



Political Economy Analysis

Teacher Licensing & Certification in Punjab

2025

Political Economy Analysis:

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Punjab**

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Acronyms

AGEGA	All Government Employees Grand Alliance
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
MoFEPT	Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training
PCTB	Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board
PEA	Punjab Educators Association
PEC	Punjab Examination Commission
PTU	Punjab Teachers' Union
QAED	Quaid-i-Azam Academy for Educational Development
SED	School Education Department
SS	Subject Specialist Teacher
TWP	Thinking and Working Politically
I-SAPS	Institute of Social and Policy Sciences
GEPD	Global Education Policy Dashboard
B.Ed	Bachelor of Education
ADE	Associate Degree in Education
PEF	Punjab Education Foundation
PEIMA	Punjab Education Initiatives Management Authority
PSRP	Public Schools Reorganisation Programme
PECTAA	Punjab Education, Curriculum, Training and Assessment Authority
NEPDF	National Education Policy and Development Framework
NACTE	National Accreditation Council for Teacher Education
TET	Teacher Eligibility Test
LMICs	Low and Middle Income Countries
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
PDPEA	Problem Driven Governance and Political Economy Analysis
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
SoPs	Standard Operating Procedures
HRMIS	Human Resource Management Information System

SIS	School Information System
TMS	Training Management System
DPC	Departmental Promotion Committees
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
GTA	Grand Teachers Alliance
SLAs	Service Level Agreements
TMIS	Teacher Management Information System
NTC	National Teaching Council
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

Introduction

Context

Education reform in Punjab has been characterized by its dynamism and range. Over the past two decades, the province has rolled out decentralisation, merit-based recruitment, technological innovations, and capacity-building efforts. New systems have emerged, and some have endured. Yet for all this momentum, a persistent gap remains between policy intention and classroom reality. At the heart of this disconnect is the figure of the teacher who exists in two separate roles. One as an implementer of reform and one as a political actor embedded in a complex system of incentives, alliances, and constraints. Teachers operate within a matrix of institutional legacies, ageing cadres, political patronage, and weak incentives for continuous professional growth (I-SAPS, 2023). Their presence in nearly every community gives them both symbolic authority and local influence, but it also entangles them in bureaucratic processes and political negotiations far removed from pedagogy. Understanding teacher perceptions and the political acceptability of proposed reforms is essential for gauging feasibility. This PEA therefore examines both the institutional and policy dimensions of licensing and certification, as well as the likely responses of teachers, unions, and professional bodies, drawing on lessons from earlier teacher focused reforms in Punjab. While there has been renewed policy interest in further professionalising the teaching workforce through licensing, certification, and continuous development, these reforms unfold within a political landscape where formal rules coexist with informal networks of patronage, union pressure, and administrative discretion. It represents a test case for how far the province's education governance system can shift from compliance and informal political relations toward capability as measured through professional standards and best practices.

Licensing is expected to ensure that only those meeting defined standards can enter or remain in classrooms. Certification, in parallel, validates the knowledge and skills of educators, providing structured pathways for professional growth and advancement. Accreditation, meanwhile, operates at the institutional level, ensuring that teacher education and training providers meet prescribed standards of quality and accountability (UNESCO & International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, 2023; Angus, 2001). Together, these instruments signal a gradual shift toward a regulated profession, while their practical influence is mediated through phased application, incentive alignment, and administrative discretion. As past reform experience suggests, including testing and recruitment reforms, their effectiveness depends less on formal sanctioning powers than on how they are sequenced, linked to career pathways, and embedded within existing governance arrangements. However, given the structural constraints of the public education system, analysis of reform experiences in comparable settings indicates that licensing and certification are more likely to gain political and institutional acceptance when introduced through sequenced arrangements that first link outcomes to career progression, recruitment, or contract decisions, rather than immediate punitive enforcement. Such sequencing has been observed in reforms affecting teacher management and professional standards, where gradual integration of new requirements has helped limit resistance and allow systems to adjust over time.

Against this backdrop, the central question guiding this analysis is the following: Given Punjab's

existing teacher governance landscape, how can teacher licensing and certification be designed and introduced in Punjab in ways that are institutionally credible and politically feasible, given existing teacher governance arrangements, incentive structures, and past reform trajectories? Addressing this question necessitates grounding the analysis in Punjab's current learning outcomes, workforce characteristics, and regulatory arrangements, which together shape both the perceived urgency of reform and the space for political and administrative manoeuvre.

Punjab's education system faces a dual challenge; a large, mostly permanent teaching workforce with uneven competencies, and weak mechanisms to ensure professional accountability beyond recruitment. Evidence from the World Bank's Global Education Policy Dashboard (GEPD) underscores the scale of this problem. Recent results show that only 3.1% of Grade 4 students meet combined proficiency standards in language and mathematics, while just 13.8% of Grade 1 students reach readiness thresholds. Classroom observations indicate that only 28.3% of teachers demonstrate good overall pedagogy and 39.1% meet basic content knowledge proficiency (World Bank, 2025). These outcomes cannot be explained by infrastructure or curriculum constraints alone; they point to deeper weaknesses in teacher preparation, motivation, and accountability, which vary sharply across rural, urban, and peri-urban contexts (World Bank, 2022; I-SAPS, 2023). Reflecting this, Punjab's GEPD teaching policy lever scores show weak de facto support (2.6/5) and only caution-range performance across attraction, selection and deployment, evaluation, and accountability, revealing a persistent gap between policy intent and classroom practice (World Bank, 2025)¹

In Punjab, a formal pre-service certification system already exists, requiring teachers to hold minimum prescribed qualifications prior to appointment. Pre-service pathways such as the B.Ed. or ADE are intended to equip future educators with foundational knowledge, skills, and classroom experience. More recently, the School Education Department (SED) has expressed interest in developing in-service certification pathways, whereby teachers' Continuous Professional Development (CPD) would culminate in employment linked certifications recognised for promotion or other incentives, rather than stand alone attendance acknowledgements. Framed in this manner, CPD linked certification has the potential to transform professional development from a supply driven to a more demand-responsive practice. Taken together, licensing, certification, and accreditation function as interlinked instruments that signal a transition from informal teacher governance toward a more regulated professional framework, while also surfacing the institutional and political dynamics that shape how standards are interpreted and legitimised.

Such reform ambitions are not new. The National Education Policy 2009 identified persistent weaknesses in teacher quality and called for reforms in pre-service training, in-service development, and career management, including the standardisation of accreditation and certification arrangements

¹ GEPD Glossary:

- A. De jure refers to formal policy intent as expressed through laws, regulations, and policy frameworks.
 - B. De facto represents practice as implemented in schools.
 - C. De jure–de facto gap measures the difference between policies on paper and actual implementation.
 - D. Policy levers (Teaching) include five dimensions of teacher management: i.) Attraction ii.) Selection & Deployment iii.) Support iv.) Evaluation and Motivation, v.) Monitoring & Accountability (each scored 1 to 5 based on de jure and de facto evidence).
 - E. Weak support indicates limited induction, mentoring, or professional-development opportunities.
 - F. Caution range (scores 3.0–3.9) signals performance requiring attention but not critical intervention.
- (Source: World Bank. 2021. *Global Education Policy Dashboard: Technical Note and Reference Guide*. Washington DC: World Bank Group.).

(Government of Pakistan, 2009)². In Punjab, these ideas were later reflected in the Education Sector Plan 2019–24, which proposed the establishment of a regulatory authority for teacher licensing and certification (School Education Department Punjab, 2019)³. Momentum resurfaced briefly in 2020, when proposals for a teaching licence triggered union concerns over tenure and testing, underscoring how teacher regulation, though framed as professionalisation, operates within a landscape of negotiation and contestation (*Dawn*, 2020). The episode illustrated a recurring pattern in Punjab’s reform trajectory. Technically grounded reforms have repeatedly encountered resistance where sequencing, incentives, and institutional anchoring remained weak.

More recently, however, the reform context has begun to shift. Sindh has moved ahead with a 2023 Teaching License Policy, introducing a renewable, CPD linked licence following an extended period of consultation, piloting, and phased design. Punjab, meanwhile, has laid a statutory foundation through the Punjab Education, Curriculum, Training and Assessment Authority (PECTAA) Act (2025), consolidating curriculum, assessment, training, and teacher regulation within a single institutional framework⁴. It also formally empowers the authority to design and implement licensing and certification systems. Taken together, these developments mark a materially different starting point from earlier initiatives that remained at the level of policy intent, raising critical questions about whether, and under what conditions such institutional and sequencing levers can shape the political and administrative dynamics of teacher licensing in Punjab, rather than simply reproducing earlier cycles of proposal and pause.

Comparative and Global Practice

Globally, licensing and certification are often designed to reinforce professionalism, assure minimum quality, and protect the public interest, particularly in contexts where teacher accountability has historically been weak (UNESCO–TTF, 2023; Angus, 2001). However, comparative cases offer mixed results of similar reforms. In Indonesia, large-scale teacher certification reforms raised salaries but did not improve learning outcomes, demonstrating that credentialism without performance monitoring may dilute effectiveness (De Ree et al., 2016). A broader synthesis echoes this caution: rigorous reviews find no consistent association between certification per se and student learning; in several Low and Middle Income Countries (LMICs) settings, Contract (often uncertified) teachers perform as well as or better than certified government teachers, implying that certification must be tied to practice focused standards, mentoring, and performance (Pugatch, 2017). In India, Teacher Eligibility Tests (TETs) improved entry filtering, but implementation was uneven and often undermined by political pressures and union resistance. In contrast, Peru’s sustained, politically negotiated teaching reforms show that

² The National Education Policy 2009 (Government of Pakistan, pp. 42–43) identified teacher quality as a systemic weakness, attributing it to obsolete pre-service training, weak in-service professional development, and governance pathologies. It called for reform across recruitment, professional development, career progression, and management, and explicitly directed that “teacher training arrangements, accreditation and certification procedures shall be standardised and institutionalised.”

³ Under Strategic Area 1: Quality and Learning Outcomes, Programme 1.1 (“Efficient supply of quality human resource”), the Punjab Education Sector Plan 2019–2024 proposed the establishment of an authority to regulate teacher licensing and certification. The Plan recorded that a draft Punjab Education Standards Development Authority (PESDA) Bill was under review, intended to prescribe arrangements for licensing, mandatory certification, and accreditation of staff; monitor quality assurance; and withdraw licences or certification in cases of professional misconduct. Although the Bill was not enacted, this was Punjab’s first formal attempt to embed licensing within a statutory framework.

⁴ The Punjab Education, Curriculum, Training and Assessment Authority (PECTAA) Act 2025 (Act VI of 2025)

sequencing, coalition-building, and long-term incentives can build legitimacy and institutionalisation over time (Balarin, 2021). Political economy analysis across systems reinforces that actor incentives and “rules-in-use” mediate technical reforms, where teachers function as pivotal constituencies, reform packages skew “more carrot than stick” (training, increments, entitlements), and central administrations are reluctant to enforce unpopular measures ultimately yielding incremental quality gains unless accountability and support are co-designed (Hossain et al., 2017).

Comparative evidence underscores that the institutional architecture of teacher licensing is often as consequential as its legal authority. Across countries like Peru, Ghana, and Indonesia, governments have alternated between direct public delivery, outsourced implementation, and hybrid accreditation systems, each with distinct implications for how discretion, accountability, and political risk are distributed (Chang et al., 2014; Bruns, Schneider, & Saavedra, 2023; OECD, 2023). Among these, regulated hybrid models have shown the most promise: a central state authority governs standards and registries, while accredited institutions, often universities or testing agencies, administer certification and renewal. These arrangements allow the state to retain credibility and oversight while leveraging external delivery capacity. Notably, Ghana’s phased licensing approach and Peru’s negotiated merit-based reforms demonstrate that legitimacy grows when governance responsibilities are clear, feedback loops are institutionalised, and stakeholders feel ownership.

Two design implications stand out from this global experience. First, hybrid models are most effective when the “in-between” spaces, between top-level policymaking and frontline implementation, are explicitly governed through clear accreditation criteria, interoperable data systems, and audit trails. These middle-tier interfaces are where most organisational politics play out and where credibility is either built or eroded (Levy & Walton, 2013). Second, in decentralised systems, such as Indonesia’s, certification reforms often collided with patronage cycles, fragmented authority, and weak enforcement. Without strong central moderation and grievance redress, certification drifted into credentialism, with formal compliance occurring with limited improvements in instructional practice (Rosser & Fahmi, 2016; De Ree et al., 2016).

Punjab’s Reform Terrain

Viewed against these design propositions, Punjab’s political economy of teacher reform remains fraught. With over 333,039 public school teachers⁵, the sector carries enormous political weight. Teacher unions, district-level patronage networks, and bureaucratic incentives intersect in shaping how, and whether, any proposed reform is implemented. Licensing may appear to be a neutral technical tool, but in practice, it will alter access to employment, reshape professional hierarchies, and potentially reconfigure power among actors within the education ecosystem. Building on a classic systems view of politics, teacher licensing in Punjab emerges as an intervention in a political system that converts inputs, demands and supports from teachers, unions, parents, parties, and agencies, through institutional throughputs, the routines and discretion of SED/PECTAA/DEAs, into authoritative outputs, licensing rules, renewals, and appeals, subject to feedback via grievances, courts, protests, media and electoral cues (Easton, 1957). This lens clarifies where discretion currently sits, how credibility is constructed,

⁵ Punjab Annual School Census 2023-2024

and why delivery choices (direct, hybrid, outsourced) are inherently political allocations of throughput authority that will be reinforced, or destabilised, by feedback cycles.

Structure of the Report

The report is organised in seven sections. Section I introduces the topic and the global/Pakistani context. Section II presents the framework of analysis and methodology. Section III sets out the structural and institutional context. Section IV analyses actors, interests, and incentives. Section V focuses on Institutions, Rules and Governance of Licensing. Section VI outlines pathways, risks, and political strategies. Section VII concludes with recommendations and options for sequencing and sustaining reform

Box: Distinguishing Licensing, Accreditation, and Certification

Dimension	Licensing	Accreditation	Certification
Core Purpose	Authorises individuals to <i>enter or continue</i> in the teaching profession based on defined minimum standards.	Validates that institutions or programmes meet required quality benchmarks for teacher preparation.	Recognises that a teacher has acquired specific professional competencies, often linked to progression or pay.
Authority & Scope	Typically granted by a state regulatory body (e.g., PECTAA in Punjab; NTC in Ghana). Focuses on individuals.	Administered by a national council or accrediting agency. Focuses on institutions and programmes.	Administered by testing or examining bodies under regulatory oversight (e.g., universities). Focuses on professional skills.
Renewal & Accountability	Usually time-bound (3–5 years), requiring renewal through CPD, ethics compliance, and performance records.	Periodic review of institutional quality; non-renewal can suspend programme recognition.	May be permanent or renewable through continued evidence of competence or CPD completion.
Comparative Evidence	Ghana’s NTC phased licensing (2018) enhanced professional accountability through digital registries and CPD-linked renewals. Sindh (Pakistan) introduced renewable licensing in 2023 with CPD and ethics requirements.	Pakistan’s NACTE accredits pre-service teacher education (NEPDF, 2024). Chile ties accreditation to teacher education standards and financial incentives	Indonesia’s 2005 Teacher Law linked certification to pay scales but saw limited learning gains without classroom accountability. Peru’s reform tied certification to negotiated merit promotion and sustained legitimacy.
Primary Outcome	Protects the public interest by assuring baseline competence and ethical practice.	Ensures institutional quality and curriculum alignment for producing competent teachers.	Rewards individual professional growth and supports career mobility and recognition.
Policy Implications	Requires clear regulatory boundaries, renewal mechanisms, and grievance redress systems.	Needs strong quality assurance protocols and independent review processes.	Works best when integrated with performance monitoring, mentoring, and continuous learning frameworks.

Sources: UNESCO/Teacher Task Force (2020); Angus (2001); De Ree et al. (2016); Balarin (2021); Mizala (2019); Government of Pakistan, NEPDF (2024)

FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS AND METHODOLOGY

Building on the preceding discussion of the political and institutional terrain of teacher reform in Punjab, this section sets out the analytical framework and methodology underpinning the study. The framework is selected explicitly to address the central exam question posed in the introduction; how teacher licensing and certification can be designed and sequenced in ways that are politically acceptable, administratively workable, and institutionally credible within Punjab's existing governance landscape. The central premise informing this choice is that teacher licensing is not only a technical reform but a political intervention that redistributes authority, alters employment conditions, and reshapes professional hierarchies. While education reforms are often framed as technical exercises in standards and systems, their success or failure mostly hinges on how they interact with incentives, institutional routines, and informal norms. Teacher licensing in Punjab exemplifies this complexity. By seeking to regulate who enters and remains in classrooms, it has implications not only for quality and accountability, but also for employment security, local power relations, and the political calculus of actors ranging from teacher unions to district bureaucracies.

Recognising this, the study adopts a Political Economy Analysis (PEA) approach to examine how formal policy intent interacts with incentives, power relations, and institutional legacies in practice, rather than focusing solely on the formal design of licensing arrangements. Over the past two decades, a range of political economy and institutional diagnostic frameworks have emerged within development practice. The World Bank's Problem Driven Governance and Political Economy Analysis (PDPEA) framework focuses on identifying binding constraints to reform and mapping incentive misalignments that impede service delivery (Fritz, Levy & Ort, 2014). The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) emphasises power analysis, examining how authority, relationships, and resources shape outcomes (SIDA, 2013). USAID's "5Rs" framework, roles, rules, resources, relationships, and results, highlights the systemic nature of political and administrative behaviour (USAID, 2018).

While these approaches offer valuable diagnostic tools, they are often better suited to problem identification than to informing adaptive reform pathways in politically contested sectors such as education. For this study, the FCDO's Thinking and Working Politically (TWP) framework is selected because it offers both analytical depth and operational realism, particularly in sectors like education where discretion, professional norms, and political contestation co-exist.

Framework of Analysis

The study adopts the TWP framework as both its analytical lens and guiding logic for the current inquiry, reflecting the recognition that reforms unfold within political and institutional arrangements that distribute authority, incentives, and legitimacy. Rather than treating politics as a constraint, TWP views it as the arena through which reform is negotiated, contested, and realised (Whaites et al., 2023).

TWP is well-suited to the analysis of teacher licensing because it foregrounds the informal norms, historical trajectories, and power asymmetries that shape reform feasibility. Unlike policy models that assume institutional neutrality or rule-bound compliance, TWP recognises that governance systems function through negotiated settlements, where discretion rather than control is often the dominant mode of implementation. Applied to Punjab's licensing initiative, this lens provides a bridge between the formal authority conferred by the PECTAA Act and the informal realities of implementation shaped by unions, bureaucratic discretion, and local political mediation.

Building on this analytical framing, the study examines where demand for licensing and certification is likely to emerge, where resistance is likely to concentrate, and how these pressures are mediated by institutional arrangements and geography. Teachers in public schools, private schools, and semi-public arrangements, including the Punjab Education Foundation (PEF), Punjab Education Initiatives Management Authority (PEIMA), and Public Schools Reorganisation Programme (PSRP) contracted schools, constitute distinct constituencies whose expectations of licensing differ according to employment terms, regulatory exposure, and prospects for mobility. Within the private sector, low fee school teachers often view licensing as a pathway to recognition and parity, while teachers in high-fee, elite, and international schools, already subject to proprietary accreditation regimes, may perceive provincial licensing as redundant or restrictive. Geographic variation further shapes incentives. The urban and peri-urban teachers tend to value certification portability and professional visibility, whereas rural teachers prioritise accessibility, cost, and procedural support. Analysing these differentiated locations across systems, ownership, and space helps identify where professionalisation pressures are likely to be strongest, where resistance is likely to persist, and how reform pacing and design can be calibrated to balance inclusion with feasibility⁶.

Framing the Questions

Anchored in the exam question set out in the introduction, this analysis examines how specific design and sequencing choices influence the political and institutional feasibility of teacher licensing in Punjab. Rather than treating licensing as a single policy decision, the framework disaggregates it into a set of interrelated design questions that shape legitimacy, acceptability, and implementation prospects. Three core questions guide the inquiry:

1. How should the scope and timing of licensing be sequenced, particularly in relation to in-service teachers versus new entrants, and what transitional arrangements (such as Recognition of Prior Learning and CPD linked renewal) can mitigate perceived risks to fairness and tenure?
2. How, and on what timeline, should teachers in PEF and PEIMA schools, newly outsourced public schools under the PSRP, low-fee private schools, and high-fee/elite private schools be included without fragmenting the profession?
3. Who should deliver which functions of the licensing chain, government, regulated hybrid, or

⁶ This framing is informed by the classic systems view in which varied inputs (demands/supports) flow through institutional throughputs to produce policy outputs, with feedback shaping subsequent cycles (Easton, 1957).

outsourced operations, and how should standards, registry, appeals, and provider oversight be allocated to sustain credibility?

The analysis also assesses whether the proposed licensing regime builds in developmental support such as RPL, CPD-linked renewal, phases/pilots and appeals mechanisms, to enable teachers to meet minimum standards and thus improve acceptability and uptake of the reform.

These questions are not simply operational, they reflect deeper tensions about authority, accountability, and legitimacy in Punjab's teacher governance landscape. Their resolution will shape whether licensing becomes a credible professionalisation mechanism or devolves into a contested compliance instrument.

Three Levels of Reform Analysis

In line with TWP framework, the study structures its analysis across three interlinked and mutually reinforcing levels. These levels are not treated as separate analytical silos; rather, they are examined in combination to understand how reform possibilities are shaped by constraints, incentives, and institutional practice.

1. *Structural and Contextual Conditions*: These include demographic trends, legal mandates, and historical reform trajectories that condition what is politically and administratively feasible. The factors such as the size and permanence of the teaching workforce, prior recruitment freezes, decentralisation reforms, and resource constraints have created a system characterised by path dependence. These structural features define the outer boundaries within which licensing and certification reforms can realistically be pursued, rather than serving as direct levers of change.
2. *Institutional Rules and Norms*: The study distinguishes between formal rules in form (laws, statutory mandates, SoPs, administrative protocols) and rules in use, the informal negotiated practices through which decisions are actually made and enforced. Teacher Licensing will affect verification, appeals, and renewal processes, all of which currently function through a mix of official procedure and informal discretion. Understanding these is essential to assessing how new regulatory instruments may be interpreted, adapted, or resisted during implementation.
3. *Actors, Incentives, and Coalitions*: Teachers, unions, bureaucrats, political principals, and development partners all operate with intersecting, sometimes competing incentives. While teachers and unions represent visible constituencies, bureaucratic actors, training providers, and political intermediaries also exercise significant influence over reform outcomes through control of procedures, information, and discretion. TWP pays particular attention to coalitional dynamics: where are embedded reformers located? What constituencies are likely to support or resist licensing? Which actors control narrative framing, grievance redress, or verification processes?

This multi-level analysis makes it possible to identify reform traction points, not by assuming ideal conditions, but by diagnosing feasible pathways for action under real political, fiscal, and institutional constraints, which are explored in detail in subsequent sections

Methodology

Methodologically, this Political Economy Analysis employs a mixed-methods approach, combining structured policy and document review with field-based qualitative inquiry. The methodology is designed to support the study's central analytical question: how teacher licensing and certification can be designed and sequenced in ways that are politically feasible and institutionally credible within Punjab's existing governance landscape. Consistent with the TWP framework, the methodology is oriented toward understanding how formal policies interact with incentives, informal practices, and discretionary decision-making across different levels of the education system. The methods used therefore aim to triangulate formal rules with "rules-in-use", and stated policy objectives with lived administrative and professional realities. The study draws on three primary sources of evidence:

- i. **Review of Literature:** A targeted review of legal instruments, policy documents, administrative rules, and analytical literature was undertaken. This included provincial legislation (notably the PECTAA Act), teacher management and professional development policies, budget and reform strategy documents, and relevant national frameworks. Comparative material from other jurisdictions (including Indonesia, India, Ghana, Peru, and Sindh) was reviewed to inform questions of sequencing, institutional design, and political feasibility, rather than to derive prescriptive models.
- ii. **Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) (Annex 1):** Interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of stakeholders positioned at different points in the teacher governance ecosystem. These included public school teachers, union representatives, district level administrators (CEOs and DEOs), officials from the School Education Department (SED) and PECTAA, and political actors. KIIs focused on perceptions of licensing and certification, anticipated risks and incentives, administrative capacity constraints, and past experiences with teacher-related reforms.
- iii. **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) (Annex 1):** Focus group discussions were held with teachers across public and private schools, including urban and rural settings, as well as with representatives of private school associations. FGDs were used to identify and understand concerns, expectations, and informal narratives around licensing, including issues of cost, access, professional recognition, career progression, and perceived fairness.

Using TWP to Diagnose Do-able Reform Pathways⁷

The Thinking and Working Politically (TWP) approach inform not only the diagnostic lens of this analysis but also offers a framework for identifying politically feasible reform strategies. In this study, the notion of *do-ability* is used to extend that focus, interpreting feasibility through a political lens, examining how technically sound reforms become implementable within prevailing incentives and institutional realities. It recognises that reforms like teacher licensing are rarely implemented through

⁷ Do-ability is the degree to which a reform's design aligns with its political and institutional context, making technically sound solutions practically implementable. It reflects how far a policy or reform can travel through prevailing power structures, incentive systems, and administrative routines—capturing the *pragmatics of reform and change* rather than merely its technical feasibility

linear, technocratic designs; instead, they require adaptive navigation through shifting incentives, institutional constraints, and actor interests. First, sequenced and politically calibrated implementation is critical. Rather than province-wide rollout, reform credibility can be built by starting in capable districts or with voluntary cohorts, allowing space for learning and adjustment. Second, narrative control plays a key role. Positioning licensing as a recognition of professional status, rather than a compliance mechanism, can help reduce suspicion and build wider acceptance among teachers. Third, coalition management is essential to offset resistance from entrenched interests. Reform oriented officials, younger teachers, and local influencers offer potential allies in building early momentum. Lastly, embedded reformers, individuals within the system who combine formal authority with peer legitimacy, can act as crucial brokers, translating policy into practice and ensuring continuity across administrative transitions. The analysis also treats the question of delivery modality, whether licensing is implemented directly by PECTAA, outsourced to professional bodies, or delivered through a regulated hybrid, as a political design choice, not merely a logistical one. This aligns with global evidence that credible reform requires not just regulatory power, but an institutional architecture that balances authority, legitimacy, and adaptability (Bruns et al., 2023; De Ree et al., 2016; Balarin, 2021).

Foundations and Structural Drivers

Structural Context Path Dependence

Punjab’s teacher governance system is characterised by a path dependent administrative logic in which professional regulation has historically been secondary to employment management (Government of the Punjab, 2019; I-SAPS, 2023). While successive policy frameworks have articulated ambitions around teacher quality and professional standards, these have operated within structures that prioritise compliance, seniority, and administrative control over pedagogical accountability⁸. The result is a system in which professionalisation initiatives, such as licensing and certification, enter an environment marked by three key structural features: a.) weak differentiation between teaching as a profession and teaching as public employment (Naviwala, 2016); b.) fragmented institutional ownership of professional standards (Government of the Punjab, 2019); and c.) political caution toward reforms perceived as destabilising established employment equilibria. These features continue to shape how far new regulatory instruments can evolve from policy intent to classroom practice.

Institutional Map (*Formal Roles*)

Punjab’s education administration is anchored in SED, which retains policy and administrative authority. Beneath SED, the landscape is populated by multiple semi-autonomous and autonomous entities. The Punjab Education, Curriculum, Training and Assessment Authority (PECTAA), established in 2025, is the result of a merger of a.) Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board (PCTB); b.) Quaid-i-Azam Academy for Educational Development (QAED), and the Punjab Examination Commission (PEC). PECTAA now holds a unified mandate over curriculum, assessment, training, and, prospectively, teacher certification and licensing. At the district level, District PECTAAs, serve as implementation nodes. Whereas, District Education Authorities (DEAs) continue to manage postings, leave, and performance monitoring of teachers, often under significant political and administrative pressure.

Under the PECTAA Act, PECTAA is mandated to “design, plan, develop, implement” and “issue” teacher licenses ‘prior to and during service,’ and to execute these functions directly or by exercising its power to “engage and collaborate with any Agency”⁹. This legal flexibility, particularly the broad definition of “Agency” under the Act, which includes government regulated entities as well as private firms, creates three credible delivery configurations for Punjab¹⁰:

⁸ These include: National Education Policy (2009); National Professional Standards for Teachers (2009); National Education Policy Framework (2018); National Education Policy Development Framework (2024); Punjab Education Sector Plan 2019/20 – 2023/24

⁹ Section 9(s) and Section 9(tt), The Punjab Education, Curriculum, Training and Assessment Authority Act 2025 (Act VI of 2025)

¹⁰ Section 2(b), The Punjab Education, Curriculum, Training and Assessment Authority Act 2025 (Act VI of

- a. Direct public delivery (PECTAA/District PECTAAs);
- b. Regulated hybrid [PECTAA governs standards, registry and appeals; universities/testing providers act as ‘Agencies’ to validate CPD and deliver exams under Service Level Agreements (SLAs)];
- c. Outsourced operations (third-party ‘Agencies’ operate exam/verification workflows; PECTAA remains regulator).

Each pathway implies discretion and political risks; the hybrid method aligns best with Punjab’s path-dependencies and capacity limitations if paired with strong accreditation and data interoperability. Comparative experience shows that credibility improves when flexibility is combined with strong accreditation rules, digital registries, and independent oversight. Ghana’s phased and centrally regulated rollout since 2018 offers a positive example. In contrast, Indonesia’s 2005 university-led model lacked effective oversight, leading to widespread credentialing without real learning gains (De Ree et al., 2016; UNESCO–TTF, 2023). In Punjab’s context, this points to a regulated hybrid with tight accreditation and data interoperability, rather than wholesale outsourcing.

Beyond the public system, teacher governance extends to public–private models operated by the Punjab Education Foundation (PEF), Punjab Education Initiatives Management Authority (PEIMA), and the recently launched Public School Reorganisation Programme (PSRP), which now covers over 10,000 outsourced schools. Teachers in these schools are hired on different terms and often lack access to formal career progression or in service training. Including them in the proposed licensing regime raises important design and equity questions, especially around institutional responsibility, cost-sharing, and enforcement.

Power, Veto Points, and Coordination Friction

This architecture presents overlapping mandates and dispersed authority. While PECTAA is positioned to act as the certifying and licensing body, operational control remains diffused. Coordination between SED, DEAs, District PECTAAs, and semi-autonomous agencies is often ad hoc, with inter-agency protocols underdeveloped. The result is multiple veto points, weak vertical coherence, and ambiguous reform ownership. Bureaucratic incentives tend to privilege administrative deliverables (training counts, transfer compliance) over institutional learning or professionalisation outcomes (I-SAPS, 2023; Rosser & Fahmi, 2016). Without deliberate design to ease inter organisational friction and clarify mandates, implementation risks being absorbed into procedural routines rather than changing practice (Pritchett et al. 2017).

Fiscal Space & Political Trade-offs

Punjab allocates roughly 20–22% of its total budget to education, with salaries consuming over 80%, leaving limited fiscal space for institutional reforms. This expenditure profile reflects a political settlement that prioritises public employment stability over system innovation. A licensing regime,

2025).

especially if applied retroactively or comprehensively, imposes recurrent costs (standards and examinations, digital registries, grievance redress, CPD integration). Fragmented public–private delivery complicates financing: teachers in PSRP/PEF/PEIMA arrangements are not currently embedded in provincial CPD or evaluation systems. Bringing them under licensing would require fiscal and legal integration (e.g., subsidy conditionality). Internationally, similar efforts have hit fiscal bottlenecks. In Indonesia, certification reforms coincided with large salary increases yet learning outcomes stagnated, in part because recurrent spending crowded out capacity-building (De Ree et al., 2016). By contrast, systems that link renewal to affordable CPD and cost recovery mechanisms have sustained implementation more readily (UNESCO–TTF, 2023). The core challenge in Punjab is political sequencing, reallocating or leveraging budgets without triggering backlash from unions or political patrons.

Demography, Equity & Gendered Constraints

Teachers in Punjab constitute the largest public-sector workforce and a politically influential group. Union activity is deeply embedded in education administration. The Punjab Teachers Union and subject-specific or cadre based associations exert influence over transfer postings, protest mobilisation and policy negotiations¹¹. Political parties and district administrators routinely engage with these networks during electoral cycles, creating reciprocal dependencies that shape the informal rules of education governance (I-SAPS, 2023). Evidence from field interviews and focus group discussions indicates that union leaders view licensing with suspicion, often seeing it as a pretext for dismissal or tenure erosion. However, this resistance is not uniform. Younger teachers recruited through recent merit based systems express conditional support, particularly if licensing offers professional recognition and career mobility¹².

Historically, teacher unions in Pakistan have framed reforms as threats to job security, yet have occasionally supported initiatives when presented as opportunities for professional development rather than performance policing (Aslam et al., 2016; I-SAPS, 2023). International experience reinforces the importance of sequencing and incentives. In Peru, for example, the 2012 reform gained traction by linking mandatory performance evaluations with salary increases and structured career progression (Balarin and Saavedra, 2021; Bruns and Schneider, 2016). Kenya’s Teachers Service Commission similarly addressed resistance to new standards through sustained dialogue and by focusing on professional growth rather than punitive measures (UNESCO and International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, 2024). In Punjab, embedded reformers, officials with credibility across both policy and union spaces, may serve as a bridge to legitimise licensing, provided the reform is communicated clearly, implemented transparently and grounded in incentives rather than sanctions.

Punjab’s demographic profile, with over 52% of the population under 25 years old, places continuous pressure on public schooling. The average teacher–student ratio of 1:38 masks stark disparities between urban and remote rural areas. These challenges intersect with gender-related constraints. Female teacher deployment is often limited by mobility and safety concerns, particularly in under-resourced rural

¹¹ Some of the major unions include; Punjab Teachers’ Union (PTU), Punjab Educators Association (PEA), Grand Teachers Alliance (GTA), All Government Employees Grand Alliance (AGEGA)

¹² Interview with Teachers Union representatives

schools where travel is difficult (Government of the Punjab, 2019). If licensing becomes a requirement for continued employment or renewal, unequal access to CPD, digital platforms or testing centres may disproportionately affect teachers in marginalised districts. Indonesia’s certification programme, while increasing teacher salaries, failed to address the concentration of qualified teachers in urban areas (Chang et al., 2014; Rosser & Fahmi, 2016). In contrast, Ghana adapted its licensure model following feedback on access barriers and logistical constraints (UNESCO, 2024). For Punjab, options such as mobile CPD delivery, district-level support, and phased compliance in remote areas could help reduce inequities and improve reform uptake.

Data Systems, Interoperability & Discretion

Punjab has made significant strides in digitisation through the School Information System (SIS) and the Human Resource Management Information System (HRMIS), yet the data landscape remains fragmented. Teacher records, CPD data, and performance appraisals are housed in siloed systems without effective interoperability. For example, the Training Management System (TMS) tracks participation but does not link training outcomes to performance reviews or student learning metrics (I-SAPS, 2023).

The creation of PECTAA offers a potential institutional anchor for integration, particularly for a unified licensing registry linked to both SIS and HRMIS. Yet, as field data and stakeholder interviews indicate, digital systems also reshape power. Transparent registries limit discretion over transfers and appraisals, potentially unsettling actors accustomed to informal control¹³. Consequently, digital reforms require careful political navigation to survive resistance from the “shadow economy” of transfers. International evidence and practice support this. Uganda’s successful rollout of a digital Teacher Management Information System (TMIS) relied on extensive stakeholder dissemination and capacity building to ensure registration and acceptance, rather than purely technical reform (UNESCO & International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, 2024).

Synthesis: Constraint & Opportunity Map

Punjab’s education reform history is shaped by episodic enthusiasm, technocratic design, and uneven execution. Many initiatives begin as development partner-backed pilots, stall during scale-up, and fade without institutional anchoring. This legacy has fostered scepticism among frontline actors, who may comply with new processes procedurally but resist meaningful change. The prevailing political settlement tends to favour predictability over disruption. Thus, licensing risks becoming another bureaucratic layer unless supported by strategies that rewire incentives and align institutional roles. Evidence from comparable contexts suggests that even well designed reforms require adaptation through iterative problem-solving, phased implementation, and sustained political engagement.

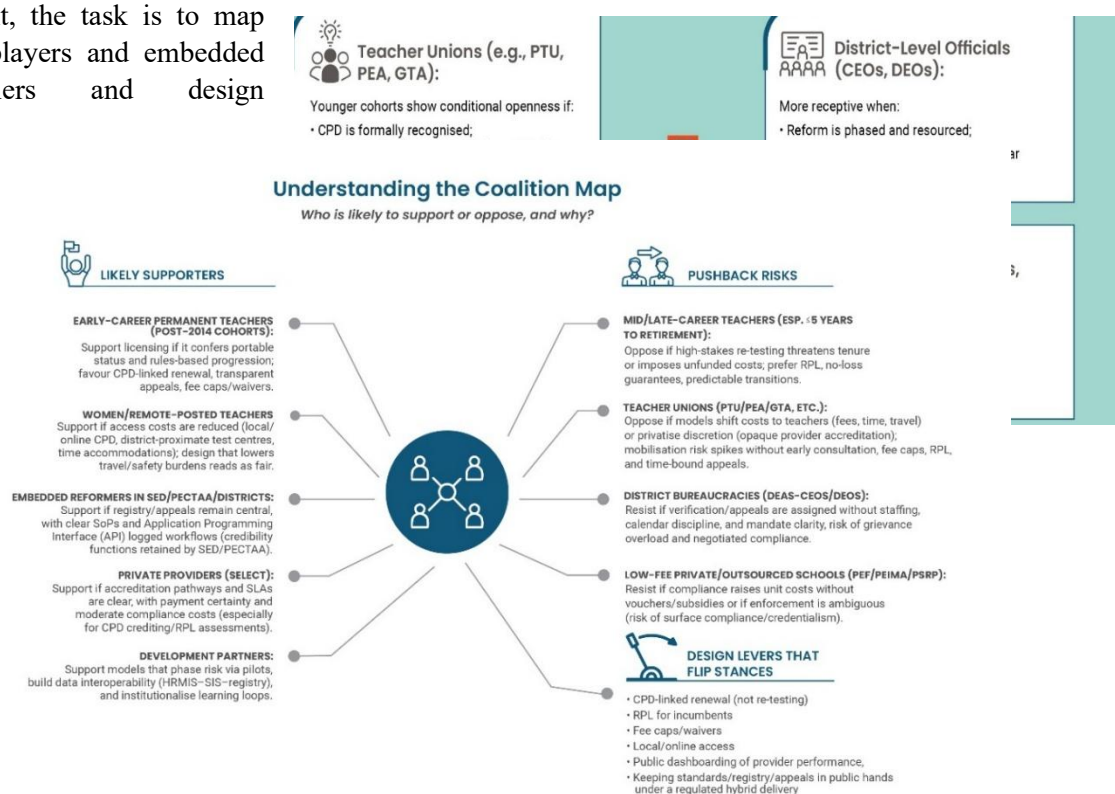
In this backdrop, the rollout of teacher licensing intersects with entrenched institutional arrangements, informal norms, and bureaucratic routines. Rather than functioning as a standalone policy tool, licensing

¹³ Interview with SED officials

is more accurately viewed as a reform that touches underlying power dynamics and governance practices. Its trajectory will likely depend on how reform actors manage sequencing, frame narratives, and mobilise coalitions within the prevailing political and administrative context. The current structural environment, while constrained by history and inertia, offers identifiable entry points. Whether licensing emerges as a credible instrument of professionalisation or becomes another stalled reform will depend on how reformers navigate actor incentives, reduce exclusion risks, and convert technical design into practices that are seen as legitimate by those on the ground.

Actors, Interests and Incentives

Teacher licensing and certification in Punjab will unfold within a negotiated political settlement where formal rules (statutes, notifications, SoPs) co-exist with informal institutions (patronage, bargaining, discretionary exceptions). The practical question is not only what the policy says, but how actors with different power, preferences, and pay-offs shape implementation. The formal organogram of Punjab's school system, spanning SED, PECTAA, District PECTAAs, DEAs, and schools, conceals a web of negotiated authority in which discretion and brokerage often determine outcomes (ODI, 2017). In this context, the task is to map veto players and embedded reformers and design



incentive-compatible routines that convert authorisation into practice—avoiding isomorphic mimicry (symbolic compliance without behavioural change) (Whaites et al., 2023).

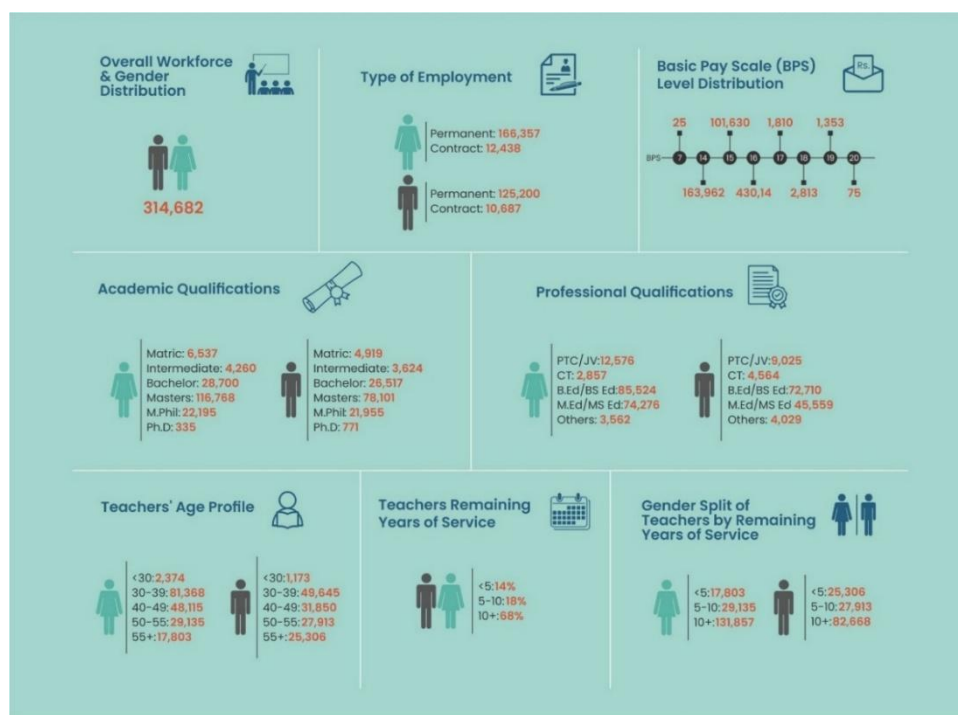
Teachers & Unions: Heterogeneity, Power, and Collective Action

In Punjab's education arena, teachers and their unions sit at the intersection of structures (a large, territorially embedded workforce), rules (civil service rules, policies and informal brokerage), and actors (PTU/PEA/GTA/AGEGA/ Cadre associations/Groups). Because schooling is transaction intensive and learning outcomes are slow to reveal and difficult to attribute, seemingly technical shifts,

such as e-transfers, outsourcing, licensing, etc., reallocate discretion and rents and therefore are inherently political. Within evolving political opportunity structures, such as election cycles and caretaker transitions, distinct incentive configurations, red lines, and potential coalitions shape the space for feasible reform bargains.

Teachers:

- a. Punjab's public school teaching workforce numbers 333,039 a female-majority cadre (57%) characterised by high job stability: 92.7% hold permanent appointments and ~98% are concentrated in Basic Pay Scale (BPS) 14–16. Professional baselines are strong, ≥88% have B.Ed/M.Ed, and the age profile is mid-career heavy: only ~1.1% are 30 or younger, while ~13.7% are 55+ years of age. In remaining service life terms, 13.7% (43,109) are due to retire within five years, 18.1% (57,048) in five to ten years, and the largest share i.e. 68.2% (214,525), has more than a decade to serve (School Education Department, 2025). This structure helps explain why reform proposals are often evaluated by teachers in terms of career value and transition risk, not as neutral technical fixes.



- b. **Political salience and design variables:** Teachers are present in every electoral constituency and routinely serve in election administration, which elevates their political salience well beyond their payroll share. A predominantly mid-career, permanent workforce tilts preferences toward security, predictable progression, and credible recognition, while the younger, post-2014 recruited cohorts place a premium on portable credentials and clear advancement ladders. The female-majority composition makes time, travel, and safety costs

pivotal design variables for CPD and assessment; in practice, accessibility becomes a first-order political condition for implementation (FGDs- Teachers, 2025).

- c. ***Career rules & discretion markets***: Transfers, postings, Departmental Promotion Committees (DPC) and time-scale progression, recognition of CPD, and disciplinary codes are the core rule-setters of realised career value. In a cadre concentrated in BPS 14–16, even marginal rule changes have distributional effects that create winners and losers. Brokered postings, selective exemptions, and venue-shopping (courts, assembly) operate as insurance mechanisms when formal rules bind, sustaining a political marketplace of discretion. Where reforms move without upstream signalling and coalition-building, the system reverts to a familiar cycle: mobilise, negotiate, notify, delayed delivery, re-mobilise, a classic implementation gap dynamic triggered by weak credible-commitment devices.
- d. ***Segments & incentives (payoff thresholds)***: Early-career permanents (post-2014 cohorts) are generally open to licensing if it confers status portability and rules based progression. New fees without offsets, opaque appeals, and renewal regimes contingent on factors outside teacher control will be the red lines. Whereas for the mid/senior, including the ~13.7% nearing retirement, there is a preference for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), no-loss guarantees, and predictable transitions; resist tenure devaluation through high-stakes re-testing late in career. Women and remote-posted teachers (~57% female workforce) tend to prioritise local/online CPD, fee waivers, and time accommodations due to disproportionate time, mobility, and safety costs. These design choices are first-order political variables for the implementation of a teacher licensing reform (FGDs Teachers, 2025; KII Union Representatives, 2025).
- e. ***Framing effects & credible commitments***: Where licensing is framed as a mandatory testing or periodic re-credentialing, the teachers and unions interpret it as screening for downsizing. In a permanent, mid-career work force this interpretation quickly unifies factions and prompts venue-shopping. (For instance, a teacher licensing bill was announced in 2020, with the Education Minister signalling that licensure would be tabled in the Punjab Assembly. The teachers perceived mandatory licensing/exams as a threat to tenure and a possible screening-out mechanism leading to widespread protests (Education Commission, 2016; Dawn, 2020). However, international evidence informs that by tying licensing to CPD credit, offering RPL for incumbents, cap or waiver of fees, guaranteeing transparent appeals with time limits, and making explicit links to career ladders, can shift the payoff from threat to opportunity. As this shifts the risk, strengthens credible commitments, and broadens the supporting coalition for phased roll-out (Pugatch, 2017; Mizala & Schneider, 2019; Chang et al., 2014; De Ree et al., 2016).

Teacher Unions

- a. ***Strategic Positioning***: Education's sector characteristics make it politically charged: services are rivalrous (places, teacher time), co-produced (learning depends on teacher–student interaction), and territorially embedded. These features generate strong user/worker mobilisation potential and complex accountability dynamics, so technical reforms routinely carry political implications that unions respond to and shape. Punjab's unions operate across

district, provincial, and governance arenas, acting as intermediaries between officials, politicians, and rank and file teachers. The nature and dynamics of engagement with governments, typically cycle from street mobilisation to negotiation and, when needed, litigation, particularly where reforms are announced without early consultation, producing the familiar “notify, partial delivery, and the re-mobilise” loop. This is consistent with TWP’s observation that formal rules and informal practices together shape incentives and outcomes. (Haris et.al, 2013)

- b. ***Landscape, internal dynamics & stance evolution:*** Teacher unions in Punjab operate as key intermediaries between the education bureaucracy, political elites, and their membership. The union landscape is fragmented but politically embedded, with associations engaging across multiple arenas: district (brokerage in transfers/postings); provincial (protest and negotiation); and judicial (litigation and procedural delays). Field interviews suggest an evolving stance within unions: younger members show conditional openness to licensing when it ensures transferable status, CPD-linked renewal, and due process; senior leadership filters proposals through institutional memory of reforms as control rather than empowerment. (FGDs Teachers, 2025; Kingdon, 2014). Key actors include the Punjab Teachers’ Union (PTU), often described as the oldest and largest with an estimated 150,000–200,000 members and province-wide reach, though internal factional duplication undermines coherence (Mehmood & Farooqi, 2020). The Punjab Educators Association (PEA) represents contract-recruited “Educators” and specialises in litigation and mobilisation around regularisation (Mehmood & Farooqi, 2020; Education Commission, 2016; The Express Tribune, 2021). The Grand Teachers Alliance (GTA) aggregates unions for province-wide action when bilateral talks stall (Education Commission, 2016; The Express Tribune, 2016). The All Government Employees Grand Alliance (AGEGA) is a cross-cadre coalition, teachers, clerical, health—that activates around pensions, benefits, or outsourcing battles (Dawn, 2025a; Dawn, 2025b). Headmasters/Headteachers Associations are cadre-specific bodies with deployment and school-management stakes and frequently act as swing actors that can legitimise or complicate wider union narratives. Subject Specialists Associations are highly issue-salient on career ladders, postings, and evaluation for SST/SS cadres and tend to mobilise when reforms touch subject-specific loads or promotion rules.
- c. ***Interaction patterns & triggers:*** Patterns of interaction follow an identified script. Formal consultation is limited and tends to give way to reactive bargaining: the School Education Department lacks a routinised forum, so engagement is triggered by the prospect of disruption rather than embedded in policy design, producing late-stage, zero-sum talks. With few institutional channels, unions rely on street power; it-ins, rallies, boycott threats, etc. to open negotiations, as seen in GTA’s 2016 mobilisation and sustained anti-outsourcing protests and actions in 2024 (The Express Tribune, 2016; Dawn, 2024a; Dawn, 2024b; Dawn, 2024c). Rounds of bargaining often end with written assurances, upgradations, DPCs—that suffer partial or delayed delivery, prompting fresh protests and deepening the credibility deficit on both sides. Authorities often exploit factionalism, discontinued union elections, duplicated PTU factions, and parallel bodies, to pick interlocutors, blunting unified bargaining (Mehmood & Farooqi, 2020; The News, 2015). Negotiations also coincide with administrative pressure, disciplinary notices, punitive transfers, and “no work, no pay”, raising the cost of mobilisation even as talks proceed (Education Commission, 2016). These

interactions are activated by predictable triggers and opportunity structures. Outsourcing or privatisation of schools is read as an existential threat to job security and a shift away from public service, reliably unifying PTU, PEA, and GTA while drawing in AGEGA for mass closures and sit-ins (Dawn, 2024a; Dawn, 2024b; Dawn, 2024c; The Express Tribune, 2024a). Pensions and service-benefit cuts generate cross-cadre solidarity due to their inter-temporal losses and immediate household impacts (Dawn, 2025a; Dawn, 2025b). Stalled promotions and upgradations, chronic DPC/time-scale backlogs, periodically spike into protests, are easy to promise at the table, and hard to clear administratively. Rationalisation, transfers, and monitoring are perceived as workload-intensive and agency reducing amid vacancies; women teachers, in particular, cite intrusive or impractical monitoring (Education Commission, 2016; Dawn, 2024a; Dawn, 2024b).

- d. Teacher licensing, especially when announced without RPL, cost shields, accessible CPD, and time-bound appeal windows, is read as screening-out and triggers venue-shopping across administrative, political, and judicial arenas (Dawn, 2020; Education Commission, 2016). So the teachers and their unions are veto-capable actors embedded in patronage laden rules (Aslam et al., 2016; SAHE, 2014). Converting contention into cooperation requires institutionalising upstream consultation through a standing forum that brings PTU, PEA, GTA, and cadre associations into policy design rather than post-announcement bargaining.

For teachers, licensing becomes politically acceptable when it converts into monetised career value, not just symbolic status. In practice, this means explicit linkages to time-scale progression, promotion eligibility (including headteacher and leadership tracks where relevant), recognition in DPC considerations, and credible portability that improves access to preferred postings or reduces reliance on brokerage. Where such benefits are absent, or where licensing adds fees, travel costs, or opaque discretionary gates, teachers rationally treat it as risk without return, strengthening resistance.

From contention to cooperation: Unions resist models that shift costs to teachers (fees, travel, time) or privatise discretion (opaque provider accreditation). Early, standing consultation on provider accreditation rules, fee caps, RPL guarantees and time-bound appeals increases do-ability. Evidence from Peru’s teaching career reform demonstrates that unions’ resistance to licensing declined where the government institutionalised dialogue through joint accreditation committees and grievance mechanisms (Balarin, 2021; Bruns et al., 2023). Participatory rulemaking on accreditation, fee ceilings, and RPL criteria improved legitimacy and sustained consent, particularly during transitions from provisional to full licensing.

Bureaucracy and Implementing Authorities: Discretion, Workload and Risk

The institutional architecture of teacher governance spans multiple tiers. SED retains overarching policy and financial control. PECTAA holds mandates related to standards, textbooks, curriculum, assessments, and (potentially) licensing. DEAs and CEOs remain central to implementation functions, especially those related to personnel management. Despite administrative reforms, such as the introduction of e-transfer systems, HRMIS, discretionary mechanisms persist in predictable loci hardship transfers, special approvals, ACR scoring discretion, verification backlogs, and appeals. Field-level officials articulate concerns regarding institutional bandwidth if licensing responsibilities (verification, monitoring, grievance) are assigned without corresponding resources, calendar discipline,

or clarity of mandate (KII Highlights, 2024; I-SAPS, 2023). This underscores that when formal rules confront capability constraints and transaction-heavy routines, frontline actors default to negotiated practices (Bruns & Schneider, 2016; Pritchett & Andrews, 2017).

Licensing will be implemented by a multi-tier bureaucracy whose incentives are shaped less by policy logic than by workload, discretion, and political exposure (I-SAPS, 2023). While SED authorises and PECTAA sets standards, district structures manage postings, leave, performance reviews, and grievances, functions at the core of bureaucratic control (Government of the Punjab, 2025; I-SAPS, 2023). For many officials, licensing will be judged by whether it disrupts or stabilises these routines, increases transaction costs, or shifts blame risk (Levy & Walton, 2013).

Administrative incentives tend to favour visible, low-risk outputs (e.g. training counts, compliance logs) and avoid politically fraught decisions (Andrews, Pritchett, & Woolcock, 2017). Licensing introduces such exposure, renewal denials or appeals may trigger political pressure, litigation, or backlash (Rosser & Fahmi, 2016). In the absence of calendar discipline, staffing, or clear mandates, bureaucracies may respond through backlog, proceduralism, or selective implementation, coping strategies that preserve stability but erode credibility. This mirrors the experience in Indonesia, where local bureaucracies, resisting loss of control over teacher management, utilised administrative delays and watered-down competency requirements to protect patronage networks (Rosser & Fahmi, 2016; Chang et al., 2014), as well as Kenya, where implementation challenges led to significant salary delays and turnover when managed by government bureaucracy rather than NGOs (Bold et al., 2013).

Evidence from field suggests district actors are more likely to support licensing if it digitises verification, clarifies roles, and sets defensible, time-bound procedures. Resistance is likely where reforms add burdens without resources or expose officials to high-stakes judgments without protections. The bureaucracy's stance is thus conditional, reform will be supported if designed as a manageable routine, not as an unfunded compliance burden that multiplies risk (Andrews et al., 2017; KIIs, 2025).

Teacher Training Providers and the Accreditation Market: Capacity, Incentives, and Rent Risks

Teacher licensing and certification will inevitably create an expanded market for training, assessment preparation, and credential validation (UNESCO & International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, 2024). This brings teacher training providers, PECTAA, universities, affiliated colleges, teacher development entities, private CPD vendors, and testing organisations, into the reform's political economy, not merely as technical partners but as actors with their own incentives. For public and semi-public providers, certification linked CPD may offer institutional relevance, funding flows, and reputational gains; for private vendors, it can create new revenue streams through exam preparation, short courses, and packaged credentials. These incentives can be productive if aligned to quality assurance, but they also generate risks of commodification and uneven standards if accreditation and monitoring are weak. This dynamic was observed in Indonesia, where the introduction of certification led universities to rapidly expand intake for teacher education programs to capture tuition revenues, resulting in a surplus of graduates from programmes of dubious quality and instances of teachers purchasing falsified portfolios to meet certification requirements (Chang et al., 2014; Rosser & Fahmi, 2016).

The key governance challenge is that training providers operate with highly variable capacity, geographic coverage, and quality control. Without clear accreditation criteria, audit trails, and sanctions for non-compliance, licensing can inadvertently produce a low-trust ecosystem in which “credit accumulation” substitutes for instructional improvement and providers compete on convenience rather than quality (De Ree et al., 2016). Field discussions suggest that teachers are particularly sensitive to the risk of a regime in which fees, travel costs, and opaque provider recognition create inequities and fuel union narratives of privatization by stealth (FGDs, 2025). Providers, for their part, often seek predictable rules and stable demand but may resist stringent oversight that raises compliance costs. This mirrors the experience in Peru, where low-quality private teacher training institutes mobilised politically to resist national entrance exams and government oversight that threatened their enrollment numbers and financial viability (Balarin & Saavedra, 2023).

Political Actors: Electoral Incentives and Negotiated Change

Teachers, due to their demographic scale and social embeddedness, serve as important political interlocutors. Elected representatives and party functionaries historically influence recruitment, deployment, and reform momentum through constituency brokerage and episodic alliances with teacher organisations (Teacher Unions & Political Parties in Punjab, 2024). Support for licensing reforms appears conditional: politicians are more amenable when reforms produce visible gains with limited mobilisation risk; they resist proposals that shrink discretionary levers or sharpen contestation.

Comparative experience underscores this design. Peru sustained teacher-career reform by sequencing evaluation and promotion rules alongside dialogue and professional incentives (Balarin, 2021). Chile negotiated appraisal within a broader professionalisation package, limiting backlash and preserving reform continuity (Mizala, 2019). By contrast, reforms perceived as punitive or politicised, such as large-scale high-stakes evaluation, have faced pushback and partial rollback. Windows of opportunity (new leadership, budget windows, digital HR upgrades) can lower political costs when used to phase-in change (Bruns & Schneider, 2016).

Parents, Communities, and Public Narrative: Indirect Pressure and Political Sensitivity

Parents and communities are not organised veto players in Punjab’s teacher governance landscape, yet they shape the reform space indirectly through public narrative, electoral sensitivity, and low tolerance for service disruption. Political economy evidence suggests that parental influence over teacher reform is constrained by what has been described as the “opacity of education quality”: while parents readily observe attendance, safety, and basic functionality, learning quality and teacher effectiveness are harder to assess, reducing incentives for collective action around professional regulation (Schneider, 2024; Rosser & Fahmi, 2016). In Punjab, existing evidence informs that although parents and students are the primary beneficiaries of public schooling, their role in shaping reform agendas remains marginal, with limited capacity to influence policy choices beyond their immediate school context (I-SAPS, 2023).

This weak demand for quality is reinforced by socio-economic factors. The Punjab Education Sector Plan notes that many households, particularly poorer ones, invest limited effort in schooling due to low

perceived returns, with early childhood education often viewed as custodial care rather than a pedagogical intervention (Government of the Punjab, 2019). As a result, parents' political signals tend to prioritise continuity of service over instructional improvement. This constrains the political space for reforms such as licensing when they are perceived as potentially disruptive rather than supportive.

A second dynamic shaping the reform environment is the “middle-class exit” from the public education system. In Pakistan, as in comparable contexts, wealthier and politically vocal families increasingly opt out of government schools, enrolling their children in private or international institutions. Comparative evidence from Latin America and Peru shows that this exit reduces political pressure for quality reforms by hollowing out the constituency most capable of articulating and sustaining reform demands through voice rather than exit (Schneider, 2024; Bruns, Schneider, & Saavedra, 2023). In Punjab, this dynamic lowers the immediate political cost of weak teacher quality, while simultaneously weakening bottom-up support for technically complex reforms such as licensing.

Where parents do mobilise, it is typically in response to perceived service disruption. Field evidence from district-level focus group discussions indicates that administrative and political actors are acutely sensitive to the perception that licensing could lead to teacher layoffs, shortages, or school instability. District CEOs explicitly warned that reforms framed as screening or exclusionary risk generating public anxiety and resistance, whereas those presented as supportive measures are more likely to be tolerated (KIIs-CEOs, 2025). This aligns with broader evidence from Pakistan showing that parental decisions to withdraw from or avoid public schools are driven primarily by concerns about safety, teacher presence, and basic functionality rather than instructional quality (Nawiwala, 2016).

Given these dynamics, public narrative emerges as a critical political lever. Comparative reform experience demonstrates that teacher professionalisation reforms are more likely to survive union resistance when governments actively cultivate public legitimacy through communication strategies that frame reform as beneficial to both teachers and students (Bruns et al., 2023). In Peru, sustained public messaging and opinion polling helped generate broad societal support for teacher career reform, enabling reformers to withstand strikes and contestation. In Punjab, however, community-level institutions such as parent-school councils remain weak and fragmented, limiting their capacity to independently champion reform (Government of the Punjab, 2019). As a result, narrative control is likely to rest primarily with the state, rather than being delegated to local participation mechanisms.

Parents and communities therefore function less as drivers of licensing reform and more as a constraint on reform design and sequencing. Their influence operates indirectly, shaping political principals' risk calculations around disruption, continuity, and blame. Licensing regimes that are perceived to stabilise classrooms and enhance professional support are more likely to remain politically viable, while those framed or experienced as punitive risk triggering anxiety, media scrutiny, and pressure for dilution. These dynamics underscore why licensing in Punjab must be designed not only for technical robustness, but also for narrative coherence within a low-demand, high-sensitivity public environment.

Private Providers: Divergent Logics of Professionalisation

Evidence from the field highlights a clear divergence within the private school sector regarding the perceived value of teacher licensing. Among high-end private institutions, licensing is widely regarded as redundant. These schools have developed sophisticated internal systems of professional recognition,

induction, and development that already meet international benchmarks. Their training departments are often accredited by institutions such as the University of Cambridge, UCL, IOE or the Chartered College of Teaching, and teachers regularly attend externally certified programmes linked to international curricula. Within such environments, licensing is perceived not as a professional advancement mechanism but as an additional bureaucratic layer. As one administrator explained, “our systems already certify and evaluate our teachers at a higher threshold than anything the state currently proposes”¹⁴. This is consistent with comparative evidence that autonomy, career opportunities and perceived status are the levers that sustain teacher professionalism in high-performing, market-exposed settings, far more than the mere presence of a licence (OECD, 2023; Schleicher, 2011).

In contrast, low-cost private schools face structural constraints, tight margins, limited human capital, and high turnover, that make licensing both financially and operationally burdensome. In many of these schools, teachers enter with heterogeneous qualifications, often treating teaching as a transitory occupation rather than a profession, which weakens incentives to invest in long-term credentials. The resulting landscape mirrors what comparative literature identifies as a dual professionalisation regime, where elite institutions self-regulate through global standards while low-cost schools depend on fragmented, state-mediated or donor-supported pathways. Teachers in PEF/PEIMA partnership schools and recently outsourced public schools often face challenges and limited access to professional development. Field evidence informs that without subsidised CPD, clear guidelines, and differentiated enforcement, private stakeholders may engage superficially with licensing¹⁵. Internationally, Indonesia illustrates the risk of credentialism where accreditation expands without robust verification or mentoring, yielding limited improvements in practice (Chang et al., 2014; De Ree et al., 2016). Incorporating private providers therefore requires calibrated compliance: phased adoption, fee waivers, and explicit arrangements on who bears verification costs (OECD, 2023).

Development Partners & Embedded Reformers: Enablers of Adaptation

Development partners (FCDO, World Bank, UNICEF, GIZ, etc.) offer technical assistance, piloting funds, and normative frameworks. Their influence/impact is durable when it underwrites risk-absorbing pilots, data integration (registry, HRMIS, SIS, assessment), and learning loops rather than stand-alone examinations (Bruns & Schneider, 2016). In this landscape, embedded reformers, mid-career bureaucrats and technocrats within SED, PECTAA, and District PECTAAs, translate policy ambition into field-credible routines, mediating between political signals and bureaucratic logic¹⁶ (KII Highlights, 2024). A quarterly review cadence (with union observers) can institutionalise adaptation and protect authorising coalitions during roll-out (Pritchett & Andrews, 2021).

Synthesis: Patterns, Preferences, and the Change Space

Across actors and arenas, the centre of gravity in Punjab’s teacher licensing debate lies in how discretion is organised and valued within personnel management routines, postings, progression, verification, and appeals, where formal rules and negotiated practices meet (I-SAPS, 2023). Teachers’ stances are

¹⁴ FGDs and KIIs with Low fee, High Fee Private School Teachers, Owners and Associations.

¹⁵ Interview with President Private Schools Association

¹⁶ Interview, PECTAA official.

contingent rather than fixed: younger cohorts tend to value recognition and portability, while mid- to late-career staff weigh additional scrutiny through perceived risk to tenure and workload; gendered and spatial constraints further condition uptake (Chang et al., 2014; De Ree et al., 2016). Union behaviour follows a familiar repertoire, mobilisation, negotiation, legal contestation, and re-mobilisation, triggered when reforms are read as redistributing discretion or imposing unfunded burdens (Kingdon, 2014).

Within the state, SED–PECTAA–DEA relations reflect classic multi-level implementation dynamics: authorisation at the centre, capacity and workload constraints nearer the frontline, and coordination frictions across registries and HR systems, with selective “pockets of effectiveness” emerging where mandates and routines align (Leonard, 2008; I-SAPS, 2023). Political engagement remains conditional and episodic, shaped by the visibility of winners and losers and the risk of disruption; private-sector participation introduces cost and compliance heterogeneity that can produce surface compliance where verification is burdensome or ambiguous (Balarin, 2021; Mizala, 2019; Chang et al., 2014). Taken together, three features characterise the present landscape. First, the distribution of discretion across postings, progression, and appeals shapes how licensing is interpreted by frontline staff and their representatives. Second, actor stances swing with perceived fairness, administrative workload, and the visibility of status gains or losses, rather than fixed “for” or “against.” Third, the interplay of organisational capacity and political timing—visible in district-level variance and in windows linked to leadership and budget cycles—conditions whether formal authorisation translates into stable routines (Bruns & Schneider, 2016; Pritchett & Andrews, 2017).

Institutions, Rules, and Governance of Licensing

The core challenge in Punjab’s teacher licensing reform lies not merely in technical policy design but in governance, specifically, the determination of who will implement, regulate, and oversee the system. This has implications for legitimacy, professional credibility, and reform durability. International evidence suggests that the technical characteristics of the chosen service delivery model, whether public, private, or hybrid, fundamentally shape the incentives, authority structures, and political resistance involved (McLoughlin & Batley, 2012). These choices are embedded within broader institutional settlements, where formal rules operate alongside, alongside informal practices and bureaucratic discretion (Whaites et al., 2023).

Formal Mandate, Scope, and Oversight

The Punjab Education, Curriculum, Training and Assessment Authority (PECTAA) was established under Act VI of 2025. Section 9 empowers the Authority to design and implement teacher licensing systems [S.9(s)], issue and renew licences [S.9(qq)], and manage grievance redress [S.9(ee)]. The law also allows for flexible delivery, PECTAA may engage external agencies [S.9(tt)] and delegate powers to committees or officers (S.10) (Government of the Punjab, 2025). While the merger of curriculum, assessment, and professional development under one body aims to enhance coherence, it also concentrates authority. Although the governance structure includes academic and non-government representatives (S.4), it remains dominated by government functionaries. This centralisation risks reinforcing a governance culture where administrative discretion and transactional considerations, often outweigh accountability (I-SAPS, 2023).

The choice of delivery model for licensing reform in Punjab is not merely a technical decision, it reflects underlying governance dynamics and fundamentally shapes how authority, discretion, and accountability are distributed. International experience highlights that the specific technical characteristics of a service, and how it is delivered, create varying incentives, capacities, and resistance points (Harris et al., 2013). In a context like Punjab, where formal rules operate alongside powerful informal influences and bureaucratic discretion, the institutional design must carefully balance credibility, feasibility, and legitimacy (Whaites et al., 2023).

Political Economy of Implementation Models

- a. *Public Sector Mandate:* A fully public model would see PECTAA and its district arms manage licensing end-to-end, from setting standards to conducting exams and maintaining registries. While this may offer policy coherence, it faces capacity constraints. Frequent leadership turnover, siloed systems, and compliance-oriented cultures limit responsiveness and risk replicating the governance problems licensing aims to address (I-SAPS, 2023). Previous reforms, such as rationalisation and transfers, have shown persistent reliance on political

mediation, raising concerns about discretion and capture. A wholly public model could thus reproduce governance pathologies that licensing reform seeks to address.

- b. *Private or Contracted Model: Outsourced Delivery:* Outsourcing operational functions (testing, CPD validation) to universities or private entities could address capacity constraints and improve scalability. India’s experience with Teacher Eligibility Tests (TETs), administered by state-level boards or third-party testing agencies, demonstrates this approach. However, this model risks fragmentation and rent-seeking if accreditation is weak. In Indonesia, outsourcing to universities led to credential inflation and weakened the link between certification and professional performance (De Ree et al., 2016; Chang et al., 2014). In the Punjab context, such outsourcing may weaken professional trust and increase opportunities for informal bargaining, particularly if roles and accountability mechanisms are not clearly delineated.
- c. *Hybrid Model: Regulated Partnerships:* A hybrid model combines regulatory authority under PECTAA with delegated delivery to accredited institutions. PECTAA would set standards, monitor compliance, and maintain the central registry, while operational functions—such as training verification or testing—are contracted under formal agreements. Sindh’s White Paper on Licensing (2023) proposes a similar model, integrating universities, professional bodies, and government oversight. Globally, Peru’s Carrera Pública Magisterial and Ghana’s National Teaching Council offer successful examples of hybrid governance, balancing legitimacy, capacity, and oversight (Balarin, 2021; World Bank, 2018). These models facilitate coalition-building, professional ownership, and adaptive learning, all critical in politically contested spaces.

The licensing reform intersects with multiple data platforms and administrative layers. A functional implementation chain requires: a.) Vertical coordination from SED (policy and budget); PECTAA (regulation); District PECTAA (implementation); school-level HR systems; b.) Horizontal linkages between PECTAA, HRMIS, the School Information System (SIS), and assessment data. If these systems remain unintegrated, they may enable discretionary validation, rent-seeking, or opaque decision-making. It needs to be considered that data governance is not a technical fix but a political safeguard, shaping control over resources and power (ODI, 2017). Lack of interoperability may inhibit data transparency and undermine accountability. In other contexts, API integration and audit trails have enabled more credible oversight.

Delivery modality	Who does what	Key safeguards & enablers
Direct public delivery (PECTAA-managed)	PECTAA: i. Sets standards ii. Conducts exams & verification; iii. Through District PECTAAs handle applications; iv. Keeps registry & appeals	Uniform SoPs; Ring-fenced budget; HRMIS–SIS–CPD interoperability; Independent appeals panel; Quarterly audit trails; Phased roll-out in “pockets of effectiveness”
Regulated hybrid	PECTAA: i. Regulator, standards, central registry, appeals; Private: ii. Exam delivery, CPD crediting, RPL assessments under SLAs	Accreditation code, conflict-of-interest rules; proctoring & data integrity specs; fee caps/waivers; time-bound appeals; public dashboard of provider performance
Outsourced operations	i. PECTAA: regulator;	Tight SLA with penalties; randomised re-verification; whistle-blower channel; full API

	ii. Testing/verification institution/firm(s) operate workflows	logging to prevent credential inflation
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Evidence from international practice underscores how the choice of delivery modality directly determines reform credibility and durability. Indonesia’s university-based certification system, introduced under the *2005 Teacher Law*, relied on outsourced delivery to accredited universities; while it raised salaries, the absence of central moderation produced *credential inflation* and negligible learning gains (De Ree et al., 2016; Chang et al., 2014). Peru’s *Carrera Pública Magisterial* adopted a *hybrid model*, the Ministry retained standards and appeals while regional testing centres conducted examinations, building legitimacy through sequencing and continuous dialogue with unions (Balarin, 2021). Ghana’s National Teaching Council (NTC) similarly regulates standards and registry centrally but accredits providers to conduct training and testing, allowing phased inclusion of private-school teachers and CPD-linked renewal (OECD, 2023). Comparative syntheses (UNESCO–TTF, 2023; Pugatch, 2017) find that *regulated hybrid systems* balance capacity, legitimacy, and standardisation better than purely public or outsourced models.

Inclusion of PEF/PEIMA/PSRP Teachers (*Mixed Regimes*)

The position of teachers employed in low-fee private schools under PEF and PEIMA, including the recently outsourced public schools under the PRSP, remains ambiguous. Extending the regime to private actors raises both legal and political complexities. Private school providers, already skeptical of state regulation, may resist mandates seen as overreach. Excluding such a large teacher workforce risk fragmenting the profession and undermining reform credibility. The experience of Ghana, where private school teachers are gradually being brought into the licensing regime through phased incentives and professional development links, offers a model for Punjab (OECD, 2023).

Given the diverse contractual arrangements and teacher profiles within the public–private partnership sector, their inclusion in the proposed licensing policy requires a differentiated approach. The teachers in these schools are typically hired through contracts, and their remuneration is often linked to school performance. Turnover among these teachers is considerably higher due to limited job security, modest pay, and lack of clear career progression pathways. However, given that these schools deliver public education to a large number of students enrolled in public-private partnership models, their inclusion in the teacher licensing and certification regime is essential for ensuring consistent teaching quality and professional standards across Punjab’s education system.

Initially, the licensing framework could recognise teaching experience in these schools through the RPL mechanism and offer them access to accredited CPD programmes, potentially delivered online or through cluster-based training centres. To address high turnover, the licensing process could be linked to incentives for retention, such as recognition of licensed teachers in future recruitment within the public system, preferential access to advanced training, or salary top-ups for licensed educators under PEF/PEIMA schemes. Over time, these provisions could be embedded within PEF’s quality assurance criteria and PEIMA’s partnership agreements, ensuring that low-fee private schools align with provincial professional standards while retaining autonomy in staffing. This approach balances equity and feasibility, enabling these teachers to gradually enter the professional licensing framework without imposing unsustainable administrative or financial burdens.

Informal Institutions, Veto Points, and Adaptive Resistance

Teacher governance in Punjab reflects a long-standing negotiated settlement between the bureaucracy, political actors, and teacher unions. Informal practices, transfer bargains, politically mediated postings, and discretionary incentives, persist alongside formal rules. The consolidation under PECTAA alters this equilibrium by reducing entry points for political and union influence in professional decisions. However, informal institutions tend to adapt rather than disappear. New spaces for influence may emerge in district-level verification or appeals processes. Historical evidence shows that when reforms disrupt embedded arrangements without offering compensatory incentives or alternative influence pathways, resistance intensifies (Teacher Unions and Government Relations in Punjab, 2024).

Sequencing and Feasibility

Implementation feasibility depends on sequencing reforms to match institutional capability. Early phases might target new entrants or voluntary adopters, with incentives such as eligibility for promotion, recognition, or access to CPD. Geographic pilots, targeting districts with reliable HR data and stronger administrative capacity, would be critical for early wins, build coalitions, and inform broader rollout. Teacher licensing in Punjab sits at the intersection of bureaucratic authority, political legitimacy, and professional identity. The question of “who governs” licensing is not administrative; it is political. It concerns how power is distributed, how institutions are structured, and how legitimacy is constructed and sustained. Among the governance models examined, hybrid arrangements appear to reflect a closer alignment with Punjab’s institutional realities and political constraints.

Evidence Box

Country	Model	Key Lessons
Indonesia	Outsourced university-based licensing	Generated rent-seeking and weakened teacher quality
India	State-regulated, decentralised TETs	Politically contested implementation, varying quality
Peru	Hybrid state-academic model	Sequenced reform, built legitimacy through sustained dialogue
Ghana	Phased licensing via the Teaching Council	Gradual inclusion of private teachers, credible oversight
Pakistan (Sindh)	Hybrid state-academic model Regulated through STEDA, (conceptually and procedurally co-designed with academic and non-governmental partners	(i) phased roll-out to manage institutional bandwidth; (ii) transparent fee structures and appeal mechanisms; and (iii) aligning licensing with CPD to sustain teacher buy-in.

Pathways, Risks, and Political Strategies

This section building upon the preceding analysis, assess the political feasibility of teacher licensing in Punjab. In line with the core questions outlined earlier, the section outlines how political dynamics shape windows of opportunity, reform narratives, and implementation risks, and what this means for strategy, sequencing, and coalition-building.

Framing the Change Space

Teacher licensing in Punjab is not a purely technical intervention; it operates within a politically charged environment shaped by historical compromises and entrenched informal norms. In such contexts, reforms rarely succeed through top down directives; instead, they rely on negotiated alignment between government officials, unions, and political actors, where perceptions of fairness and gain determine acceptance (Whaites et al., 2023). Recent history in Punjab illustrates this dynamic: the 2024 Training Needs Assessment (TNA) failed to gain traction, with under 5% participation, largely due to a trust deficit and lack of consultation. Similarly, efforts to rationalise teacher deployment (2018–2021) and a 2019 proposal for mandatory PPSC exams for in-service teachers were withdrawn following union led protests. In contrast, the HRMIS E-Transfer module succeeded because it aligned with teacher incentives i.e. reduced transaction costs, transparency, and professional convenience (I-SAPS, 2023).

Interviews with District Education Officials, Teachers and Union Representatives confirm that union responses differ across cohorts. Some unions, especially those led by pre 2013 recruits, view reform as a threat to tenure. Others are more open to professionalisation if reforms are framed credibly and offer recognition. As a result, licensing must be positioned as a professional status -enhancing instrument, not a compliance burden. Without this shift in perception, even technically sound reforms may be blocked or diluted (Akhtar & Kayani, 2024; Bruns & Schneider, 2016).

Coalitions, Path Dependence, and Narrative Risks

Punjab's education governance is shaped by layered institutional routines, formal rules on postings, promotions, transfers and grievances coexist with informal bargaining and political mediation. Historical precedents such as the 2009 teacher regularisation drive, the 2016 GTA led sit-ins, and the 2023–24 AGEGA protests illustrate this pattern i.e. reform is rarely imposed top-down, but negotiated through compromise (The Express Tribune, 2016; Dawn, 2024)

Teacher unions have developed strong collective bargaining power. This has shaped shared expectations that reforms must protect tenure and be negotiated, not imposed. If licensing is perceived as a covert austerity measure or a threat to job security, it will face resistance rather than uptake (Naviwala, 2016). Indonesia's 2005 teacher certification reform illustrates the risk. Despite early support, weak oversight and poor incentive alignment led to credential inflation without improving classroom outcomes (Chang et al., 2014; De Ree et al., 2016). In this context, history is not just a

constraint, it offers insight into feasible entry points. Licensing in Punjab will require careful sequencing, credible signalling, and a framing that links certification to professional status rather than administrative control.

Windows of Opportunity & Sequencing for Legitimacy

Reforms do not succeed simply because policies are well-designed, they take hold when actors across the system see value and reduced risk in supporting them. These windows of opportunity emerge not just in time, but through political alignment and strategic signalling. Punjab's 2020 attempt to introduce a teacher licensing ordinance illustrates the cost of ignoring this dynamic. Announced with little consultation, the proposal triggered immediate backlash because unions framed it as a threat to job security rather than a professional opportunity (Dawn, 2020). Field consultations with stakeholders during the course of this study reaffirm that premature announcements cause uncertainty and unrest, particularly when actors are excluded from early design stages (FGDs with Teachers, 2025).

In contrast, the current effort indicates signs of greater deliberation. SED officials now emphasise the need for clear benefits and coalition building. Field insights suggest that unions act as “pressure groups” largely because they are excluded from formulation and only engaged during implementation.

Successful examples like the E-Transfer rollout show that when reforms are seen as transparent, voluntary, and enabling, the uptake improves. Conversely, those seen as sudden or punitive provoke resistance. To navigate this, legitimacy must be established across two dimensions; a.) *Procedural Legitimacy*, which will stem from the inclusion of stakeholders in the design phase. Evidence from field indicates that engagement must move beyond tokenism; recommendations should be consolidated from the district level (CEOs interacting with cadres) up to the provincial level to ensure ownership; and b.) *Substantive Legitimacy*, which depends on whether reforms offer tangible gains. Stakeholders have explicitly noted that initially, licensing should not be linked with accountability, but with incentives to enhance motivation and professional status.

Evidence Box

Evidence from Punjab and international practice reinforces the political significance of sequencing and framing teacher licensing reforms:

- **Punjab (2019):** The HRMIS E-Transfer reform gained traction and legitimacy because it aligned with teacher interests by offering transparency and reducing the transaction costs of posting (I-SAPS, 2023).
- **Indonesia (2005):** While the certification reform raised salaries, political pressure led to a dilution of standards (replacing exams with portfolios). Without rigorous quality assurance, the reform resulted in "credentialism" without improvements in student learning (Chang et al., 2014; De Ree et al., 2016).
- **Peru (2007):** To mitigate resistance, the *Carrera Pública Magisterial* reform was initially applied only to new hires and voluntary applicants, allowing the government to build a meritocratic parallel stream without frontal union conflict (Balarin, 2021; Bruns & Schneider, 2016).
- **Mexico (2013):** A cautionary case where mandatory, high-stakes evaluations were introduced without stakeholder buy-in, leading to massive mobilisation and the eventual reversal of the reform (Moch Islas et al., 2021).

Incentives and Credible Commitments

Actors across the teacher governance landscape, teachers, unions, bureaucrats, and politicians, respond not to abstract ideals but to tangible incentives and constraints. Licensing will gain field level acceptability only when renewal mechanisms align with the everyday calculus of gain and loss. Evidence from field indicates that younger teachers support licensing if it links to CPD credits, recognition, and career advancement. Senior cohorts, however, seek assurances around fairness, cost neutrality, and protection of tenure (Field Notes, 2025).

Licensing uptake will depend on making such commitments enforceable. For instance, integrating licensing into existing service rules for promotion, automating CPD-hour tracking, and ensuring fee waivers or reimbursements can help transform licensing from a perceived threat into a professional credential. Conversely, if licensing is perceived as punitive, exam-heavy, or poorly communicated, it is likely to provoke pre-emptive resistance. This risk is especially high if older cohorts feel targeted; findings from the field suggest that the initiative must be perceived as a “supportive measure, not punitive” to avoid unrest. District CEOs report bandwidth constraints, lack of dedicated staff for verification, and fears of grievance overload if proposed licensing framework is not clearly defined or adequately resourced. In such conditions, implementation becomes discretionary and uneven, eroding legitimacy and deepening institutional fatigue.

Evidence from international experience reinforces this. In Kenya, reforms have historically faltered when government implementation lacked the credibility of non state actors. For instance, the Teachers Service Commission’s initiatives have faced resistance due to perceived threats to tenure and weak enforcement capacity (Bold et al., 2013). Similarly, Indonesia’s early licensing reforms led to “certificate mills” and rent seeking, where candidates purchased portfolios and certifications due to poor oversight and a lack of predictable renewal pathways (Chang et al., 2014; De Ree et al., 2016). In these contexts, certification became a mechanism for distributing patronage rather than assuring quality (Rosser & Fahmi, 2016).

These patterns underline a critical point: institutional credibility must precede behavioural change. Teachers will only engage if they trust that the process is fair, the goals are developmental, and the rules are consistently applied.

Discretion, Bandwidth and Operational Risk

The consolidation of QAED, PEC, and PCTB into PECTAA has created a unified statutory platform, but it also centralises risk,. The credibility of licensing will ultimately depend on whether the institutional nodes, especially at the district level, can verify credentials, manage appeals, and ensure procedural consistency. Where capacity is weak, bureaucratic discretion expands; and in such settings, frontline officials often resort to negotiated compliance, accommodating informal requests to avoid disruption (Andrews et al., 2017). International cases further highlight this risk. Kenya’s Teachers Service Commission introduced licensing-linked CPD, but weak digital infrastructure and verification delays created policy backlogs and temporary exemptions. Indonesia’s early implementation, lacking proper oversight, produced “certificate mills” where portfolios were falsified, resulting in limited credibility (World Bank, 2015; Rosser & Fahmi, 2016),. These instances substantiate that institutional

credibility precedes behavioural change; predictable and fair processes are the precondition for professional recognition

Political Do ability Scenarios: Triggers and Levers

The political do-ability of teacher licensing in Punjab is best understood not as a binary of success or failure, but as a spectrum of reform trajectories. To anticipate how different actors may respond under varying political and institutional conditions, the analysis maps three plausible scenarios, each shaped by the interplay of incentives, administrative bandwidth, and political signalling. These scenarios reflect how institutional capacity, actor incentives, and political framing interact under the province's prevailing settlement. Each scenario carries its own indicative probability and political-economy signature, helping identify the opportunities and risks.

i. *Negotiated Incrementalism:*

This pathway assumes broad incentive alignment across actors, low protest risk, and an adaptive coalition led by reform minded SED officials and younger teacher cohorts. In this scenario, the licensing reform is rolled out through phased pilots, beginning in districts with relatively higher administrative bandwidth. RPL is extended to in-service teachers to mitigate backlash, while co-design forums with teacher unions help pre-empt resistance. Political leadership frames the reform as status-enhancing, rather than punitive, invoking professionalism, dignity, and CPD driven career progression. This approach resonates with the “bypass” strategy used in Peru (2007), where applying new standards only to new hires (while making them voluntary for incumbents) helped neutralise opposition from powerful unions (Bruns & Schneider, 2016; Balarin, 2023). In Punjab, early wins such as portable credentials and reduced arbitrariness in postings would help validate reform intentions and build momentum. Over time, such an approach could embed licensing as a credible, non-threatening reform.

This scenario is likely to retain the support of reform-oriented SED officials, younger teacher cohorts seeking career progression, and district officials in higher-capacity settings. Resistance is expected to be minimal, provided senior teachers see clear transitional safeguards.

ii. *Hybrid Transition:*

With an indicative probability of medium, this pathway features selective compliance, mixed administrative signals, and a reform that is experienced as uneven and negotiable. This scenario sees the licensing initiative taking off in select districts, particularly where PECTAA nodes' capability or partner support is concentrated, while others lag due to capacity constraints, unclear communication, resource constraints, or local opposition. Communication gaps and ambiguous political commitment compound the problem, producing a fragmented reform landscape. Local officials, operating under unclear SoPs or overburdened with verification duties, default to discretionary compliance. While the policy is not reversed, it is reshaped in practice, mirroring Indonesia's 2010–2014 experience, where decentralised certification mechanisms led to “*credentialism without competence*” (Chang et al., 2014; De Ree et al., 2016; Rosser & Fahmi, 2016). Licensing, in this scenario, as the evidence from field suggest, risks discretion replacing design, and teachers may comply formally while resisting informally. In this scenario, partial uptake is likely among better-resourced districts and teachers already engaged in CPD, while

disengagement or quiet resistance may emerge among overstretched districts, senior union leaders, and teachers unclear about long-term benefits.

iii. Disruption and Policy Freeze:

This scenario is driven by veto coalitions overpowering reformers after top down announcements trigger backlash, pushing government into damage control mode. In this adversarial scenario, teacher licensing is perceived as a threat, either to job security, union leverage, or patronage networks. Reform is introduced with limited consultation and heavy emphasis on high-stakes evaluation. Union leadership mobilises protests, particularly in politically sensitive districts, invoking past precedents like the 2016 GTA sit-ins or the mass opposition to the 2020 Licensing Ordinance, which was later withdrawn amid backlash (The Express Tribune, 2016; Dawn, 2020). Faced with mounting pressure, political leadership withdraws support, and reform architects retreat, leaving behind reputational and institutional damage. This trajectory reflects many experiences in Pakistan (see page 29 above), as well as internationally such as the Mexican experience in 2013, where teacher evaluation reform collapsed under the weight of insufficient buy-in and aggressive rollout (Moch Islas et al., 2021).

This trajectory will likely result in strong opposition from senior teacher unions, political actors seeking to preserve patronage networks, and mid-level administrators concerned about grievance overload. Reform champions risk isolation unless broader political coalitions are built in advance

Each of these scenarios underscores that the trajectory of licensing reform is not preordained by its policy logic but will be shaped by how actors interpret its effects. The “do ability” of reform lies in building coalitions that see value in professionalisation, sequencing reform to match institutional bandwidth, and embedding trust-building mechanisms that insulate implementation from politicisation. Evidence from international practice affirm that such consent is built through sequencing, transparency, and strategic narrative framing not through imposition or top-down enforcement.

Synthesis: Navigating Reform Choices in a Political System

Teacher licensing in Punjab cannot be separated from the political and institutional dynamics that shape public sector reform. Its feasibility depends not just on technical robustness alone, but on whether the reform can reconfigure incentives, build supportive coalitions, and mitigate implementation risks across the system. Across these dynamics, three factors will be fundamental: First, the distribution of discretion, over postings, progression, and appeals, structures how actors interpret the reform; Second, actor positions are conditional, not fixed. Teachers and unions respond to perceived fairness, administrative burden, and the visibility of gains or losses. As established in the findings from the field, even initially resistant groups may shift stance if licensing is linked to professional recognition and practical support (e.g., CPD access, portable credentials). Third, viability of reform will be shaped by timing and local capacity, with district-level variance, administrative readiness, and political stability shaping whether authorisation converts into stable routines.

To move forward, teacher licensing in Punjab must navigate a narrow pathway, sequencing reforms to build credibility, framing them as professional growth, and ensuring implementation is supported, not imposed.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Credibility, Coalitions, Sequencing

Credibility, Coalitions, Sequencing

Implementing teacher licensing in Punjab is not merely a question of technical robustness, operational readiness or capacity, it is a test of government's political capacity to negotiate, adapt, and deliver within a highly discretionary governance space. As the preceding analysis has demonstrated, education reform in Punjab occurs not in a technocratic vacuum but within a negotiated institutional reality shaped by informal norms, incentives, and political risk management.

At stake is not only the operational workability of licensing, but how it can be introduced in ways that are both politically feasible and institutionally credible within this complex landscape. The reform alters the distribution of discretion i.e. who verifies, appeals, and benefits. Thus, making its sequencing and legitimacy as critical as its formal design. The choice of delivery modality, whether direct government delivery, a PECTAA regulated hybrid, or an outsourced mechanism, will determine where discretion sits, how trust is built, and how implementation risk is absorbed across the chain (standards, testing, CPD recognition, registry, renewal, appeals). Comparative practice indicates that regulated hybrids tend to balance capacity, legitimacy, and standardisation more effectively than either purely public or fully outsourced systems.

Equally important, licensing reform enters a system where expectations of procedural fairness have been shaped by past cycles of mobilisation and partial reform delivery. The reform's success will depend on whether it is seen as a professional enhancement or a new layer of control. The challenge, therefore, is not one of compliance enforcement, but to build a coalition for reform, anchored in perceived legitimacy, responsive communication, and phased implementation. Practically, this means prioritising credibility before control, coalition before capability, and sequencing before scale (Whaites et al., 2023; Andrews, Pritchett, & Woolcock, 2017). An early, credible decision on who leads what function in the licensing chain, and what protections and appeals mechanisms are in place, will shape how fair and feasible the reform appears to key actors.

Political Ownership and Communication Windows

Reforms that reshape or disrupt established institutional balances require more than policy design. They demand clear and consistent political signalling. Punjab's 2020 licensing ordinance episode illustrates the risks of premature codification without narrative framing. What was intended as a professionalising measure became widely viewed as a threat, sparking unrest. The current reform moment presents a chance to reframe licensing as a career-enabling transition, rather than a compliance tool. This requires unified messaging from SED, PECTAA and political leadership, positioning licensing within a broader

agenda of education quality, teacher dignity, and career progression.

Communication must precede codification. Senior leadership, including the Minister, Secretary SED and key political figures, must publicly articulate the purpose and benefits of licensing. Moreover, institutionalising ownership mechanisms, such as formal reform coordination structures and early briefings with Standing Committees, can preempt contestation and enable cross stakeholder alignment.

Capability and Roll-out: The establishment of PECTAA has clarified the statutory mandate for licensing. However, implementation capacity remains uneven, particularly at the district level where the actual functions of verification, renewal, and appeals may occur. The institutional legacies of QAED, PEC, and PCTB are now merged, but coordination gaps and bandwidth limitations persist, especially in District PECTAAs. In such settings, discretion becomes the default operating mode, with local actors often reverting to negotiated compliance in the absence of clear protocols and automated systems. This risks undermining standardisation and corroding reform credibility. A universal rollout under these conditions would likely stretch capacity and provoke resistance.

A more pragmatic path is staged implementation, beginning with “reform footholds”, districts where core routines and systems are in place. These can serve as low-risk demonstration zones, building political and operational confidence through visible early wins. Importantly, capability need not precede reform, it can be developed through reform. Early implementation should focus on testing routines, not perfection. Indicative readiness criteria for pilot districts could include: (i) functional HRMIS with CPD data integration; (ii) a designated appeals node; (iii) verified staff for document verification; and (iv) a basic audit trail for licensing decisions.

Pathways for Government Action: Some Recommendations

To design and implement teacher licensing in a credible and politically durable way, the government must move beyond technical design to a phased strategy rooted in legitimacy, communication, and coalition building. The following nine pathways offer a practical roadmap across three reform stages: foundation-building, phased rollout, and long-term system integration.

1. Build Legitimacy Before Enforcement (0–12 months)

- a. Launch and institutionalise a RPL process for all in-service teachers before introducing any licencing exams.
- b. Link first cycle license renewal (Years 1–2) to verified CPD participation, not high stakes tests.
- c. Introduce fee waivers for initial renewals and 30-day appeal timelines to preempt union mobilisation.
- d. Communicate licensing as a professional support mechanism, especially for mid-career and female teachers.

2. Create a Licensing Governance Platform (Within 3 months)

- a. Establish a Teacher Licensing Consultative Forum, with representation from SED, PECTAA, teacher unions, CEOs, etc.
- b. Use the Forum to co-design licensing SOPs, communication strategies, and grievance redress mechanisms.
- c. Assign reform champions at provincial and district levels to sustain momentum and political ownership.

3. Phase Rollout Through Demonstration Districts (12–36 months)

- a. Begin rollout in high capacity districts with functional HRMIS-CPD integration.
- b. In parallel, enable voluntary licensing pilots in select PEF, PEIMA, and private schools seeking accreditation.
- c. Use initial districts as learning zones, documenting lessons before scale-up.
- d. Adopt a district readiness index to guide expansion over three years.

4. Use Contracts to Drive Compliance in the Non-State Sector (12–24 months)

- a. Embed licensing compliance clauses into all new PSRP concession renewals and school operator contracts.
- b. Negotiate/introduce voluntary compliance addendums for existing concessionaires during transition.
- c. Frame licensing as a quality enhancement and career progression tool, not a regulatory burden.
- d. Complete operator consultations before contract renewals in Year 2.

5. Strengthen Data Integration and Interoperability (0–18 months)

- a. Integrate PECTAA's teacher registry with HRMIS, SIS, and CPD platforms for real-time tracking.
- b. Define a minimum dataset: unique teacher ID, CPD hours, licence status, and appeal outcomes.
- c. Launch public dashboards showing district wise licensing progress.
- d. Complete full system interoperability by Year 1 through PITB or equivalent.

6. Include Non-State Actors Without Fragmenting the System (12–30 months)

- a. Enable voluntary licensing participation from PEF and PEIMA schools/teachers through CPD vouchers and institutional accreditation.
- b. Introduce phased inclusion to prevent parallel credential regimes.
- c. Maintain public oversight of moderation and verification to ensure quality control.
- d. Set clear inclusion targets for non-state teachers by Year-3.

7. Control and Shape the Reform Narrative through Strategic Communication (Immediate and Ongoing)

- a. Develop and roll out a licensing communication narrative strategy, emphasising licensing as professional recognition and career growth rather than compliance.
- b. Identify the early adopters and teacher ambassadors to model success.
- c. Provide district officials with “narrative toolkits” emphasising teacher dignity and career mobility.
- d. Launch a provincial awareness campaign by Month 6 to build public legitimacy.

8. Integrate Licensing with Performance Management and CPD (18–36 months)

- a. Link license renewal to outcomes from classroom observations, student learning, and head teacher feedback.
- b. Provide targeted CPD for teachers requiring needing support prior to renewal.
- c. Embed these indicators in SED's HRMIS by Year 3 for automated tracking.
- d. Reinforce professional growth over punitive evaluation.

9. Extend Licensing to PEF and PEIMA Teachers (24–36 months)

- a. Recognise teaching experience in these systems through RPL and accredited CPD pathways.
- b. Offer incentives such as promotion eligibility, CPD stipends, and professional recognition for licensed teachers.
- c. Develop a joint SED–PECTAA–PEF roadmap for integration by end of Year 3.
- d. Align with the national teacher standards and qualification framework for consistency and system coherence.

Constraints and Mitigations: Pragmatism Over Perfection

Successful implementation of teacher licensing will require not only capability but also reflexivity, the willingness to adapt and learn in real time. A politically smart reform is one that evolves through feedback, iteration, and coalition maintenance. This demands the institutionalisation of feedback loops that allow for course correction, stakeholder reflection, and policy evolution. Quarterly joint review mechanisms, bringing together PECTAA, SED, DEAs, and unions can create a rhythm of collective problem solving.

Transparent data systems, including appeals dashboards and anonymised district progress updates, will help reinforce accountability and rebuild trust. Significantly, implementation protocols must remain living instruments, open to revision based on pilot evidence and frontline feedback. Reform resilience grows when adaptation is designed into the delivery architecture.

Even well-designed, sequenced reforms will face constraints. Fiscal limitations may delay investments in CPD or verification infrastructure, highlighting the need for strategic donor alignment. Political turnover may disrupt continuity, underscoring the importance of bureaucratic custodianship and cross-party briefing. District-level overload could trigger a return to informal workarounds, while narrative slippages may reframe licensing as surveillance rather than support. These are not reasons to defer reform; they are variables to be managed through credible design, coalition maintenance, and communication clarity.

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Annexures

Annex-1

List of Key Informant Interviews and Focus Groups for PEA

KIIs

Sr. No.	Name	Designation / Department
1	Mr. Rana Sikandar Hayat	Minister SED, Punjab
2	Mr. Khalid Nazir Wattoo	Secretary SED/CEO PECTAA
2	Mr. Shakeel Bhatti	MD Academics, PECTAA
3	Mr. Ghulam Farid	The Secretary, Higher Education Department (HED)
4	Mr. Imtiaz Shahid Gondal	Programme Director, PMIU-PESRP
5	Mr. Nasir Mehmood	Assessments Wing (PECTAA)
6	Mr. Mushtaq Sial	Ex. DPI Elementary, SED, Punjab
7	Mr. Omer Saeed	Manager M&E, PMIU-PESRP
8	Mr. Muzammil Mehmood	Advisor to CM on Education
9	CEOs	3 Districts
10		Teacher Union Representatives

FGD-1

Participant Name	Gender	School Level
Ameer Hamza	Male	Primary
Muhammad Tahir	Male	Middle
Muhammad Mehbob Iqbal	Male	High
Shakila Naik	Female	Primary
Ashifa Rafique	Female	Middle
Rabia Hanif	Female	High

FGD-2

Participant Name	Gender	School Level
Riaz Ahmad	Male	Primary
Muhammad Kaleemullah	Male	Middle
Muhammad Mansha	Male	High
Arjumand Rana	Female	Primary
Nadia Sabir	Female	Middle
Bushra Perveen	Female	High



**Institute of
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PO Box: 1379, Islamabad, Pakistan.

UAN: (+92-51) 111 739 739; Fax: (+92-51) 2289425

Email: info@i-saps.org; Website: www.i-saps.org