



Navigating The Pedagogical Landscape: A Qualitative Inquiry Into Teachers' Perceptions And Preparedness For Teaching License In Sindh, Pakistan

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Abstract

Quality of teachers' development, recruitment, and retention holds substantial value when it comes to delivering quality education. In this paradigm, teaching licensing epitomizes the cornerstone of development as it brings professionalism in teaching, executing strict protocols of compliance with quality measures. In the context of Pakistan, the emergence of the Sindh Teaching License Policy has served as a progressive initiative towards elevating the educational caliber in the province to ensure teachers' adherence and compliance to certain standards of skills, knowledge, and competence and, in turn, bringing professional proficiency to them. The current study is aimed at exploring teacher's perceptions and readiness concerning the newly introduced teacher licensing system in the context of the province of Sindh, Pakistan. Data was analysed and presented by conducting a thematic analysis of interviews. Findings revealed that when asked about their perceptions, teachers expressed skepticism about licensing policy implementation, cited resource constraints, showed transparency and accountability concerns, called for better stakeholder engagement and support, and finally demanded clarity on policy, benefits, and its impact on their professional status. Moreover, while discussing their readiness and the barriers they encountered, teachers communicated a lack of readiness for the requirements as they felt the absence of formal training and support by their institutions, and the need for supportive resources and test materials. Furthermore, personal financial constraints, resistance to change, and inequity of access were notably hindering access to licensure at the primary individual levels. On the contrary, the senior educational faculty members recognized the significance and need for the policy initiative and careful implementation of the policy. The challenges highlighted include the involvement of private sector schools, the status of existing teachers, the importance of teacher involvement, and the government's responsibility for support. This research study emphasizes the need for dedicated efforts by policymakers and educational stakeholders to enhance teacher licensing and improve the quality of education in Sindh.

Keywords: Teaching License, Teachers' Licensing, Sindh Teaching License Policy, Teachers' Perceptions, Teachers' Readiness.



Introduction

Background of the Study

After decades-long struggles and challenges, Pakistan's educational landscape has been finally undergoing significant transformations to uplift the educational quality and ensure better student outcomes. One of the areas calling for substantial improvements in this paradigm was the concern regarding the quality of teachers' development, recruitment, and retention according to well-structured mandates (Tahira et al., 2020; Tareen et al., 2022). Consequently, the attention of policymakers and the Ministry of Education in Pakistan has been garnered towards addressing the issues of professionalism in teaching and the development of licensing systems to execute strict protocols of compliance with quality measures. Although teachers in Pakistan receive certification via distinct "pre-service teacher training programs", they still are not granted licenses for teaching in the classrooms (Gul & Hussain, 2016). Thus, in consideration of the above and as a progressive initiative towards elevating the educational caliber, the province of Sindh has taken the first big step forward and introduced a teacher licensing system "Sindh Teaching License Policy" which received approval in May 2023 (Ali & Ahmed, 2022; Tunio, 2023). Being an imperious part of educational reform, the licensing system is developed to assess the pedagogical as well as content knowledge of educators (Hasan, 2023). This system is developed for ensuring teachers' adherence and compliance to certain standards of skills, knowledge, and competence and, in turn, bringing professional proficiency to them (Javaid, 2023). Such a policy has the potential to subsidize teaching quality by setting pre-determined standards for entering the profession which, in turn, will result in a qualified applicant pool and consequently enhance students' learning outcomes (Rizwan, 2015). Besides, a teaching license can further upsurge the professional status of teachers, enclosing better and increased employment prospects both locally and internationally (AKU, 2021). Hence, teachers who are aspired to extend their career path may feel deeply motivated to undertake this endeavour to fortify their professional status.

The licensing policy has reflected the achievement of an imperative milestone as 646 teachers have reportedly cleared Pakistan's first Teaching License Test held under this policy on January 28, 2024 (AKU, 2024). The policy is not only directed towards elevating teaching standards but is also intended to endorse a culture of accountability, continual improvements, and equity in the educational context. Another primary endeavor is to enhance the status of the profession by attracting young talent to this sector (Hasan, 2024). Syed Sardar Ali Shah



(the Provincial Minister of Sindh for Education, Culture, Tourism, and Antiquities and Archives) shared his views regarding the policy by asserting that:

“Sindh is the only province that has approved a teaching license policy, which represents a proactive approach to recognising the value and importance of effective teaching. With the policy in place, the Sindh Government has laid the foundation for a more robust and professional teaching workforce, which will have a positive and lasting impact on the educational landscape in the province.” (AKU, 2023)

Considering the prior conditions of the teaching sector and the discrepancies concerning access to professional development opportunities, teachers might come across a myriad of disparities when acquiring a teaching license. Apart from this, teachers from rural or underserved areas may not have equitable access to licensing tests which is another pronounced challenge (The Express Tribune, 2024).

Statement of the Problem

In the transformative educational horizon of Sindh, the emergence of the teaching licensing system serves as the cornerstone of development intended at attaining the ultimate quality goals. However, despite this considerable reform, there exists the need to wholly comprehend the underlying opportunities alongside the challenges inherent in the educational sector that have been influenced by the licensing policy. First and foremost, it is indeed notable that the policy has the prime incentive of cultivating the teaching profession by introducing a new caliber of hiring which will facilitate the development of a proficient workforce. However, it can also not be overlooked that the present teachers might not be prepared for such an abrupt transition and may encounter various challenges or barriers in complying with the novel requirements. Apart from this, the existing situation in the educational sector and the emergence of new obligations might have an impact on teachers' readiness towards this reform.

On the contrary, since the policy is also attributable to opening new doors to better career opportunities, the teachers will also have affirmative takes on this paradigm that needs to be discussed. However, to date, there is no study exploring these topics to offer a clear picture of the extent of acceptance of the licensing system by the teachers in Sindh. Hence, in view of the present standing of the issue and the dearth of research on this topic due to the recency of its nature, the research seeks to identify the outlooks, encouraging facets, and perceived barriers to the successful implementation of the teaching license system in Sindh. From structural challenges to cultural resistance, various factors may hinder the implementation of



licensing initiatives. By investigating these barriers through the lens of teachers, educational administrators, and policymakers, the study aims to elucidate the complex interplay of contributory factors.

Research Objectives

The current study revolves around the following primary objectives that enlighten the rationale driving this research:

- To explore teachers' perceptions of the newly introduced teaching license system in Sindh, Pakistan.
- To assess teachers' readiness to meet the teaching license requirements in terms of knowledge, skills, and professional development needs.
- To identify potential barriers to the successful implementation of the teaching license in Sindh.
- To investigate the insight of the educational experts on the Teaching License initiative in Sindh Pakistan.

Literature Review

Teacher Licensing and Professionalization

Teacher licensing is a globalized system that endeavors to set forth minimal standards regarding teaching competencies and qualifications for educators, which can potentially uplift education quality. Globally, teacher licensing and professionalization are essential aspects of the educational system and consist of instituting regulations, assessments, and standards controlling the certification and induction of teachers. The teachers must exhibit certain skills, literacy, and competence through licensure to ensure the quality of education for students, parents, policymakers, and stakeholders (Cochran-Smith, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2000). Professionalization encircles the current advancement, recognition, and progression of teaching as a recognized and honored profession.

Studies concerning teaching licensing and professionalization underline the multifaceted nature of these constructs and their ensuing implications for educational policy, practice, and outcomes. For instance, Goldhaber and Brewer (2000) reported that the requirements of teaching licensure like subject-area endorsements and certification status have positive interlinkage with student achievements, specifically in destitute schools. Darling-Hammond (2017) enlightened the decisive role of well-designed licensing systems in amplifying teachers' efficacy and, in turn, students' outcomes. Tomasik (2022) assessed how could licensure exams play a role in contributing to the professional system of teaching and in the



professionalization of teachers.

policy will potentially open up new venues for addressing the challenges linked to teacher quality and educational reforms. The National Education Policy (NEP) developed by the Ministry of Education in (2009) underpins the necessity of teacher certification and professional development for enhancing the skills and competencies of tutors and, in turn, elevating the quality of teaching. Khan and Ahmad (2021) foregrounded this inevitability by asserting that:

“Pakistan needs sector wide reforms for developing quality workforce operating as reflective practitioners in 21st century class room.”

In Sindh, the provincial government recognized the need to improve teacher quality to meet the challenges of an evolving educational landscape. Thus, the province took the frontline in this regard by proposing its own teacher licensing policy for augmenting educational outcomes by means of teacher quality (Government of Pakistan, 2023). The Government of Sindh introduced the Teacher Licensing Program as part of its commitment to enhance educational standards and ensure that teachers are adequately equipped to deliver quality education. The program aims to set clear standards for teaching competencies, encourage continuous professional development, and improve overall teaching quality (APP, 2023). However, ensuring that the licensing assessments accurately evaluate teachers' skills, competencies, and knowledge, reliably and fairly, is a central challenge of teacher licensing. Regardless of the new initiatives, constraints and challenges persevere in the efficacy and adoption of teacher licensing in Pakistan that ought to be thoroughly discussed from distinct dimensions.

Challenges and Criticisms

Criticism and challenges affecting teacher licensing systems' impact, equity, and efficacy on educational outcomes are encountered globally (Abdallah & Musah, 2021; Ballou & Podgursky, 2000; Cochran-Smith, 2006; Goldhaber & Brewer, 2000), including in Pakistan. Such challenges arise from several aspects, comprising the relevance and quality of teacher mentoring programs, comprehensive socio-political dynamics in the education systems, and the adoption and design of licensing procedures. Even in the context of other countries, teacher licensing systems have remained a topic of continuous concern in relation to distinct facets. For instance, Podgursky (2005) argued that increasing the requirements for teachers' licensing is unlikely to induce significant or long-term impacts on student outcomes, rather, it further shrinks the applicant pool by setting restrictive standards. The researcher suggested



that instead more flexible licensing regimes can be set in place coupled with greater accountability for student “achievement gains”. Apart from this, the intricacy of licensing systems has also been cited as a prominent issue impeding access to licensing. Sakariassen (2021) discussed that school leaders emphasize the need for “alternative licensing pathways” for non-traditional competent teachers who are unable to receive licenses or whose licenses are denied for some procedural reason.

In the case of Pakistan, although the execution of the teacher licensing policy is a benevolent strategy to uplift the educational system, there are challenges and concerns that require to be addressed. The research works of Akram (2014) and Gul and Hussain (2016) illuminate the concerns allied with the alignment of licensing requirements with the diverse teaching contexts in Pakistan. Besides, Rizwan (2015) anticipated that of all the other challenges, aligning an adequately trained and experienced team to operate such an organization has the potential to raise another challenge for the provinces. Challenges like cultural significance, restricted exam content scope, and examination bias can also hinder the equity and validity of licensing assessments while likely unfavorably treating specific applicants like non-natives or minorities (Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010). Additionally, the politicization of teacher and education licensing procedures causes substantial issues to their efficacy and integrity.

Policymakers and researchers in Pakistan have demanded reforms to reinforce teacher licensing and professional development systems to tackle these issues. The suggestions include improving the teacher education program’s relevance and quality, the arrangement among teaching quality and licensure assessments, ensuring accountability and transparency, increasing the accessibility to professional development opportunities, and addressing inequities in access to resources and support for teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). These challenges underscore the cruciality of comprehending teachers' perceptions and readiness so as to ascertain efficient and seamless implementation.

Teacher Perceptions and Readiness

Explorations regarding the teachers’ perceptions of licensing are decisive for understanding the educators’ outlook on the new policy. Bryk (2010) stressed that successful educational reform hinges on the active engagement of teachers, which can only be attained when their concerns and viewpoints are taken into determination. Hence, evaluating educators’ readiness to meet the licensing requirements is also among the critical aspects for getting familiar with the existing gaps that ought to be addressed through targeted professional development initiatives.



A teacher's ability to complete professional development and meet licensing requirements depends on several factors, such as opportunities for cooperation with colleagues, support from school administrators, and access to resources (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). According to studies, instructors with community and school support are more likely to engage in professional development and licensing programs actively, enhancing instruction and improving student results (Fullan, 2015; Richter et al., 2014). However, ensuring all instructors have the tools and assistance they need to complete their professional development activities and obtain their licenses is not without its difficulties. The lack of training, mentoring, and educational resources that teachers in rural and underprivileged areas frequently experience can make them less prepared to participate in licensure procedures (Lankford et al., 2002). Furthermore, competing requirements, burnout, and workload impact the time and competency of teachers to fully participate in professional development programs (Jomoad et al., 2021).

A complex strategy to address such issues is required considering the complicated interconnection of organizational, systematic, and individual aspects. Education and school authorities can support the willingness of teachers for professionalization and licensure by offering targeted professional development opportunities while fortifying a cooperative and constant culture for learning and assuring equitable access to support and resources (Darling-Hammond, 2012; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Furthermore, equity, inclusivity, and cultural responsiveness should serve as guiding principles for initiatives aimed at improving teachers' views and preparedness. More inclusive and supportive learning environments for teachers and students can be achieved by appreciating and respecting the diversity of origins, experiences, and viewpoints educators hold (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Research Methodology

Research Approach

As per the suitability of the research aim, a qualitative research approach was employed to accumulate the rich and nuanced perspectives of teachers. Qualitative designs are optimal and most compatible with investigations that intend to capture the viewpoints on a subject as they facilitate a more in-depth exploration of ideas in this aspect (Clements, 2021; Jamshed, 2014). Thus, the current study opted for a qualitative research method to amass the required data for the study.

Data Collection

A purposive sampling approach was adopted, and the data was collected via semi-structured



interviews. Since a qualitative interview design was used, open-ended semi-structured interviews were conducted with the target population to get insight into their perceptions regarding the licensing policy. The questions for the semi-structured interviews were designed in consideration of the primary objectives of the study, as done in the study of Akhtar (2019). The discussions were divided into different segments. Questions regarding each research objective were asked to gather relevant themes and cover all potential aims of the study. With the consent of participants, all interviews were audio-recorded to be later transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis

Since the current study is a qualitative investigation, thematic analysis was performed to extract and identify the recurring themes, patterns, and insights from the interview transcripts. The analysis followed a systematic process of coding and categorization, leading to the development of themes that captured the essence of teachers' perceptions and readiness for licensing. In order to ensure the anonymity of responses, each participant was assigned a specific code to refer to (i.e., ST1 for participant 1 from school teachers, and EFM1 for participant 1 from senior educational faculty members).

Significance and Expected Contribution of the Current Work

The present research idea has the potential to make significant contributions to the available body of knowledge in the given context. Firstly, the topic of teacher licensing in Pakistan has been relatively unexplored in the literature. Furthermore, ever since the emergence of the Sindh teacher licensing policy, teachers from all sectors have mixed feelings regarding the implementation and effectiveness of this initiative and they hold varying perceptions of this prospect that need to be aptly elaborated.

Policy Recommendations

By providing a thorough understanding of the teachers' perspectives, the findings will enable the policymakers to adapt the licensing system to better target the teachers' needs and concerns. The development of policies that align with the existing interests of the targeted population has the potential to subsidize the macro-level objectives of the government by elevating the respondent pool.

Professional Development Planning

The study can lead to meaningful implications for the development of targeted professional development programs that capture domains where educators might require more preparation since the teachers in Pakistan are not usually facilitated with such provisions. Hence,



enlightening focused areas warranting immediate execution would be accommodating in guiding future actions.

Implementation Strategies

This research can aid in guiding strategies for the successful execution of the licensing system by identifying the underlying facilitators and barriers perceived by the teachers and with the help of experts' insights as they are the target population for such interventions. The concerns enlightened by educational experts could be instrumental in translating policy goals into actions and productive outcomes in educational settings.

Research Gap Filling

Owing to the novelty of this topic, there is a limited body of literature discussing this matter. Hence, by conducting thorough research in this paradigm, the current study aspires to contribute to bridging the existing knowledge gaps. Moreover, by sharing the feedback of the teachers and citing the underlying themes, the study may also suggest new areas of inquiry or insinuate novel dimensions for future research.

Results and Analysis

The data collected from teachers and educational experts via interviews was systematically categorized into distinct interrelated themes. Discussions lasted till data saturation was reached and the researcher noticed repetition of previous themes and ideas and no new aspect/theme was emerging. Firstly, the interviews were transcribed to identify recurrent patterns from the perceptions of the respondents. Later, on the basis of relevance, these patterns were filtered and categorized under multiple themes. The themes derived for each objective are presented in this section.

Themes Derived from Interviews with the Primary and Elementary Teachers

Skepticism about Implementation

When asked concerning teachers' perceptions of the licensing policy, the first and most recurrent theme noted was skepticism about implementation. Teachers expressed doubts about the effective implementation of the teaching license system, citing previous experiences with policies that were not implemented sincerely. Participants reflected concerns about the government's commitment to enforcing the new system. One of the respondents asserted that:

"I believe the intentions are indeed significant, yet most of us [teachers] are dubious about the successful and effective implementation of this policy... Can't say anything now since it



is just the beginning, but I am optimistically looking forward to long-term positive results.”[ST3]

Another participant, who was a primary school teacher, also expressed that:

“This isn’t the first time we are seeing this. The government announces big reforms, but when it comes down to implementation, there’s a lack of follow-through. How can we trust this new system to be any different?” [ST5]

The participants were skeptical due to their past experiences when policies were announced with great enthusiasm but failed to follow through owing to different reasons. Ali (2006) highlighted that some of the main causes of policy failure in Pakistan are resource constraints, political commitment of leadership, influence of donors, centralization, governance structures, and clarity of policy goals. Thus, it was noted that the government’s capacity and willingness to ensure effective enforcement of policies was seen as an issue of concern in view of the previous policy initiatives that failed to address systemic challenges within the education system.

Transparency and Accountability Concerns

Transparency and accountability in the system hold imperious prominence for the successful and unbiased execution of policies. Baker-Doyle and Petchauer (2015) asserted that entry tests for teachers serve as gatekeeping mechanisms for teacher quality. However, in case of having vague accountability measures or the involvement of corrupt staff in the monitoring bodies, the legitimacy of these systems is often compromised. Throughout the interviews, participants continually expressed concerns about the lack of transparency in the process of the teaching licensing system. They voiced numerous concerns regarding the biased practices and involvement of corruption in almost every sphere of the educational system. Participant ST2 articulated that:

“Given the high levels of corruption in the existing systems, I cannot see transparency in the implementation and operations of this policy in the longer run.”

Participants believed that if not now, the system would shortly fall susceptible to corruption and exploitation due to the existing practices and history of previous reforms. Another teacher further indicated:

“Unfortunately, we can all see and agree that we will need transparency in every step of the way. Without it, there’s a risk that the system could be exploited for personal gain. The staff at the higher posts are doing it for so long and are heavily biased, how can one trust it after all that has been happening for decades.” [ST5]



This sentiment reflected the high levels of distrust among the teachers for the licensing requirements and potential involvement of corruption, questioning the integrity of this approach. Consequently, many of the educators showed a lack of confidence in the governance bodies and in the authenticity of this reform. Overall, participants highlighted many instances where lack of oversight had led to abuses of power and misallocation of resources in the past. As a result, teachers' optimism towards the idea of equitable career opportunities hinges on the transparency and accountability standards in the licensing system.

Stakeholder Engagement and Support

Lack of support and stakeholder engagement was quoted by multiple participants as the reason for frustration due to little to no collaboration and effective communication regarding the policy. Many of them expressed that they felt marginalized and excluded from the decision-making because of being unable to voice their concern or add their input during the development and implementation. Participant ST1 narrated that:

“Most of us [teachers] are feeling excluded... it's like we were kept in the dark... I am not saying that they should have asked every single one of us about our opinions, it is obviously foolish to expect, but they did not make any effort to engage with us and address our concerns or at least gathered our suggestions before policy implementation.”

The above statement suitably concludes the sentiment reflected by almost all participants and their feelings of disengagement and disconnect across the teachers, administrators, policymakers, and community members. As per Auburn (2005), consulting the stakeholders is crucial to assess if a policy is expected to practically function and hence their contribution is critical so the policy reflects the interests of all stakeholders involved. In the current study, participants highlighted the need for inclusive decision-making by integrating the standpoints of all educators to foster better collaboration to warrant the success of the licensing system for all educators alike.

Clarity on Policy, Benefits, and Impact on Professional Status

Clarity of a policy and its requirements, anticipated potential, and relevance for educators are central to ensuring that every stakeholder involved can comprehend the benefits of the projected system. Clarity in policies enables the educational stakeholders to advocate for the required changes and efficaciously impact public decision-making (Gelburd, 2015). The teachers repeatedly alluded to the confusion and lack of clarity in the requirements. They further noted that the information regarding the policies and the benefits of the licensing



system was not adequately communicated to them, leading to misconceptions and uncertainty about its implications for their careers. Teachers remarked that:

“It is not clear what this license overall entails or how it benefits us. Without comprehensive information and with such vague indications, it's hard to buy into the system.” [ST4]

“Personally, I didn't understand the requirements and what the policy adds to the current system since the objectives are not clearly communicated. Are the tests necessary for all, are they equally accessible to all and what exactly are their professional worth, seems unclear so far. We're worried that not having a license could hinder our career prospects and job security” [ST8]

Similar apprehensions were echoed by others who shared concerns about the lack of clarity surrounding the licensing process and its potential impact on their professional development. As reported by Van Engen et al. (2019), clarity in policy-making for teachers augments the meaningfulness of policies and perceived legitimacy. Thus, having clarity in policy objectives is integral to ascertaining that educators understand the rationale deriving the policies and can implement them effectively (Ward & Parr, 2011). Participants were anxious about the potential consequences of not obtaining a license, including limitations on career advancement and job security. Hence, offering clear guidance on policy and its objectives would facilitate the teachers to suitably navigate policy implementation, encouraging a more cohesive education system and therefore improved educational outcomes.

Resource Constraints

Resources are the first and foremost requirement for the development and enactment of any reform in every sector. In accordance with Akhtar et al. (2022) proper diversion of resources is indispensable to the successful implementation of any educational policy. The teachers recognized resource constraints as a critical barrier to teaching licensing, including issues of inadequate funding, staff, infrastructure, and administrative support required for the effective and comprehensive implementation of the system. Participant ST6 comprehensively communicated this issue by stating,

“Our system lacks necessary resources to implement the teaching license system effectively and without adequate funding and support, it's challenging to ensure compliance and quality standards... Even if funding is provided, its proper provision and strategic allocation needs to be judiciously done to guarantee longstanding results.”

This theme pinpointed the need to invest in resources for supporting the execution of the licensing program. Teachers recognized resource constraints as a major impediment to the



successful implementation of the teaching license system in Sindh. Hence, it is proposed that addressing resource constraints is essential to ensure the successful implementation of the teaching license system, requiring strategic allocation of funding, staffing, and infrastructure to support compliance and quality standards across educational institutions in Sindh.

Lack of Readiness

Passing the licensing test demands thorough preparation, including strong recalls of theories and concepts, having efficient question-answering strategies, and cultivating one's analytical and critical thinking skills and for all this to happen effectively, teachers' readiness is a major facet (Aribon et al., 2023). In the present study, teachers expressed lack of readiness to look forward to the teaching license procedure, positing despairs regarding their skill set, qualifications, and resource availability. The participants illuminated that they continually live through the feeling that they are extremely ineligible for the licensing requirements. Most of them reported similar sentiments, professing things like:

“Even before the test, I am sure that I cannot pass the requirements as I need more training and also, I might have to seek consultation to enhance my teaching skills because I don't know what the test is holding for me... this is my first chance, what if I ruined it due to my unpreparedness?” [ST2]

Teachers felt overwhelmed by the licensing requirements since some of them lacked the specified qualifications for applying, some were not prepared for the test, and a few of them believed that they needed to polish their skills. Thus, this theme reflected teachers' unpreparedness to undergo licensure protocol and hence there is a need for targeted support and resources to equip them with the qualifications, skills, and confidence needed to enable their better participation in the licensure process and enhance teaching standards in the education sector.

Absence of Formal Training, Supportive Materials, and Institutional Support

Teachers conveyed that they had been caught off-guard by the licensing test and mentioned that they necessitated formal training and institutional support. Their frustrations over the lack of formal training opportunities and the absence of in-house training initiatives highlighted a critical gap in their preparation for the licensure examination and the oversight of institutions in taking active measures to support staff in meeting licensure requirements. Teachers highlighted the absence of structured formal training programs or supportive resources like practice materials and study guides within their institutions or districts to prepare them for the licensure examination. Participants made different remarks about this



need, alluding to a number of factors:

“We were not familiar with the test format for licensing and our organizations also didn’t provide us with practice material or even a brief training session to help us prepare for the assessment... It is honestly so disappointing to see no big actions to prepare us for the test.”

[ST4]

“They want us to obtain license but they are not willing to make any effort in leading us at least to the point that we feel confident and motivated to participate.” [ST1]

“I wish we had training or mock tests to prepare in advance... I could barely find material to study.” [ST6]

Teachers argued that establishing formal training programs within educational institutions or at least familiarizing them with the test format would have done the job. However, they instead were left with no concerted support. All in all, participants stressed the need for accessible information, training sessions, and support networks to help navigate the complexities of the licensing system. In this regard, Keesookpun et al. (2022) accentuated the need for preparation models for teaching license exams that should encompass tutoring, quizzes, and face-to-face on-site and online training combined with on-site and group online training to prepare the teachers for the main assessment. Consequently, equipping teachers with the necessary support is a must to help them become licensed professionals in the future.

Personal Financial Constraints

One of the prominent challenges that the teachers in Sindh were coming across was their personal financial constraints. It cannot be overlooked that although many teachers are proficient in their fields and subjects of expertise, yet majority of them do not have the particular level of education as specified in the licensing requirements. Consequently, they need to pursue additional qualifications like a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree or any relevant degree to earn themselves the license which is sadly unfortunately not possible for all due to economic issues. One participant shared;

“The main reason holding me back from acquiring the license is financial constraints that don’t allow me to pursue further qualifications to meet the licensing requirements. In Sindh, or in general too, it is difficult to afford additional education on a teacher’s salary.

Unfortunately, in my case, I can either be a breadwinner or career-oriented.” [ST7]

Participant ST3 also professed that:

“I am coming from a wealthy background and that’s why I openly acknowledge that I did not face any issue in submitting for the license as I can afford the process. However, a lot of my



fellow teachers have almost given up on teaching licenses as they do not think that they are financially ready to invest in this venture.”

Other teachers also acknowledged the financial issues they were facing while attempting to facilitate their way to the teaching license. In accordance with the outcomes reported by Ansah (2023), although teachers recognize the salience of acquiring a teaching license for their professional development, such policies might impose financial burdens on them which may confine the number of individuals intending to pursue teaching as a career. Thus, addressing issues of teachers’ financial constraints necessitates policy interventions as well as financial support mechanisms to alleviate the perceived burden imposed upon their shoulders to comply with the licensing requirements.

Inequities and Accessibility Issues

Teachers constantly signaled worries about the inequities in access to licensure opportunities and resources, specifically for educators from rural or underserved areas of Sindh. They discussed disparities in access to training, testing centers, and support services, that are most likely to deter equitable participation in the licensure program. One participant stated,

“I hope everyone could pass the licensure exam. Many teachers are not familiar with the requirements or criteria and those from underserved areas are most obviously the biggest victims as they generally don’t even have support services to prepare for the test and requirements in time which will result in an unequal distribution of opportunities.” [ST6]

The above statement illuminates the issue that a great section of individuals from the rural side would be encountering due to falling short of the requirements or not having enough knowledge about the procedure, resulting in inequitable access to licensure. Another teacher pointed out distinct concern, confessing that:

“I am from a rural area and I understand what the teachers would be facing there. It is easy to declare policies and set new agendas but making sure that everyone gets equal access to these is a matter requiring great attention. I can guarantee that there would be many teachers who will not be able to receive licensure despite wanting to because of personal factors and the misuse of power and political background by some officials, and it's all about access and privilege.” [ST7]

The abuse of power and use of initiatives for their own personal gains by some higher officials or those in influence was cited as one of the most prevalent issues in the context of Sindh as participants perceived that the opportunities would be swept by those in power and hence the teachers deemed weak to compete against the system will be left with nowhere to



look for. Similar results were reported by the study of Shah et al. (2023) where they discussed multiple factors reflecting the misuse of power and political backing in hindering the success and execution of positive initiatives in rural educational institutions in Sindh. Thus, it is suggested that addressing inequities and accessibility issues is essential to ensure equitable participation in the licensure program, requiring stakeholders to invest in resources and an unbiased infrastructure to support educators in rural and underserved areas of Sindh.

Resistance to Change and Stakeholder Engagement

Educators constantly identified resistance to change as a key factor impeding the efficacious implementation of licensing policies. Teachers communicated that they sensed reluctance among the teachers, administrators, and policymakers concerning the embracement of novel policies, calling for more concerted efforts and stakeholder engagement to garner support.

One participant suitably expressed this viewpoint saying:

“Teachers are resistant about the change given the presence of multiple issues and loopholes in the licensing system which I think is pretty much justified at some point because of the lack of clarity and cluelessness... Licensing policy is something new for all of us and that’s why we cannot expect everyone to quickly adapt to it without proper clarity, institutional support, and lack of engagement and collaboration from the main stakeholders.” [ST8]

It was noted that teachers were hesitant about the change considering the vagueness of the policy and lack of institutional engagement and support. Mrachko et al. (2020) classified such resistance as “Ideological resistance to change” when individuals envisage the change to be a bad move for the engaged stakeholders or an organization in general. To sum up, overcoming resistance to change requires proactive efforts to engage stakeholders and build consensus around the benefits of the licensure program, emphasizing the importance of collaboration and partnership to drive meaningful reform in the education sector.

Themes Derived from Interviews with Senior Educational Faculty Members

Recognition of Significance and Need of the Initiative

When we asked the educational experts for their insights concerning the licensing policy, all of them collectively acknowledged the Sindh teaching license initiative as a crucial step towards revolutionizing the educational standards in Sindh, believing it can enhance teacher quality and contribute to overall educational reform. They indicated that licensure can enhance teacher quality by setting clear standards for competency and professionalism. One expert stated,

“I believe that the teaching license initiative has been long overdue in Pakistan and represents



a bold step forward in the pursuit of educational excellence. I am quite certain that it can potentially raise the bar for teacher quality and contribute to broader educational reform efforts in Sindh.” [EFM1]

A consensus was found among experts regarding the importance and necessity of the initiative in driving positive change in the education sector. As reinforced by Hasan (2024), the licensing test will guarantee a high caliber of professional teachers, leading to a “culture of teaching excellence” across the province. Therefore, it was noted that the senior experts recognized the vast potential of licensure to act as a catalyst for enhancing teacher quality and advancing educational reform in Sindh.

Importance of Careful Implementation

Similar to the teachers, the senior faculty members also recognized the need for careful implementation of the policy to ensure maximum effectiveness and, in turn, enhanced outcomes. They simply stressed upon the need for strategic planning and careful monitoring protocols to guarantee unbiased and equitable execution. It was noted that setting appropriate measures could make the policy implementation more efficacious and responsive (Amoah et al., 2020). One of the experts outlined that:

“If not implemented carefully, teaching licensing policy would be of no use for the educational sector and for this reason I perceive that the implementation stage holds great value... proper and more formal implementation measures should be adopted to ensure the success of this initiative in Sindh to set the stage for other provinces as well.” [EFM4]

As reflected in the above statement, experts pinpointed the importance of careful implementation of the policy as they deemed this step to be of imperious prominence. Participants further mentioned various interlinked factors that might produce adverse outcomes if the implementation is not made rationally. Therefore, this theme exhibited experts’ commitment to the long-term welfare of this initiative by means of dedicated efforts in its vigilant execution to dodge future challenges.

Challenges in Involving Private Sector Schools

Among the diverse array of challenges, ensuring the involvement of private sector educational institutes and those with low budgets in policies is a substantial challenge for government organizations (Ali & Ahmed, 2022). During the interviews, experts alluded that involving private sector schools in teaching licensing initiatives poses considerable challenges, highlighting issues related to funding, incentives, and regulatory frameworks that might hamper participation in the licensure protocol. In this regard, participant EFM3



acknowledged that:

“We cannot ignore the fact that a large proportion of schools are operating in the private sector which means the majority of our teaching workforce is made up of private school teachers... Involving private sector schools in licensing needs resolving multiple challenges, including those linked to funding and regulatory issues. The government must create incentives and support mechanisms to encourage their participation.”

Experts believed that addressing disparities in equal participation should be ascertained by targeted support and resource allocation, where needed, to broaden the participatory scope. Besides, the faculty members further expanded on the discussion by indicating that the private sector schools govern on a low budget which will limit the teachers from this sector to pursuing licensing owing to financial barriers. Participant EFM2 made comments in this regard, saying:

“I have friends who work in private sector [educational institutes] and they can barely cover their monthly expenses due to lower salaries. I don't think such individuals would want to apply for licensing due to the associated cost since their pocket wouldn't allow it... This isn't fair enough as it just shows how the policy will only benefit a certain category of teachers and those belonging to the middle and lower classes [in terms of salaries/income] would be deprived of these opportunities.”

As documented by Ali and Ahmed (2022), a great number of Pakistani schools fall under the category of the low-fee low-salary private sector, and hence the teaching faculty of these schools will be unable to afford licensure fees, requiring grants from the public sector financing. Overall, it was noted that the senior faculty members accentuated that it is essential to provide support and resources to low-budget private sector educational institutions across Sindh to ensure that teachers in these schools can meet licensure requirements and can conjointly partake in the licensing program.

Status of Existing Teachers and Importance of Teacher Involvement

To affirm teachers' participation in career development initiatives, it is vital that the teachers feel motivated enough to dedicate their time, resources, and efforts to such endeavors (Joshi, 2024). In the current study, experts constantly discussed the broader implications of teaching licenses for educators' career prospects and identified the need to motivate and support them in joining the licensure process. Recalling the central role of teachers and the significance of addressing their concerns, one faculty member stated that:

“They [teachers] are the primary stakeholders of this reform and must be given priority while



designing implementation protocols or explaining the overarching benefits of this policy for their career boost. Also, their concerns should be addressed and efforts must be made to maximize their contribution in this process.” [EFM1]

Experts confessed that the engagement of existing teachers must be aptly promoted to push them towards the licensing requirement. The faculty members also continually suggested the need to consider teachers’ feedback and inputs to guarantee greater collaboration and alignment of the policy with their needs and experiences. Choosing to pursue teaching on the basis of personal interest and intrinsic motivation can lead to a close connection with the profession, increasing the success prospects in the licensing tests (Pleșca, 2022). Hence, educational experts demanded to involve teachers as the primary stakeholders in the licensing initiative to make this reform responsive to the needs and experiences of educators to drive effective policy implementation and impact.

Government Responsibility for Support

During the interviews, participants construed that the government should take responsibility for supporting the existing teachers as they are also among the deserving candidates who are rightfully subject to obtaining the license. The participants advocated for the existing teachers by arguing that the government is accountable for subsidizing existing teachers to obtain the required qualifications for licensure. One of the senior members endorsed:

“Government must take responsibility to sponsor low-income teachers in fulfilling their licensing requirements and obtaining the required qualifications as these standards have been set forth in the policy and thus it is their responsibility to make sure every teacher can get access to license by satisfying the primary needs... They [government] have to invest in this direction.” [EFM5]

Participants also proposed that teacher training programs should be arranged in collaboration with universities to offer preparation opportunities to those who cannot afford them. As in the words of respondent EFM3:

“Many existing teachers need government-funded programs to prepare for the tests as they lack resources. My suggestion is that the government should take steps to make partnerships with universities to provide training and preparation opportunities to the willing candidates so that they can assess their readiness and extent of preparedness for the licensing exam and identify areas for improvement.”

Previous research works have also emphasized the need for greater investments and enhanced collaboration across the government, ministry of education, and authoritative teaching bodies



to take accountability to address the issues allied with teacher licensing (Kowalski & Björk, 2005; Mensah et al., 2020). Therefore, it has been implied that the government must take responsibility to offer a greater extent of support to teachers by arranging training programs, funding support to deserving eligible teachers, and other sorts of institutional backing to facilitate licensure for all.

Discussion and Conclusion

To bring it all together, this research has underpinned a qualitative assessment of teachers' perceptions and readiness for the recently announced teacher licensing policy in Sindh, Pakistan. During the interviews, when asked about their perceptions, teachers expressed skepticism about the implementation of licensing policy, cited resource constraints, showed transparency and accountability concerns, called for better stakeholder engagement and support, and finally demanded clarity on policy, benefits, and its impact on their professional status. Apart from this, while discussing their readiness towards the licensing system and the barriers they encountered, the educators communicated a lack of readiness for the requirements. They drew attention to the absence of formal training and support by their institutions and the need for supportive resources and test materials. It was also noted that personal financial constraints and resistance to change were some of the underlying aspects, hindering access to licensure at the primary levels. Besides, the inequity of access was another dimension, impacting licensure accession at the individual levels.

In contrast, during the interviews with senior faculty members, multiple distinct dimensions were identified. Firstly, the experts recognized the significance and need of the licensing initiative, perceiving it as a long overdue step that shapes the educational reform in Pakistan, upsurging the teacher quality across the province. In addition, similar to the teachers, the senior faculty also acknowledged the cruciality of careful implementation of policy to ensure the long-term welfare of the initiative. One of the prominent challenges cited by the participants was involving private sector schools in the policy. The educational experts reported that the majority of the teaching workforce is made up of private school teachers and hence requires incentives and support mechanisms to participate in the program as they usually operate in low-budget settings and cannot afford the licensing protocols. The senior faculty believed that teachers are the key stakeholders of this reform and consequently their involvement (in the form of feedback and inputs) and collaboration is vital to addressing their concerns, ascertaining maximum participation, and amplifying the likelihood of success. The experts further argued that the government ought to be deemed responsible for offering



support to the potential candidates, specifically, the existing teachers and low-income educators, to pursue the required qualifications and invest in their training. They further suggested that the government should collaborate with universities to arrange government-funded training programs and provide institutional backing to facilitate access to licensure for all willing teachers. Overall, from the interviews with both primary and elementary teachers as well as senior educational experts, the study identified numerous imperative and interrelated themes, all directed towards maximizing greater collaboration and amplifying the applicant pool to enable all willing and potential candidates' access to licensing. By diving into teachers' outlook on this system, this study has ventured to contribute meaningful insights that can potentially enhance the effectiveness of the licensing system and foster striking improvements in educational quality. The findings have significant implications for policymakers and educational institutions, and the study has also attempted to contribute to the broader discourse on teacher professionalization and development. To sum up, teacher licensing in Pakistan embodies an evolving and complicated landscape molded by interconnecting economic and socio-political aspects. Hence, it has been anticipated that by promoting evidence-based reforms and addressing the barriers and issues in existing licensing practices, Pakistan can progressively accomplish its objectives to ensure an equitable, diverse, and high-standard education system.

Recommendations for Policymakers and Institutions

With the aim of ensuring consistent and streamlined licensing procedure, the current study has proposed some recommendations for policymakers and the involved institutions that are discussed subsequently:

- Firstly, based on the insights gained from the interviews, it has been recommended that the policymakers should develop clear criteria, professional development opportunities, and recognition mechanisms to ensure that the teachers can suitably acknowledge that the licensing system promotes rather than hinders their professional growth.
- Furthermore, policymakers must design policies that align with the interests of a broader audience and should take the necessary initiatives to address teachers' concerns to a possible extent.
- The institutions and policymakers need to set up consultations, open forums, or similar opportunities for feedback to safeguard that the licensing system reflects the needs and realities of those it seeks to serve and promotes better collaboration



between the concerned stakeholders.

- By accumulating distinct perceptions, policymakers can harness collective wisdom and expertise to inform policy design and implementation, ultimately leading to more equitable and sustainable outcomes for all involved.
- Large-scale surveys or feedback systems should be designed to inspect the teachers' responses to the licensing system and its requirements to use those insights for upgrading and tailoring the protocols accordingly.
- Administrative bodies must develop programs to pre-assess teachers' readiness for licensing exams and offer strategic initiatives to prepare them for the future.
- The institutions should provide necessary support to the willing candidates throughout the licensure protocol and set clear guidelines and policies to warrant transparency in the procedure.
- Finally, government institutions ought to make arrangements to provide additional support to the private sector and undersourced institutions facing challenges in relation to inadequate infrastructure, understaffing, and lack of administrative support necessary to effectively roll out the licensure program across educational organizations.

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