers makes them less responsible and instills a culture of compliance rather than one of cooperation.

## **Theme 2: Fragmented Communication and Misalignment**

The second theme relates to all the fragmented and asymmetrical communication pathways between policy makers and educators. The participants mentioned uncertainty in the message and interpretation of new rules, in particular, on curricular changes and instructional policies.

Zubair, a teacher from a city in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, commented: *"There's no proper way they inform us. One day we hear a rumour, next day a circular comes. Then it's the headteacher telling us to do something new, but with no training or explanation. We're left guessing what's actually required."* This misalignment often resulted in confusion at the school level. Nighat, a headteacher in a city in Punjab, shared: *"Sometimes we get circulars that contradict previous ones. Or the language is so vague that we interpret it differently. I had to clarify with another school to see how they understood it. There's no proper follow-up from the department."*

Policymakers expressed their limitations in communicating with the teachers across the country in effective manner. During the interview, one policymaker expressed his helplessness: *"What can we do? We can only send directives and letters to Principals (school leaders), and then mostly rely on their feedback. It is not possible for us to get in touch with all teachers."*

During the observation of a training session on formative assessment reform, the facilitator consistently encountered difficulties in addressing teacher enquiries, attributing

this to insufficient departmental supervision. Educators murmured among themselves, enquiring if the policy had been finalised.

Policy documents were regularly full of vague language, i.e., they had such statements like promote activity-based learning, or meet national standards, but did not specify what strategies educators had to implement specifically. Document analysis also indicated low localisation provisions of the semi-government institutions and insufficiency of various student needs.

The observed fragmented communicative structures can be linked to the concept of policy incoherence suggested by Marsh et al. (2020) according to which the lack of clarity in instructions undermines policy adherence. The absence of formal and regular communication channels does not only worsen the educators but also brings about inconsistent execution. This incompatibility reduces the ability of teachers to be innovative in the agenda framework thus making teachers not claim ownership of the reform.

### **Theme 3: Constrained but Emerging Agency**

Even though the structural constraints were present, the educators were able to manifest agency (pinpointed or conspicuous) when altering or renegotiating policy instructions in their classroom environments. However, such activities were usually non-systematic and were barely institutionalized.

Farzana, a teacher in a city in Punjab, said: *"We are told to do lesson planning according to the new themes, but sometimes they don't make sense for our students. So I tweak them, add my own examples. I don't report it because I fear being questioned, but I have to make it work for my class."* Similarly, Jawad, a science teacher from a city in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, explained: *"The policy says 'hands-on learning,' but we don't have labs. So I use simple things; bottles, string, whatever I can find. No one told me to do it. I just know the kids understand better this way."*

Policymakers appeared largely unaware of these grassroots adaptations. One policymaker said: *"We assume teachers follow the guidelines. If there's deviation, it's seen as non-compliance. We have no mechanism to track or support local innovation."*

In one of the recorded lessons in a semi-government school, a teacher has deviated off the given lesson plan and added a local cultural reference, which significantly increased student engagement. Though this initiative was not registered, its effects could be easily felt.

According to field notes based on document analysis, there were strict standardisation measures that had allowed little room to contextualise as well as to integrate feedback based on classroom experiences.

This theme demonstrates the concept of agency proposed by Bandura (2001) of proxy agency, in which teachers are acting in an agency even though they are limited by the means but are not supported by structures and institutions. Such examples of adaptive practice testify the fact that educators are not passive receivers of reform, but active intermediaries. Nevertheless, this agency is peripheral in the absence of approved mediums of criticism. The results hence point to a wasted chance: such a source of inherent professional knowledge would help to raise the sustainability of reforms and make them more contextually relevant.

### **Discussion**

The current section puts the empirical data into perspective with the existing body of knowledge and the theoretical model of teacher agency in policy making. It provides an

interview on the main research questions related to the first-hand experience of the teachers in terms of communication in educational change, representation or mediation of their voices, and support or suppression of their professional agency in the policy milieu. The discussion is organized based on three critical observations namely: (1) the politics of representation and symbolic engagement; (2) the implications of systemic miscommunication on policy action; and (3) the development of informal teacher agency within structured systems. The discussion concludes with a consideration of how the research brings new insights into the academic discussions on teacher agency, communication and policy change in resource-limited environments like in Pakistan.

### **Symbolic Participation and the Politics of Representation**

The main lesson learned in the course of the empirical research is that teachers are always viewed in the indirect sense, which is a fact that is highly dependent on the mediation and selective representation processes. The pronouncement of policymakers concerning inclusion of the stakeholders do not align with the real experiences of teachers who often have to face no consultation or only procedural consultation. This symbolic interaction resembles the argument of Ball (1994) that education policy incorporates not just practice but the politics of voice, which include who is permitted to speak, when and how. The new generation of educators viewed themselves as represented objects but not as active participants in dialogue. Such a relationship fits into the statement in Brown et al. (2023) to the extent that teachers are enforcers of top-down changes and possible bottom-up innovations are ignored. The dataset classifies teachers as the implementers of professional-led change or the passive people, who receive the promotion of the government. Bureaucratic hierarchies and political centralisation are the factors that worsen this dynamic in the semi-government schools of Pakistan. Therefore, teachers are systematically excluded in making the higher-level decisions because their opinions are refracted through administrators or union leaders who are not always reliable in transferring the frontline issues.

This paper clarifies the ways in which teacher consultation can be confused with a real consultation in the context of an environment that is defined by a non-transparent and hierarchical governance system. It questions the oversimplified accounts of teacher engagement; in that formal inclusion may conceal informal exclusion.

### **Systemic Miscommunication and the Fragility of Policy Enactment**

The second lesson predicts the fragmented and discontinuous nature of communication between educators and political actors that significantly hinders the implementation of the policies. Results show that vague instructions, mixed messages, and contradictory circulars create an environment of uncertainty and uncertainty in the institutional context. Teachers often said that they tried to make out unclear norms without proper help, and they thus reflect the description of policy sense-making offered by Spillane et al. (2002). Unlike the decentralized systems where innovation is likely to occur as a result of sense-making, the Pakistani milieu seems to insulate the deviation and favour conformity in place of interpretive flexibility.

This kind of misalignment is representative of the concept of Fullan (2007) of implementation failure that is explained not only by teacher resistance but also by the absence of adequate infrastructural support. The confusion between the teachers is rather not due to incompetence or indifference, but to the lack of an effective communication channel, as well as the absence of effective feedback systems. Teachers, therefore, play a dual role as subjects and agents of change, being expected to abide by new directions without being given the power to critically analyze, interpret and make significant adjustments to change initiatives.

The research adds up to the existing literature since it demonstrates that communication failures in the system are not only logistical but also inherently political. In low-resource, centralised educational systems, communication is a non-neutral process: it becomes a means of power exercise at the expense of some of the actors and in favour of some others. This recontextualisation complements the dominant meanings of the idea of the policy translation in the Global South (Rizvi and Lingard, 2009) by showing that the communication failures are not only the technological failures but also the political constructs.

### **Informal Agency Within Constraint: Beyond the Binary of Passive vs Active Teachers**

The third prominent observation is that teacher agency exists, although it is mostly informal and often not recognized. Within the framework of this study, teachers explained that they made a lot of attempts to tailor lesson plans, contextualise, and use improvised materials to render the policy directives relevant to their students in a meaningful way. Such micro-level discretionary practices are the examples of the concept known by Priestley et al. (2015) when determining the notion of constrained agency, i.e. when teachers are allowed to exercise judgement and creativity within the frames of the existing structural constraints.

This study offers empirical evidence of adaptive agency, contrasting prevalent deficiency narratives that depict teachers in Pakistan as unmotivated, without a positive attitude, or initiative (Nawab & Bissaker, 2021). Significantly, these actions were characterised not as acts of defiance but as acts of accountability, with educators navigating the system to enhance student support. The findings such as these problematize the simple dichotomy according to which teachers are seen as passive implementers or heroic rebels, but rather create a more nuanced account of teacher professionalism as pragmatic, context-specific, and relationship.

Moreover, the study points out to the fact that to a great extent, this institution is not the subject of the attention of policymakers. Even though teachers modify their practices in order to use policy effectively, these changes are not recognized and incorporated into policy processes. Such a disjunction solidifies a one-way policy system where students are supposed to learn but not educators. The article develops the work of Biesta et al. (2015) by highlighting the relational and ecological aspects of agency that denotes the behaviours of teachers in conjunction with other people in systems and in many cases, in contradiction to them.

### **Conclusion**

The study contributes to theoretical knowledge about teacher agency in the policy processes in the Global South, especially through the framework of the policy enactment theory (Ball et al., 2012) and the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986). The data indicate that the agency of teachers in semi-government schools is not neither absent nor autonomy; on the contrary, it is often influenced or manipulated by the means of intermediaries, including school leaders. This observation supports the fact by Bandura that agency is socially grounded and culturally limited. This absence of educator involvement in the policy discussions also confirms the description of policy implementation as contingent, negotiated, and selective as provided by Ball (2012). The current study has contributed to the theoretical discussion by revealing how top-down structures and shallow consultations misrepresent teacher voice the problem that has not been well addressed in earlier research.

The implications of these findings are enormous to education policy makers, administrators of schools and reform programs funded by donors in Pakistan. The research recognizes a lack of systemic linkage between front line teachers and policy makers,

particularly in semi-government institutions. To enhance teacher agency, the transition of symbolic representation to substantive consultation by policymakers ought to be adopted and institutionalisation of formal mechanism like the establishment of regional teacher-policy councils through which policy development may be developed through collaboration.

The results also show that document-based reforms (e.g. curricular structures, teacher standards) have limited penetration into classroom life. The policymakers should consider the bottom-up approach, which involves policy translation into realistic school-based frameworks in collaboration with the teachers. The training programs in leadership must include participatory decision-making and ethical representation of the staff opinion. Lastly, the development partners and the NGOs need to review assumptions about teacher engagement, and participatory tools should be centrally incorporated into culturally sensitive, power-conscious systems. The failure to consider such practical aspects may lead to the continuation of discriminating processes against which reforms seek to eliminate.

### **Revisiting the Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical foundation of the research is the ecological model of teacher agency (Priestley et al., 2015) which is based on the idea of agency as the result of personal competencies, structural conditions, and professional cultures interaction. This view of individual teachers is supported by the empirical data suggesting that the institutional and cultural circumstances had a significant impact on the expression of the agency of individual teachers, although they had the ability and desire to act. This highlights the fact that empowering the teacher in policy change is not a matter of personal motivation, but, indeed, a systems reorganization to be authentic and traditional in recognizing, valuing, and integrating teacher voices.

The results also support the policy as a discursive space hypothesis (Ball, 1994), according to which the control of language and representation defines who is seen as knowledgeable and which voice gets a privilege to be heard by the power. In Pakistan, teacher inclusion is increasingly being discussed although the system continues to marginalize teachers by consulting them superficially and conveying vague messages.

### **Recommendations**

On the basis of the data and literature, some crucial solutions are offered to overcome communication rifts and promote teacher agency in the education policy reform. First, the ministries and provincial education agencies ought to institutionalize teacher involvement by having representative forums that encompass teachers of various school types such as semi-government schools with rotational membership and decision making powers. This conforms to recommendations offered by Sinclair and Brooks (2024) on dispersed policy networks.

The education leaders and officials should be ready to act as facilitators instead of gatekeepers of the policy discourse. The feedback provided by the teachers must be documented, shared and must be reflected in their policymaking using transparent feedback mechanisms, which is critical in instilling confidence as supported by Lauritzen (2023). Furthermore, the donor-driven education reforms must use the participatory research approaches, i.e. focus group and co-design researches, in all the stages of the program cycles. According to empirical findings, it seems that top-down reforms tend to be very irrelevant or are treated with a grain of salt at the school level, which highlights the need to improve contextual sensitivity.

Policy literacy and professional autonomy should be included in the teacher training. The research suggests that motivation and effectiveness will increase as teachers will understand the rationale behind the policies and will feel as a participant, rather than

an importer of them (Cochran-Smith, 2021; Bandura, 2001). Similarly, the evaluation techniques should incorporate qualitative measures of teacher participation, besides the student achievement measures. Integration of classroom observations with teacher feedback as was the case in this research gives a holistic view on reform effects.

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

Such revelations have absolute policy implications. The policymakers need to go beyond the token consultations and put up institutionalized, long-term structures of engaging the frontline educators in the reform process. The strategies of communication must be revised thoroughly in the process of making them clear, consistent and appropriate to context. No less important is the institutionalization of feedback mechanisms that value and learn about the practical changes of teachers which do not perceive them as passive implementers but as active joint policy makers.

Without these kinds of transformations, it is probable that reforms will keep facing uneven application, poor ownership, and diminished sustainability, regardless of how they are better designed on higher administrative levels.

### **Directions for Future Research**

The current research provides significant information about teacher agency as part of Pakistani education reforms, but future studies need to explore institutional aspects of the issue and different geographic settings. The longitudinal research of how teacher voices have developed through different crises of reform would provide deep understanding of institutional memory and culture-changing in schools. Comparative studies of the private schools, the public schools and semi government schools might help clarify the effect of various governance system on teacher involvement in the policy process.

Besides, the mediating function of the educational unions and professional organizations between teachers and policymakers should be explored. Do they add to or undermine the natural teaching voices? Are they acceptable to grassroots educators? The mixed-method research may explain these dynamics in more detail. Besides, the inclusion of student-based opinions into the discussion of the teacher voice might contribute to expanding the knowledge base on the consequences in question in the context of silencing frontline educators. Further research on the topic can utilize the method of critical discourse analysis (CDA) of policy documents and media texts on teachers and, by doing so, shed light on the ways the linguistic practices are used to assign roles and responsibilities that empower or limit teacher agency.

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