



Political Economy Analysis

Teacher Licensing & Certification in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

2025

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Acronyms

APTA	All Primary Teachers Association
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DCTE	Directorate of Curriculum and Teacher Education
DEO	District Education Officer
DESE	Directorate of Elementary and Secondary Education
DPD	Directorate of Professional Development
E&SED	Elementary and Secondary Education Department
EMIS	Education Management Information System
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (UK)
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HRIS	Human Resource Information System
I-SAPS	Institute of Social and Policy Sciences
KII	Key Informant Interview
KP	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
KPPSC	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Public Service Commission
MIS	Management Information System
MPA	Member of Provincial Assembly
MNA	Member of National Assembly
NMDs	Newly Merged Districts
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PITE	Provincial Institute for Teacher Education
PST	Primary School Teacher
RPDC	Regional Professional Development Centre
SSA	Senior Staff Association
TIP	Teacher Induction Programme
TL&C	Teacher Licensing and Certification
TWP	Thinking and Working Politically
UGEL	Local Educational Management Unit (Peru context)
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development



INTRODUCTION

1.1. Contextualising the Education Reform Imperative in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's education system is faced with a convergence of systemic pressures. These include, declining learning outcomes, fiscal constraints, growing disparities in teacher deployment, and persistent gaps in professional development. These challenges have brought forth the questions on how teachers are recruited, inducted, developed, and retained, and have generated momentum for reforms that can professionalise the teaching workforce without exacerbating existing inequities or triggering political backlash. In this backdrop, licensing and certification are emerging as potential tools to strengthen the credibility, capability, and coherence of teacher management. While these instruments are often considered technical reforms and innovations designed to raise professional standards, they are, in practice, politically salient interventions. They touch directly on questions of authority, status, progression, and institutional control, areas shaped not only by formal policies but also by long-standing bureaucratic logics, union dynamics, and discretionary practices¹. In several comparative contexts, education reforms with technical facades have unravelled or succeeded not on design strength, but on whether they align with the state–society bargains already in place².

Recent planning instruments, including the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2020–2025 and the Education Blueprint (2018–2023), reflect a growing recognition that recruitment led expansion alone cannot sustain quality improvement³. The reform discourse is gradually shifting from short-term staffing solutions towards more systemic, performance-linked professional trajectories. The KP Teacher Induction Programme (TIP) represents a notable milestone in this transition. A case in which reform has gained traction by aligning with institutional incentives and minimising political resistance⁴. Similar to other similar reforms globally, reform success in KP hinges less on normative goals and more on whether it reshapes incentives while preserving the existing social contracts between government and public sector actors. As seen in other contexts such as Indonesia and Bangladesh, reform feasibility increases when the locus of change is seen as reinforcing, rather than threatening,

¹ FCDO. (2023). *Understanding Political Economy Analysis and Thinking and Working Politically*. London: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

² Education and Social Accountability in Developing Countries (ESID). (2017). *The Politics of Education Reform in Indonesia and Bangladesh*; World Bank. (2018). *The Political Economy of Teacher Reform: Lessons from Southeast Asia*

³ Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, *KP Education Blueprint 2018–2023*. Elementary and Secondary Education Department

⁴ Institute of Social and Policy Sciences. (2023). *Teacher Induction Programme in KP: A Success Story*. Islamabad: I-SAPS



existing informal settlements between the state and frontline actors⁵.

In this context, licensing and certification serve distinct but related functions. The terms licensing and certification are often used interchangeably in international education frameworks to describe the formal process by which teachers receive official recognition of their professional achievements and qualifications, allowing them to teach at a specific educational level. Both mechanisms are designed to ensure individuals possess the necessary knowledge, competencies, and attributes required for the profession. However, there are functional and institutional differences between the two. Licensing refers to the authorisation to teach in schools, typically contingent upon demonstrated pedagogical competence and adherence to ethical standards. Certification, by contrast, refers to the recognition of professional achievement, whether through training, assessment, or role differentiation, and may be tied to advancement or incentives⁶. Together, these mechanisms offer a potential shift from input-based credentialism towards a competency-based model of professional legitimacy. However, whether such a shift is viable depends not on design alone, but on the alignment of interests, the adaptability of institutions, and the recalibration of political incentives. Thus, licensing must navigate, not bypass, the political logic of teacher management.

The rationale for introducing such reforms in KP is being shaped by four interrelated factors:

First, the system suffers from a credibility gap. Despite competitive recruitment through the Educational Testing and Evaluation Agency (ETEA) and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Public Service Commission (KPPSC), professional development and induction remain fragmented, inconsistent, and inequitably accessed. Quality benchmarks for in-service development are unevenly enforced across districts, and mobility constraints disproportionately affect women teachers, reducing access to training opportunities⁷. Without a province-wide system to ensure ongoing competence, the state lacks both leverage and legitimacy in asserting the quality of its teaching workforce.

Second, declining learning outcomes, especially in foundational literacy and numeracy, have intensified pressure on the public system to demonstrate value. This is particularly relevant in the merged districts, where education is closely tied to the restoration of state legitimacy. Licensing is seen as a public signal of teaching quality, distinguishing trained educators from unregulated alternatives, particularly in comparison to low-fee private providers⁸.

Third, the political economy of teacher deployment continues to be contentious. Previous attempts at redistribution and rationalisation have triggered strong resistance from teacher unions, legislators, and local influencers⁹. In this context, licensing is perceived as a more neutral mechanism. A policy

⁵ World Bank. 2018

⁶ UNESCO. (2019). *Teacher Policy Development Guide*. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

⁷ Institute of Social and Policy Sciences (I-SAPS), *Bridging the Gap: Enhancing Coordination and Communication in KP's Educational Landscape*. Islamabad: I-SAPS, 2023.

⁸ Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, *Education Sector Plan 2020–2025*. Elementary and Secondary Education Department

⁹ Zafar Khan and Bushra Salah ud Din. (2023). "Changing Context of Teacher Education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Identifying and Addressing Gaps," *Pakistan Social Sciences Review* 7, no. 4: 506–514.



instrument that embeds differentiation through technical criteria, rather than through overt administrative discretion.

Fourth, the fiscal space has narrowed. With limited space for large-scale recruitment or across the board financial enhancements, the focus is shifting toward efficiency and value for money. Licensing and certification offer a narrative of quality within constraint, allowing recognition and progression to be linked to performance rather than patronage. However, if seen as a mechanism to slow promotions or increase surveillance, these tools may also trigger opposition from organised teacher constituencies.

Taken together, these dynamics underscore that licensing and certification in KP are not merely administrative innovations. They are embedded within a political and institutional ecosystem shaped by contestation, negotiation, and deeply rooted norms¹⁰. The experience of TIP suggests that where reform is perceived as enabling recognition and growth, rather than enforcing compliance or exclusion, it has a greater chance of securing buy in, especially from women teachers, who face structural barriers to participation in standardised pathways of professional advancement¹¹.

This study, therefore, does not aim to assess licensing or certification in the abstract. Rather, it examines whether a version of this reform exists that is technically sound, politically acceptable, and administratively workable in KP's current context. It seeks to map the incentive structures, institutional arrangements, and actor interests that will determine what kind of reform is feasible, and under what conditions it might succeed¹². The study, draws on the assumption that institutional change is rarely linear and is shaped through iterative negotiation between actors operating within constrained political space and informal systems of power.

1.2 Analytical Approach and Methodology

Teacher licensing and certification are politically embedded institutional reforms. They influence who is recognised within the profession, how careers advance, and which bodies control professional authority. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, these questions intersect with deeply embedded informal norms, negotiated interests across administrative layers, and regionally differentiated expectations regarding merit, access, and fairness.

This study adopts a Thinking and Working Politically (TWP) lens, which frames reform not as a shift in formal rules alone, but as a renegotiation of interests, incentives, and informal institutional arrangements. TWP emphasises that governance arrangements are outcomes of political bargains, often implicit, between bureaucracies, frontline actors, and the state. This approach also cautions against assuming that policy implementation follows institutional design. Instead, it highlights the role of informal norms and power dynamics in shaping outcomes.

¹⁰ FCDO. (2023). *Understanding Political Economy Analysis and Thinking and Working Politically*. London: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

¹¹ Institute of Social and Policy Sciences. (2023). *Teacher Induction Programme in KP: A Success Story*. Islamabad: I-SAPS

¹² WHO. (2021). *Political Economy of Primary Health Care: Systems Reform in Fragile States*.



The analysis focuses on three interlinked domains that collectively shape the governance of the teaching workforce in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. First are the foundational and structural constraints. These include long-standing path dependencies arising from earlier rounds of recruitment driven reforms, persistent gendered barriers to professional access, and spatial disparities, particularly between settled districts and the recently merged tribal areas. Second are the rules, norms, and incentives, encompassing both formal procedures and informal practices that govern how teachers are recruited, posted, and promoted. These include discretionary transfers, the role of political intermediaries, and varying expectations across cadres regarding career progression and entitlements. Third, the analysis attends to actors and power dynamics, including the influence wielded by teacher unions, the interests of departmental hierarchies, and the strategic positioning of administrative champions. Together, these domains offer a lens to examine how licensing and certification might interact with, or challenge, the prevailing configuration of institutional power and authority.

Building upon this analytical framework, the study addresses three questions:

1. Should licensing and certification be limited to new entrants, or extended to in-service teachers as well? If extended, what transitional arrangements can ensure equity and minimise perceived penalisation?
2. How can licensing frameworks accommodate the distinct operational constraints of teachers in the merged districts and remote areas, particularly in relation to training access and gendered mobility?
3. Which institutional body is best positioned to carry out key functions such as assessment, renewal, grievance redressal, record maintenance and with what level of autonomy?

To explore these questions, the study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining legal-regulatory analysis, documentary review, and stakeholder consultations. Policy and legal documents reviewed include the KP Civil Servants Act (1973), the Civil Servants (Appointment, Promotion and Transfer) Rules (1989, revised 2023), the E&SED Regularisation Act (2018), and the Teachers Appointment and Regularisation Act (2022). Complementary frameworks such as the Efficiency and Discipline Rules (2011), the KP Rules of Business (1985), and the Facility-Level Budget and Expenditure Management Policy (2024) were also examined. These were examined in conjunction with the planning and policy documents, including the KP Education Sector Plan (2020–2025), the Education Blueprint (2018–2023), and design frameworks for the Teacher Induction Programme (TIP) and Continuous Professional Development (CPD). Additionally, international comparative literature was used to inform analysis of global practice and reform experience, drawing on studies from South Asia (e.g., Bangladesh, India, Nepal), Indonesia, and selected OECD and UNESCO frameworks on teacher professionalism.

This was supplemented by qualitative fieldwork. Extensive field consultations were conducted with a total of 65 stakeholders across 10 categories. These included senior government officials from E&SED, DPD, DCTE, and ESRU; district-level administrators including DEOs, DDEOs (especially from merged districts); leadership of teacher and management associations (e.g., APTA, ATA, SSA, SOA); and primary, elementary, and secondary school teachers from diverse urban and rural settings. Consultations also included voices from private sector representatives (e.g., KP-PSRA and PEN), providing insights into how licensing might interact with non-state provision and public–private boundaries in education. The interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) explored stakeholder understandings of licensing, perceptions of fairness, concerns about political capture, and administrative



feasibility. Findings from these engagements were cross-referenced with policies and historical trajectories to develop a politically informed diagnostic to understand the conditions under which reform may be negotiated, adapted, or resisted within existing institutional landscapes.

1.3 Structure of the Report

This report is organised into five interlinked sections, each building on the preceding analysis to develop a coherent political economy interpretation of teacher licensing in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Section 1 introduces the purpose of the study, outlines the conceptual and analytical framework, and describes the methodology adopted, including field consultations and document review. Section 2 examines the long-term structural and contextual factors shaping the reform environment, highlighting the demographic, administrative, and political features that condition reform feasibility. Section 3 analyses the formal rules, informal norms, and incentive systems that govern behaviour across the teacher management landscape, showing how these elements interact to create the negotiated order within which reform must operate. Section 4 maps the key actors, coalitions, power dynamics, and patterns of influence and exclusion that shape decision-making and implementation trajectories. Section 5 then synthesises these insights to outline feasible, politically informed pathways for change, identifying entry points, trade-offs, and adaptive strategies for designing a licensing system that is both institutionally anchored and politically viable in the KP context.



FOUNDATIONS AND STRUCTURAL FACTORS

The viability of teacher licensing and certification reform in KP hinges not only on technical soundness but on the province's underlying governance arrangements. The education workforce system operates within a negotiated political and administrative settlement. It is shaped by historical legacies of politicised recruitment, bureaucratic accommodation, geographic inequality, and entrenched informality. These foundational structures do not merely influence reform trajectories; they define their outer limits and determine the pathways through which change becomes viable or stalled.

Rather than functioning through top-down rule enforcement, teacher management in KP is sustained through a series of tacit bargains, between stability and standardisation, between district discretion and central authority, and between political loyalty and professional recognition. Reforms such as licensing or certification, which seek to redefine who qualifies as a “professional teacher,” inevitably challenge these negotiated equilibriums. This section examines the foundations structural factors shaping reform space in KP.

2.1 Historical Legacies and Path Dependency

The current structure of teacher governance in KP has been shaped by four decades of institutional drift, periodic policy recalibration, and political accommodation. Since 1973, teacher recruitment and management have increasingly reflected a settlement that privileges absorption, stability, and bureaucratic control over professionalisation. Following 2000, successive rounds of teacher recruitment reforms, often underpinned by regularisation, have entrenched expectations of guaranteed absorption into the civil service. These expectations persist, even when new recruitment models were introduced as *contractual* or *merit-based*, leading to a path-dependent cycle where contractual innovations are eventually folded into the permanent cadre through political negotiation and legislative action.

Large-scale regularisation efforts, such as those under the KP Regularisation Acts of 2018 and 2022, solidified a culture in which contractual appointments, often made under political or emergency conditions, were later absorbed into the permanent cadre¹³. These actions rewarded political

¹³ Please see; Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (2018). *The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Employees of the Elementary and Secondary Education Department (Appointment and Regularization of Services) Act, 2017 (Act No. I of 2018)*; and

Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (2022). *The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Teachers (Appointment and Regularization of Services) Act, 2022 (Act No. XLI of 2022)*.



intermediaries and created expectations among teachers that any initial insecurity was temporary and would eventually convert into job security. Such legislative accommodations have not only eroded the credibility of differentiated entry pathways but also diluted attempts to link hiring with professional development or accountability.

Reforms such as the TIP were introduced to address quality and standardisation in teacher preparation. However, in the absence of clear career incentives and an enforceable certification structure, these programmes often remained peripheral to the core logics of hiring and promotion. In the absence of strong institutional anchors, newer reforms tend to be perceived as transient, procedural hurdles rather than transformative pathways.

These structural tendencies are reinforced by the legacy of teacher union mobilisation. As documented in interviews and archival records, teacher unions in KP have been pivotal in not only securing wage gains, but also in resisting differential incentives, opposing performance linked progression, and contesting accountability reforms. Their legitimacy is rooted in defending secure tenure, and many union actors view licensing and certification as efforts to slow down regularisation or fragment the service cadre¹⁴. Evidence from the field underscore this disconnect. A senior E&SED official noted, *“We’ve had performance-based induction ideas before. But when you have ten thousand teachers marching for regularisation, everything else waits.”*¹⁵ Such dynamics shape a cadre governed more by precedent than performance, and a bureaucratic memory resistant to retrospective filtering.

The legacies are especially pronounced in the newly merged districts, where conflict, administrative exceptionalism, and weak state presence have entrenched localised patronage arrangements. In these areas, reforms introduced without local adaptation, particularly those reliant on standardised performance metrics, struggle to gain legitimacy. This resistance to reform reflects a political rationality. As comparative evidence from practice suggests, sectoral stability is often achieved by trading professional standards for political containment¹⁶. In this context, the introduction of any new system of professional recognition, whether through licensing, certification, or other career progression mechanisms, will need to navigate deeply embedded expectations and historical patterns of accommodation. Reform pathways that position such mechanisms as enabling recognition and progression, rather than as tools of restriction or filtering, are more likely to align with existing incentive structures and secure wider acceptance.

2.2 Demographics, Geography, and Gender Constraints

The structural conditions of KP’s education workforce are marked by geographic disparity and gendered constraints. A youth bulge continues to expand the demand for teaching positions, particularly in underserved districts, while administrative capacity and fiscal space have not kept pace. The teacher workforce ecology in KP remains highly uneven, with acute disparities between settled and merged

¹⁴ Focus Group Discussion. (2025)

¹⁵ Interview E&SED. (2025)

¹⁶ Brian Levy, *How Political Contexts Influence Education Systems* (RISE Insight Series 2018/016, Research on Improving Systems of Education, 2018). & Fritz, V., Levy, B., & Ort, R. (2014). *Problem-driven political economy analysis: The World Bank’s experience*. Washington, DC: World Bank



districts, and between urban and rural postings.

The public teaching workforce in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa comprises 174,278 teachers, of which 111,297 (64%) are male and 62,981 (36%) female, reflecting ongoing gender asymmetries in representation. Although this reflects modest improvement since 2010, especially at entry levels, gendered participation declines steeply at higher career stages and in remote locations. This structural profile is further compounded by geographic disparities between settled districts, which host nearly 89% of all teachers (155,881), and the merged areas, where only 11% (18,397) of the workforce is stationed, despite higher relative need. In fact, vacancy rates in some tehsils of merged districts exceed 25%, highlighting both supply constraints and difficulties in attracting qualified candidates to the underserved areas.

Level	Working Male	Working Female	Total Working	% Female
Primary	55,775	32,748	88,523	37%
Middle	11,962	8,814	20,776	42%
High	27,123	13,432	40,555	33%
Higher Secondary	16,437	7,987	24,424	33%
Total	111,297	62,981	174,278	36%

This informs that over 51% of teachers serve at the primary level, while the higher secondary cadre accounts for only 14%, and is more male-dominated and urban-centred¹⁷.

Educational qualifications within the workforce have improved in recent years. Over 60% of public-school teachers now possess at least 16 years of education (Bachelor's or Master's degree), and approximately 20% hold M.Phil./MS-level qualifications. This shift is particularly notable among the post-2014 recruits, many of whom entered the profession through merit-based testing and underwent structured induction through the TIP framework. However, older cadres, especially those inducted prior to 2010, still include teachers with legacy diplomas such as PTC, CT, and B.Ed., reinforcing a dual system of professional identity.

Qualification	% of Total Workforce
16 years (BA/BSc/MA/MSc)	~60%
18+ years (MS/M.Phil.)	~20%
PTC, CT, B.Ed. (legacy)	~20% (mostly senior)

The teachers inducted before 2010 benefitted from time based promotion systems, while the later, or *merit inductees*, entered through the NTS and TIP pipelines. These two service cohorts

¹⁷ E&SED. 2024. Annual School Census 2022-23



not only differ in age or training, but also in their orientation towards reform. While merit inductees often view licensing as a “logical next step,” senior cadres, particularly those aligned with powerful unions, interpret it as “retrospective filtering.” This bifurcation creates a dual legitimacy problem for reform. Without careful sequencing and transition mechanisms, any licensing or certification regime risks being seen as punitive by one group, and redundant by the other.

Geography intersects with reform in additional ways. Initiatives requiring uniform deployment, licensing-based progression, or continuous professional development (CPD) struggle in regions with minimal infrastructure or travel insecurity, particularly in merged districts like Orakzai or Upper South Waziristan. Second, the culturally entrenched expectation of home postings, especially among female teachers, remains politically mediated and operationally rigid. Focus groups discussion with the teachers confirmed that teachers assigned to remote schools “wait for political cycles” to be transferred closer to urban centres¹⁸. Administrative actors noted that transfer orders are often “negotiated, not issued,” with teacher unions and local legislators playing critical roles in determining who goes where¹⁹.

Regional concentration patterns reinforce these inequalities. Peshawar (11%), Swat (9%), Mardan (8%), and Abbottabad (7%) account for over a third of the total teacher base. These districts also host disproportionately more highly qualified and recently inducted teachers. By contrast, low-density districts, such as Upper Kohistan, Orakzai, and South Waziristan, struggle to attract and retain qualified staff. Female participation in these districts often falls below 10%, further weakening the case for standardised reform implementation.

Gender inequality compounds these constraints. While formal planning instruments such as the KP Education Sector Plan (2020–2025) espouse equity in female teacher deployment, real world dynamics suggest otherwise. Female representation levels off at around one-third at secondary and higher secondary levels, compared to 42% at the middle level, and in merged districts, it remains around 24%. Further, training access is deeply unequal. In South Waziristan and Mohmand, headteachers reported that “no female staff has attended in-person CPD in over a year,” with security risks, logistical costs, and lack of family support cited as major barriers²⁰.

Region	% of Total Workforce	Female Representation
Settled Districts	89%	~38%
Merged Areas	11%	~24%

Such disparities have implications for reform uptake. Female teachers indicated conditional support for licensing reforms, especially if framed around recognition and promotion.

¹⁸ Focus Group Discussion. Teachers. 2025

¹⁹ Key Informant Interview, E&SED. 2025

²⁰ Focus Group Discussion. Teachers 2025.



However, without adapted delivery models, such as remote training, location-sensitive exemptions, or transition support, even well-intentioned reforms risk reinforcing unequal access. One teacher stated, “If this is just another exam that we can’t even get to, then it’s not for us.”

These inequities are not neutral. They shape how policies like licensing and CPD are perceived, negotiated, and implemented. Urban teachers with access to digital resources, administrative networks, and stable postings are better positioned to benefit from certification schemes. In contrast, those in peripheral tehsils, particularly women, may view them as mechanisms of exclusion rather than empowerment, unless supported by differentiated incentives and context-specific implementation. A district education official stated, “You cannot build professional standards on an unequal foundation, access and credibility must rise together.”²¹ Thus, demographic, professional and spatial configurations are not background conditions; these are active determinants of whether a specific reform gains traction or stalls in selective compliance.

2.3 Bureaucratic Structures and Fragmentation

The governance of teacher management in KP is characterised by a layered, functionally decentralised, yet institutionally segmented architecture. While overall accountability lies with the Elementary and Secondary Education Department (E&SED), implementation authority is distributed across a network of directorates, district education authorities, and semi-autonomous bodies. This design is embedded in the broader provincial governance system. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Government Rules of Business (1985) assign E&SED the fundamental role in managing service matters of teachers, including appointments, transfers, and performance management. However, they also provide for attached departments and directorates to perform dedicated roles in assistance of the department. These included the Directorate of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), the Directorate of Professional Development (DPD), and the Directorate of Curriculum and Teacher Education (DCTE)²².

At the administrative level, the DESE and district education offices (DEOs) hold primary authority over postings, promotions, service records, and pay. Whereas DPD and DCTE oversee induction, training, and curriculum support. Yet, there are no formal mechanisms to ensure that teacher professional development is recognised in personnel decisions, a gap which stakeholders repeatedly highlighted in political economy consultations. As one education official noted during a stakeholder consultation, “We have a good CPD framework, but no lever to ensure a teacher completes it.”²³

This institutional incoherence is further exacerbated by fragmented data systems. Despite recent efforts to modernise EMIS, HRMIS, and the training tracker, these platforms remain

²¹ Key Informant Interview. DEO. 2025

²² Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (1985). *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Government Rules of Business, 1985*. Establishment & Administration Department.

²³ Focus Group Discussions. 2025.



siloed, lack inter-operability, and do not share a unified unique teacher identifier to track career histories across systems. The personnel records, service books, training histories, and payroll data are maintained in separate repositories, some digital, many still paper-based, with “no shared architecture across recruitment, deployment, and training systems²⁴.” EMIS/EMA, HRMIS, and DPD’s training databases remain non-interoperable, preventing teacher lifecycle tracking and creating what the diagnostic terms “parallel data regimes” that hinder coordinated planning. The KP Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2020-2025 similarly highlights the impact of inconsistent role definitions, weak data integration, and poor cross-functional collaboration on the implementation of personnel policies.

Fragmentation also shapes accountability. The Efficiency and Discipline Rules (2011) provide a clear procedural framework for determining misconduct and inefficiency, and define the powers of appointing, competent, and appellate authorities²⁵. Yet in practice, enforcement is uneven because these authorities sit across disconnected administrative tiers and depend on incomplete or inconsistent records. The result is an accountability chain that is formally comprehensive but operationally porous. These bureaucratic silos not only reduce policy effectiveness but also create political opportunity structures. In the absence of reliable records and enforceable cross-departmental linkages, reform initiatives such as licensing or promotion-linked certification become susceptible to selective compliance. Clerical discretion, informal brokerage, and administrative negotiation fill the vacuum created by unclear statutory linkages

Comparative political economy evidence from other governance settings reinforces these patterns. Studies of sectoral reforms in decentralised systems consistently show that when bureaucratic structures are fragmented, “pockets of administrative discretion” emerge in which informal authority can override formal lines of control²⁶. Similarly, analyses of reform implementation in multi-agency environments highlight that initiatives requiring cross-functional verification, such as certification, licensing, or performance-linked progression tend to struggle when information systems are siloed and institutional ownership is unclear²⁷. Together, these findings indicate that limited reform traction often reflects structural and organisational boundaries rather than shortcomings in technical design. The dynamics that closely parallel the constraints observed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The cumulative effect of these structural divisions is a governance space where selective compliance is not an anomaly but an adaptive response. Ambiguity over mandates enables negotiation-led rule implementation, clerical gatekeeping, and variable enforcement across districts.

For licensing and certification, the implications are clear. Without integrated data systems, clarified institutional mandates, and enforceable linkages between HR, training, and

²⁴ Institute of Social and Policy Sciences. (2023). *Bridging the gap: Enhancing coordination and communication in KP’s education landscape*. I-SAPS.

²⁵ Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (2011). *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Government Servants (Efficiency and Discipline) Rules, 2011*. Establishment & Administration Department

²⁶ World Health Organization. (2024). *Political economy analysis of primary health care governance in Kenya: Implications for system strengthening*. WHO Health Governance and Financing Unit.

²⁷ Nelson, A., Cyril, S., & Torres, E. (2020). *Integrating political economy analysis into development programming: A synthesis of lessons from RTI projects*. RTI Press



performance structures, the reform risks being technically sound but functionally symbolic. The challenge is not only to design a credible framework but to anchor it in a system where coherence, ownership, and administrative interoperability remain limited.

2.4 Structural Informality and Political Brokerage

What sustains the education workforce system in KP is not strict compliance with rules but negotiated informality. The posting and transfer process illustrates this clearly. While governed by departmental orders, it is widely understood as a site of discretion and exchange. The “attractive” posts, usually defined by urban location, proximity to home, and low supervision, are accessed through political referrals, union mediation, or administrative barter.

Desirable” postings, typically in urban schools, near home, and with limited oversight, are routinely mediated through informal recommendation (*sifarish*), political referrals, or union intervention. Teachers, especially those with local political affiliations, often function as both civil servants and political actors, participating in campaign work or vote mobilisation in exchange for job security or favourable placements. Interviews and focus group discussions confirm the existence of informal “protected lists” maintained by DEOs or clerical staff, shielding certain teachers from transfer orders without high-level clearance.

Unions play a central role in this negotiated order. Groups such as the Senior Staff Association (SSA) and the All Primary Teachers Association (APTA) act as powerful intermediaries, advocating for members but also resisting reform measures perceived as undermining tenure or increasing surveillance. For instance, SSA has opposed the linking of licensing to promotion eligibility, arguing that “no additional hurdles” should be placed on experienced cadres (FGDs, 2025). Union pressure also derailed efforts to automate postings via e-Transfer systems, and helped roll back rationalisation initiatives in 2019. At the district level, head teachers, clerks, and local administrators form an informal “middle tier” that interprets, filters, and negotiates the application of rules. These actors provide stability but also preserve discretion, limiting the enforceability of standardised reforms like CPD or induction compliance. Evidence from the field also informs that many administrators apply rules selectively to keep schools running, particularly when accommodating female teachers with mobility constraints. While such flexibility is adaptive, it entrenches uneven implementation.

These informal settlements are not merely dysfunctions, these reflect adaptive logics in a system where formal processes are often seen as slow, opaque, or poorly enforced. Without credible benefits or administrative clarity, new reforms risk being reinterpreted as tools of control. Licensing, in this context, may be resisted unless framed as a reward for newer, merit-induced teachers and accompanied by incentives such as promotion eligibility or access to specialist roles.

Comparative political economy literature echoes these dynamics. Studies across decentralised systems, highlight that reforms perceived as technocratic impositions are often passively resisted unless adapted to local incentive structures. In KP, this means bridging formal mandates with informal power networks



to ensure that licensing is seen as not threatening the professional status quo²⁸.

2.5 Conclusions and Implications

The foundational landscape of teacher management in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is shaped not just by administrative design but by a deeply entrenched political settlement. Across recruitment, deployment, training, and progression, the system has evolved through accommodation rather than rationalization, balancing bureaucratic order with political bargaining, and professional norms with informal adaptation.

Historically, teacher recruitment has operated as a tool of political inclusion. Legislative regularisations, often retrospective, have blurred the line between contractual innovation and permanent absorption, embedding expectations that service security is a political right rather than a professional milestone. Attempts to introduce structured entry through mechanisms like the Teacher Induction Programme (TIP) or NTS testing have only partially disrupted this logic, and even these are now viewed by many as preambles to eventual regularisation rather than stand-alone qualification systems. Demographic pressures and spatial disparities compound this dynamic. The twin realities of a youth bulge and rural-urban service gaps have created demand for rapid expansion, often outpacing planning or standardisation. The gendered and geographic disparities in CPD access and deployment further constrain equal footing for reform uptake.

Bureaucratic structures, meanwhile, present both the machinery and the friction points of reform. Beyond structure, the governance culture itself is marked by negotiated informality. Unions, clerks, head teachers, and local administrators play gatekeeping roles, managing informal settlements that enable discretionary transfers, CPD exemptions, and political protections. Efforts such as e-Transfer automation or rationalisation drives have faltered not due to design flaws alone, but because they threatened the discretionary space on which many stakeholders rely. Licensing, if introduced without navigating these informal structures, risks similar resistance.

²⁸ Levy, B. (2022). *How Political Contexts Influence Education Systems: A Comparative Perspective*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution



RULES, NORMS, AND INCENTIVES

Reform Context

Teacher careers in KP are governed by a layered rule and practice equilibrium, where statutory procedures coexist with entrenched informal norms, negotiated discretion, and incentive structures shaped by decades of collective bargaining. Formal laws define recruitment, promotion, and disciplinary thresholds, but they operate within a system where political mediation of transfers, union-brokered protections, and selective enforcement are routine, predictable, and often stabilising. In this context, rules do not function as fixed constraints, they serve as reference points interpreted through local political settlements, administrative capacity, and the distributional realities of gender and geography. Norms, expectations, and informal bargains frequently determine how rules are applied, when they are relaxed, and what teachers perceive as legitimate. This interaction between formal authority and informal practice creates a management environment where reforms that alter incentives, such as licensing, face both institutional friction and political sensitivity.

This section therefore maps the five interlocking layers that shape the feasibility of licensing and certification reform: the formal legal architecture, informal rules-in-use, the actual functioning of professional development, incentive structure embedded in progression and career pathways, and the equity landscape produced by gender, geography, and cadre histories. Taken together, these layers define the operating terrain of teaching workforce reforms in KP.

3.1 Formal Rules of Recruitment and Promotion

The recruitment, appointment, and promotion of teachers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa rest on a formal architecture comprising the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Civil Servants Act (1973), the Government Rules of Business (1985), the Civil Servants (Appointment, Promotion and Transfer) Rules, 1989 (updated 2023), and periodic regularisation acts (2018, 2022). These instruments provide the legal foundation for how teachers enter service, move across posts, and progress through career stages²⁹.

²⁹ Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (1973). The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Civil Servants Act, 1973; Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (1985). Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Government Rules of Business, 1985; Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (1989). Civil Servants (Appointment, Promotion and Transfer) Rules, 1989 (Updated 2023). Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (1989). Civil Servants (Appointment, Promotion and Transfer) Rules, 1989 (Updated 2023);



However, these rules operate within a workforce that is unusually large, heterogeneous, and politically salient. KP's public education system employs 174,278 teachers, making it the single largest provincial workforce. Of these 36% are women, and the distribution between settled and newly merged districts (NMDs) reflects deep geographic, security, and infrastructural asymmetries³⁰. These structural features shape both the interpretation and the enforceability of formal rules, particularly around deployment, training compliance, and progression.

Recruitment formally occurs through two channels; a.) BPS-16 and above through the KP Public Service Commission, and b.) BPS-15 and below through the Educational Testing and Evaluation Agency (ETEA) under departmental oversight. Rules mandate merit-based selection, residency requirements, and subject-specific qualifications. Yet, the composition of the current teaching workforce reflects two distinct cohorts:

- (i) teachers appointed before 2013 through largely discretionary, politically mediated processes; and
- (ii) post-2013 inductees hired through NTS/ETEA-based merit examinations, typically holding higher academic qualifications but with limited formal pre-service training.

This bifurcation is crucial because formal rules are not interpreted uniformly across these cohorts. Seniority based teachers view new requirements, such as induction programme, CPD, or future licensing, through the lens of tenure security, while merit recruits view them as extensions of an emerging professional identity.

The APT Rules provide for appointments on probation, confirmation subject to satisfactory performance, and placement through administrative orders. Promotions are governed by seniority-cum-fitness, with limited space for meritocratic differentiation. While the rules technically allow performance-sensitive progression, in practice, seniority remains the dominant organising principle, and performance appraisals (ACRs) rarely influence promotion outcomes³¹. The Regularisation Acts of 2018 and 2022 add further complexity by absorbing large contractual cohorts into permanent service, often without requiring completion of induction training or professional development prerequisites. This generates internal asymmetry, where merit-recruited inductees and politically regularised cohorts coexist under the same service rules but with different entry routes, expectations, and qualifications.

Field evidence shows that rules are formally respected but substantively negotiated. Decisions on transfer, confirmation, or disciplinary action frequently reflect a logic of managed discretion, shaped by political brokerage, union expectations, and administrative workload. This aligns with comparative evidence that formal bureaucratic provisions, without accompanying authority and accountability structures, often create “islands of interpretation” where rules are selectively activated³². The formal rules governing teacher management in KP provide a coherent procedural framework, but their

Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (2018). Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Regularisation of Services Act, 2018; Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (2022). Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Regularisation of Services (Amendment) Act, 2022.

³⁰ I-SAPS. (2024). *Teacher Management Reforms in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (2000–2024)*. Islamabad: Institute of Social and Policy Sciences (I-SAPS)

³¹ Key Informant Interviews, and FGDs with Male and Female Teachers (2025)

³² WHO. (2021). *Political Economy of Primary Health Care: Systems Reform in Fragile States*; Nelson, A., Cyril, S., & Torres, E. (2020). *Integrating political economy analysis into development programming: A synthesis of lessons from RTI projects*.



influence is constrained by the size, heterogeneity, and political embeddedness of the workforce, as well as by institutional fragmentation and asymmetric administrative authority. Yet it is in the shadow of these formal structures that a parallel system of informal norms and negotiated authority has evolved. Which shapes how rules are interpreted, when they are enforced, and by whom.

3.2 Informal Practices and Political Norms

While formal rules provide the procedural scaffolding for teacher management in KP, it is the informal norms, expectations, and negotiated settlements that determine how those rules operate in practice. In line with comparative PEA evidence, the system functions through what TWP terms as “pragmatic problem-solving arrangements” rather than consistent rule enforcement³³. These arrangements stabilise the system but also embed distortions that directly affect the feasibility of licensing and certification reform.

Transfers and postings represent the most visible arena where informal practices override formal regulations. Interviews and consultations with diverse stakeholders indicate that teachers seldom experience transfers as administrative decisions but as negotiated exchanges shaped by proximity to political patrons, local influentials, and departmental gatekeepers³⁴. The urban, low-supervision, or near home postings serve as political currency. Teachers often engage in electoral canvassing or constituency level mobilisation in return for favourable postings, echoing patterns observed in decentralised governance systems in Nepal, Sudan, and South Africa³⁵. Election cycles intensify transfer activity. A district official described this dynamic as a negotiated balance between political demands, union pressure, and administrative constraints. This equilibrium keeps the system stable but embeds powerful incentives against rule based deployment or performance-based mobility.

Teacher unions, especially the Senior Staff Association (SSA) and All Primary Teachers Association (APTA), act as parallel governance structures in certain contexts³⁶. They mediate disputes, broker transfers, and mobilise collective resistance against reforms perceived as threatening tenure security. Field interviews confirm that union leaders often maintain informal lists of “protected teachers” who cannot be transferred without political or union clearance. Reforms that alter conditions of service, such as rationalisation, e-transfer automation, or transfer-linked CPD requirements, have repeatedly

³³ Hudson, D., Marquette, H., & Waldock, S. (2018). *Everyday Political Analysis*. TWP Community of Practice

³⁴ Focus Group Discussion (2025)

³⁵ UNICEF. (2017). *Political Economy Analysis of South Africa's Education Sector*. & Beverley Jones and Daniel Oosthuizen, with Abdelgalil Elmekki and Esraa Ahmed, *Political Economy Analysis in Sudan: Handy Tools for Everyone?* (Birmingham: Thinking and Working Politically Community of Practice, University of Birmingham, 2024).

³⁶ The key teacher unions in KP include: 1. All Primary Teachers Association (APTA) represents primary school teachers (the largest segment); 2. All CT Teachers Association: Represents *Certificate Teachers* (“CT” cadre, often middle school level); 3. All Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Subject Specialists Association: Represents subject specialist teachers (typically high school subject teachers); 4. All Teachers Association, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (ATA-KP): An umbrella body claiming to represent teachers of all levels province-wide; 5. Muttahida Mahaz-e-Asatza (United Front of Teachers): A national alliance of multiple teacher associations with a provincial chapter in KP. 6. All Teachers Grand Alliance. An informal coalition often formed during large protests (sometimes part of the All Government Employees Grand Alliance, AGEGA); 7. Politically Affiliated Groups: i. *Malgari Ustazaan* (ANP’s teacher wing); ii. *Tanzeem-e-Asatza* (Jamaat-e-Islami’s teacher wing); 8. Young Teachers Association (YTA): A newer association representing recently recruited and younger teachers.



triggered collective pushback. For instance, rationalisation efforts in 2019 were reversed under union pressure. Similarly, the e-Transfer automation between 2019–2021 faced sustained opposition and was diluted; and the 2024–25 province-wide upgradation strike demonstrated how service-condition reforms can mobilise system-wide resistance. Licensing, if framed as a gatekeeping tool, risks being interpreted as another attempt to discipline or filter senior cadres.

Informal practices operate as adaptive mechanisms that enable the system to function where formal rules are unrealistic. During the 2019 rationalisation drive, for example, district officers routinely reshuffled teachers informally to keep small rural schools open when formal redeployment orders failed to consider local staffing needs. In multiple conflict-affected merged districts, administrators acknowledged relying on *tribal intermediaries* to enforce attendance and mediate disputes because formal disciplinary routes were either unsafe or institutionally weak. Similarly, female mobility constraints have historically prompted DEOs to adjust postings outside the APT Rules, particularly in Swat, Buner, and South Waziristan, when adhering strictly to seniority based placement would have left girls' schools without functional staff. These patterns demonstrate that informal norms in KP often emerge as workarounds when rigid rules meet practical constraints, stabilising service delivery even as they dilute procedural coherence.

Selective enforcement is a defining characteristic of KP's teacher management system. Disciplinary provisions under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Government Servants (Efficiency and Discipline) Rules, 2011 are triggered inconsistently, partly due to incomplete personnel records and partly due to informal clearance networks³⁷. The informal political settlement that underpins teacher management in KP functions as both a stabilising force and a structural constraint. It sustains system equilibrium by guaranteeing teachers predictable access to preferred postings and by safeguarding livelihoods through negotiated protection networks. On the other hand, this very stability limits the scope for reform. It renders rule-bound enforcement politically costly, incentivises organised resistance when reforms challenge established entitlements, weakens the credibility of performance-linked conditions, and creates space for selective compliance with new mandates. In effect, the same informal arrangements that keep the system functioning also narrow the room for introducing more professionalised, performance-oriented reforms.

Consequently, licensing cannot rely on formal compliance alone. It must anticipate the friction where the informal influence will be threatened. The global evidence for similar reforms suggest reframing reforms around co-benefits, aligning with embedded incentives, and sequencing implementation to avoid threatening established settlements³⁸.

3.3 Teacher Induction and CPD in Practice

The Teacher Induction Programme (TIP) and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) architecture were introduced as key pillars of a broader effort to reposition teaching as a competency-based profession rather than a seniority-based service. In principle, TIP links induction training to confirmation in service, while CPD provides structured opportunities for ongoing pedagogical growth.

³⁷ Key Informant Interview. (2025)

³⁸ USAID. (2018). *Thinking and Working Politically Through Applied PEA: A Guide for Practitioners*



In practice, however, both initiatives operate within the same institutional and political constraints that shape the rest of the teacher management system, fragmented mandates, weak data interoperability, uneven district capacity, and informal norms that dilute implementation³⁹.

CPD represents one of the most robust reforms focused on teachers' professional development in KP's recent history. Its implementation however, varies sharply across geography and cadre and faces structural bottlenecks. Monthly Professional Development Days, cluster-based training, and subject specific workshops are intended to provide a continuum of learning, yet participation is uneven, content is often generic, and school-level follow-up is weak⁴⁰. The institutional fragmentation between DPD, DCTE, and district offices creates overlapping mandates, with none holding full authority over CPD planning, delivery, and verification. Teachers during the consultations repeatedly highlighted that CPD completion has no bearing on confirmation or promotion, reinforcing the perception that professional development is optional rather than integral to career progression.

A core constraint is the absence of an integrated digital record. CPD participation, classroom observation scores, and probation records are stored across parallel systems, DPD's LMS, HRMIS, and district office files. The data disconnect makes it impossible to track professional growth across the service lifecycle of teachers⁴¹. Crucially, this disconnect means that TIP and CPD achievements cannot be reliably used in promotions, postings, or licensing, even when policy intent exists.

Informal practices further reinforce this weak institutionalisation. In several districts, teachers nominate themselves or are nominated through personal connections for CPD workshops, shaping access through relationships rather than merit or need. In remote districts such as Mohmand, Orakzai, and South Waziristan, female teachers have gone over a year without attending in-person CPD, with mobility and safety concerns prompting DEOs to adjust expectations informally to keep schools functional. The review of practice informs that these adaptive practices stabilise the system but erode standardization⁴².

Together, these dynamics reflect a professional development system that is firmly anchored in reform intent and institutional importance, while continuing to strengthen its operational consistency. TIP and CPD send a strong signal of professionalisation, nonetheless, without clear institutional ownership and linkage to career incentives, teachers perceive professional development as detached from their core service trajectory. This persistent gap between what an intervention or reform intends to achieve and how they materialise in practice echoes patterns observed in cases of teacher centered reform uptake in Nepal, Sudan, and East Africa. The misaligned incentives, fragmented mandates, and weak organisational anchoring have repeatedly slowed the translation of reform intent into system-level behavioural change⁴³. These gaps also reflect a deeper challenge, the absence of a credible incentive

³⁹ Elementary and Secondary Education Department.(2020). *KP Education Sector Plan (2020–2025)*. Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

⁴⁰ I-SAPS. (2023). "KP: Continuous Professional Development (CPD)", *Decade of Learning Success Story No. 3*. Islamabad: Institute of Social and Policy Sciences.

⁴¹ Institute of Social and Policy Sciences. (2023). *Bridging the gap: Enhancing coordination and communication in KP's education landscape*. I-SAPS.

⁴² Hudson, D., Marquette, H., & Waldock, S. (2018). *Everyday Political Analysis*. TWP Community of Practice

⁴³ Please see, UNICEF South Africa. (2017). *Political Economy Analysis of the Education Sector*; and Nelson, A., Cyril, S., & Torres, E. (2020). *Integrating political economy analysis into development programming: A synthesis of lessons from RTI projects*. RTI Press



structure that rewards professional growth.

3.4 Incentives, Progression, and the Institutional Bargain

The current incentive structure in KP's teacher management system rewards tenure rather than performance, creating a career pathway where progression is largely automatic and time-bound. Teachers advance through routine time-scale promotions embedded in the service framework, a model that provides predictability but systematically disassociate individual effort from professional mobility. The evidence from the field revealed a majority consensus that advancement is perceived as an inevitability rather than an achievement. The recurring sentiment “once you're in, you're in” reflects the durability of this expectation across cadres and districts⁴⁴.

This arrangement constitutes a long-standing institutional bargain between the state and the teaching workforce. Predictable seniority based progression has historically functioned as a low-cost, politically safe mechanism to maintain workforce stability, minimise contestation, and avoid the high transaction costs associated with differentiated systems. In a context where teachers represent one of the most organised public-sector constituencies, reforms that threaten this equilibrium, such as performance linked promotions or differentiated career tracks, are viewed by both unions and administrators as politically risky. Attempts to inject merit into this system have historically been short-lived and politically costly. The 2003 promotion reform, which required teachers to pass Public Service Commission (PSC) examinations and interviews to move up the grade structure, was designed to reward high performers and create a more competitive promotion pipeline. In practice, however, the limited number of PSC slots left large cohorts stranded in the same grade for years, generating widespread frustration among mid-career teachers who perceived the system as exclusionary and misaligned with classroom realities. Under sustained union pressure, the government reversed course in 2012, introducing a new promotion policy that restored sizeable seniority-based quotas. This shift resulted in the rapid upgradation of roughly 150,000 teachers over subsequent years, addressing long-standing stagnation but further weakening any link between promotion and demonstrated performance⁴⁵.

More recent experience reinforces how fragile incentive reforms can be when they collide with fiscal constraints and organised resistance. In January 2023, the provincial cabinet approved a long-awaited pay scale upgradation for primary teachers, to take effect from July 2023, a decision negotiated over years of union lobbying and framed by teacher leadership as a critical test of government credibility. When the finance authorities later withheld implementation, citing unsustainable recurrent costs, unions framed the backtracking as a breach of trust and mobilised province-wide protests and school closures through late 2023 and 2024⁴⁶. The episode underlined a recurring pattern: incentive promises are often used to stabilise the political settlement around teacher management, but inconsistent follow-through

⁴⁴ Focus Group Discussion with Teachers

⁴⁵ Nafees BiBi et al., “School Teachers’ Promotion Policy in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan: Observations of School Heads, Union Leaders and School Teachers,” *Ilkogretim Online – Elementary Education Online* 19, no. 3 (2020): 3420–3426

⁴⁶ The Express Tribune, “Education lockdown imminent in K-P: Teachers threaten to close govt schools province-wide,” *The Express Tribune*, October 8, 2024, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2501397/education-lockdown-imminent-in-k-p>



erodes confidence in any new reform that claims to offer future rewards.

In practice, no formal incentive exists for participation in TIP or CPD. Training achievements are neither linked to promotion nor recognised through allowances or role differentiation. As a result, the motivational pull of professional development remains weak, and teachers largely attend training to fulfil administrative requirements rather than to advance their careers⁴⁷. The interviews with teachers and E&SED officials confirm that TIP and CPD operate “outside the career ladder”, diminishing their perceived relevance⁴⁸.

The evidence suggests that the most powerful incentives in the system have been those linked to job security and long-term financial protection. Legislative victories such as the Employees Regularisation Acts of 2009 and 2022, which converted large numbers of contract teachers into permanent civil servants, consolidated expectations that initial insecurity would eventually be regularised through collective action. Similarly, the introduction of a contributory pension scheme for new hires in 2022 triggered sustained agitation; teacher unions joined wider government employee alliances to demand restoration of the traditional pension regime, positioning retirement security as a non-negotiable component of the employment bargain⁴⁹. In this settlement, seniority, regularisation, and pensions function as the core “currency” of incentives, whereas professional development achievements or classroom performance remain largely peripheral.

For licensing and certification, this incentive history presents a structural dilemma. A licensing regime that is introduced as an additional conditionality without credible, visible gains in progression, postings, allowances, or professional status, is likely to be interpreted through the same lens as earlier performance-linked reforms: a potential threat to tenure, rather than an opportunity for advancement. Given the pattern of reversals around KP PSC based promotions, the contested 2023 upgradation, and the centrality of regularisation and pension protections, any viable licensing model will need to align with, rather than abruptly disrupt, the existing political settlement. Practically, this implies tying licensing to tangible benefits, such as eligibility for accelerated promotion tracks, leadership roles, or access to desirable postings, while ensuring that design and rollout have the ownership of the unions and teacher representatives. However, even the most well-calibrated incentive reforms risk uneven uptake if they do not account for the stark structural inequities across gender, geography, and cadre history.

3.5 Gender, Geography and Equity Gaps

Gender, geography, and cadre histories shape the lived experience of teachers in KP in ways that directly influence how rules are interpreted and what incentives actually matter. These disparities are not marginal. These constitute the underlying distributional terrain within which licensing and certification

⁴⁷ I-SAPS, *KP Induction Programme Review* (Islamabad: Institute of Social and Policy Sciences, 2023)

⁴⁸ Key Informant Interview (2025)

⁴⁹ The Express Tribune, “Pay, pension row sparks K-P strike threat,” *The Express Tribune*, September 29, 2025, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2569483/pay-pension-row-sparks-k-p-strike-threat>



reforms will operate.

Gender remains a defining axis of inequality across the teacher workforce. Although provincial participation has improved to a 64:36 male–female ratio since 2010, women remain concentrated at the lower tiers of the system. Female teachers account for 37% of the primary cadre and 42% of the middle-school cadre, while their representation at secondary and higher secondary levels stabilises at around one-third of the workforce, it remains below their overall share in the system. This tapering reflects limited career progression opportunities, mobility constraints, and the high transaction costs women face when posted to remote or insecure areas. In the newly merged districts, structural barriers are even more acute. The female representation hovers around 24%, and falls below 10% in districts such as North Waziristan, South Waziristan, Orakzai, and Upper Kohistan. These disparities affect both access to training and exposure to supervisory support. Field evidence confirms that female teachers in rural districts often operate in professional isolation, unable to travel to central CPD venues and reliant on ad hoc accommodations negotiated by district officials⁵⁰.

Geography reinforces and amplifies these inequalities. With 70–75% of KP’s schools located in rural areas, the majority of the teaching workforce is deployed outside district headquarters. Rural boys’ and mixed schools depend predominantly on male teachers, while female teachers, due to mobility and safety constraints, are largely concentrated in urban and peri-urban girls’ institutions. Recent merit-based recruitment through NTS and the Teachers Regularisation Act (2022) has expanded female postings in rural girls’ schools, but uptake remains uneven and difficult to sustain where travel is unsafe or infrastructure is weak.

The rural - urban asymmetry also shapes transfer politics, absenteeism patterns, and the power bases of unions. Teachers in urban districts, particularly Peshawar (11%), Swat (9%), Mardan (8%), and Abbottabad (7%), benefit from higher concentrations of qualified staff, denser supervisory structures, and greater access to training and professional networks. By contrast, teachers in peripheral and NMDs operate in thin administrative environments, with weaker oversight, slower processing of promotions, and limited recourse to union mobilisation. In these settings, formal rules often give way to negotiated practices. Cadre histories compound these geographic and gendered divides. Teachers regularised through the 2018 and 2022 Acts often lack complete service books, accurate seniority records, or verifiable training histories, limiting their eligibility for progression or CPD⁵¹. These administrative gaps fuel mistrust of reforms that introduce new conditions, particularly licensing, before existing inconsistencies are resolved.

Taken together, these intersecting inequities form a structural constraint on licensing and certification. A contextually aligned and politically viable licensing framework must therefore incorporate equity corridors, such as decentralised assessment options, transitional provisions for teachers with incomplete records, and tailored pathways for women and NMD-based teachers, to ensure that the reform enhances, rather than restricts, access to professional recognition.

⁵⁰ E&SED. (2024). *Annual School Census 2022-23*. Elementary and Secondary Education Department, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

⁵¹ Key Informant Interview. (2025)



3.6 Conclusions and Implications

Teacher management in KP operates through a layered interaction of rules, norms, and incentives, where formal procedures exist but do not singularly determine practice. The analysis shows that rules provide structure, while norms provide traction. Formal recruitment, promotion, and disciplinary provisions coexist with negotiated transfers, selective enforcement, and protection networks that stabilise the system but constrain reform. Professional development initiatives (TIP and CPD) signal a shift toward professionalisation, yet lack of institutional anchoring and weak incentive alignment limit their behavioural impact. Seniority-driven progression and predictable regularisation form the core of the institutional bargain, shaping how teachers interpret new conditions in particular those perceived as performance linked or compliance-heavy.

Gender, geography, and cadre histories further segment the workforce, producing differentiated access to mobility, training, and progression, and reinforcing unequal exposure to rules and incentives. Taken together, these dynamics underscore a fundamental implication for licensing and certification. It needs to align with existing incentives, anticipate informal interpretations, and accommodate structural inequities.



STAKEHOLDERS & POWER DYNAMICS

Context

Teacher licensing in KP will evolve in a governance landscape where organisational authority, political brokerage, and workforce expectations intersect in patterned, historically conditioned ways. The preceding analysis has already shown that formal rules do not operate in isolation; they acquire meaning through the actors who interpret them, the alliances that sustain them, and the incentives that shape compliance and resistance. In such environments, institutional reforms gain traction not because they are technically sound, but because they resonate with the distribution of power, the logics of administrative practice, and the expectations that teachers and officials have built over decades of negotiated interaction. International evidence underscores this logic. Attempts to introduce teacher certification in Indonesia, Nepal, Peru, and parts of sub-Saharan Africa demonstrate that reforms touching conditions of service succeed only when they are anchored in coalitions that possess both administrative leverage and political legitimacy. Where reforms privileged compliance over recognition, threatened job security, or bypassed district-level intermediaries, they were resisted, diluted, or quietly abandoned. Conversely, certification models that aligned with the professional aspirations of teachers, accommodated union concerns, and sequenced change to avoid destabilising existing bargains managed to embed themselves more durably⁵².

Teacher licensing in KP will inevitably be shaped by the actors, interests, and incentives. The reform is likely to be read by some of them as an opportunity for professional recognition, while by others as an intrusion into established entitlements. Its trajectory will depend on which actors perceive material or symbolic gains, which anticipate losses, and which possess the practical authority to enable, reinterpret, or obstruct implementation. Significantly, teachers themselves will interpret licensing through the long standing norms that structure the established practice. Thus, the reform credibility will hinge not only on design, but on how convincingly it is aligned with these deeply embedded expectations. This section therefore maps the stakeholder configuration surrounding teacher management in KP, identifying reform champions, potential veto players, pivotal mid-level actors, and those at risk of exclusion, in order to assess how licensing and certification can be introduced in ways that are politically viable, administratively workable, and responsive to the distributional realities that define the functioning of the education system.

⁵² Please see; TWP Community of Practice (TWP CoP). (2020). *Thinking and Working Politically: A Long Story of Change*; UNICEF. (2017). *Political Economy Analysis of Education Reform in South Africa and Sudan*; and World Bank. (2015). *Teacher Reform in Indonesia: The Role of Political Economy in Policy Uptake*



4.1 Locating Authority

Authority over teacher management in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is formally concentrated in E&SED, yet functionally dispersed across multiple tiers, political intermediaries, and informal influence structures. Comparative evidence confirms that in decentralised, politically embedded systems, formal mandates rarely determine outcomes on their own.⁵³ Instead, day-to-day authority is exercised through “negotiated implementation domains” where actors interpret, mediate, or selectively enforce rules based on institutional incentives and political relationships⁵⁴.

In KP, E&SED retains the statutory mandate for policy formulation, recruitment frameworks, promotion rules, and approval of reforms such as licensing. However, its authority is structurally “thin” at the point of implementation. The Directorate of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) carries administrative control over service books, postings, transfers, and confirmations, functions that teachers themselves view as the real levers of power. Evidence from the field informs that DESE’s routine decisions shape teacher behaviour far more than policy pronouncements from the Secretariat⁵⁵. Below the directorate level, District Education Officers (DEOs) exercise extensive de facto authority, often becoming the system’s operational centre of gravity. DEOs interpret APT Rules, negotiate transfers in response to political, union, and administrative pressures, and determine whether directives from E&SED or DPD are acted upon, delayed, or quietly diluted. This pattern aligns with international evidence showing that middle tier rather than central ministries, often shape reform outcomes through informal gatekeeping⁵⁶.

DPD and DCTE possess normative authority over professional standards, TIP, CPD, and training content. Yet both remain structurally underpowered. Both the directorates, control pedagogy but not deployment or career progression, leaving them unable to connect training participation with credible incentives. This institutional asymmetry is consistent with experiences from Indonesia and Peru, where reforms struggled when professional development agencies lacked leverage over career structures⁵⁷.

Outside the formal bureaucracy, teacher unions constitute the most entrenched locus of influence. Their organisational density, electoral relevance, and historical victories, particularly around regularisation and scale upgrades, grant them agenda-setting power that can rival formal departments. Unions routinely shape transfer outcomes, protect members from disciplinary action, and mobilise district-wide resistance when reforms are perceived as threatening tenure or seniority. This reflects patterns identified in South Africa, Nepal, and Bangladesh, where strong teacher unions act as political veto players in

⁵³ Carmen Belafi. (2019). *The Role of Political Will in Aligning Education Systems for Learning* (RISE Insight Series 2019/020, Research on Improving Systems of Education). & Crouch, L., & De Hoyos, R. (2020). *Politics and the transformation of education systems: Lessons from Peru 2007–2020*. RISE Programme.

⁵⁴ TWP Community of Practice. (2020). *Thinking and Working Politically: Lessons on navigating informal institutions*

⁵⁵ Key Informant Interviews (2025)

⁵⁶ USAID. (2018). *Thinking and Working Politically through Applied Political Economy Analysis: A Guide for Practitioners*

⁵⁷ Crouch, L., & De Hoyos, R. (2020). *Politics and the transformation of education systems: Lessons from Peru 2007–2020*. RISE Programme



service-condition reforms⁵⁸.

Finally, provincial and district-level political actors, MNAs, MPAs, local notables, tribal elders, and constituency brokers, exercise episodic but potent influence. Their involvement, most visible during transfer seasons, reinforces a political settlement in which teacher deployment is treated as a distributive good and a source of constituency service.

In this configuration, DPD and DCTE emerge as potential reform champions with technical credibility but weak leverage; DESE and DEOs function as swing actors, controlling the everyday machinery of postings and enforcement; while unions and political intermediaries represent veto players, capable of mobilising resistance unless meaningfully engaged. These dynamics reveal that licensing reform will not unfold within a single hierarchy, but across a multilayered governance landscape in which authority is distributed, negotiated, and frequently informal. Any reform design must therefore recognise that implementation power sits less in formal policy instruments and more in the incentives and discretion exercised by DEOs, district administrators, and unions.

4.2 Teacher Unions: Organised Power and Political Leverage

Teacher unions in KP are not merely representative bodies, they are political institutions embedded in the province's governance architecture, operating as influential intermediaries between the state and one of its largest workforces. Their influence extends across recruitment narratives, transfer negotiations, election campaigning, and public-sector mobilisation. Comparative political economy literature repeatedly demonstrates that teacher unions in low and middle-income countries are among the most consequential veto players in education reform, especially when reforms could alter career incentives or threaten tenure security⁵⁹. KP mirrors this pattern closely.

Historically, KP's major unions, including the All Primary Teachers Association (APTA), Senior Staff Association (SSA), and subject-specific organisations, have grown their bargaining power through repeated cycles of mobilization. Over three decades, KP's unions have repeatedly translated disruptive capacity, school closures, province-wide strikes, alliance-building with broader employee fronts, into legislative gains on regularisation and protections on pensions and postings. Reforms perceived as threatening this core settlement, such as contributory pensions, large-scale outsourcing, or the failed 2023 upgradation, have either been delayed, partially reversed, or converted into ongoing political liabilities for governments.

These struggles have created a durable expectation that collective action yields policy concessions. This accumulated power conditions how unions interpret licensing. FGDs and KIIs show that union leaders perceive licensing, especially if linked to progression or confirmation, as a direct intrusion into the institutional bargain they fought to secure. A significant proportion of teachers still recall the stalled KPPSC promotion reforms of 2003–2012 and the unmet promises of the 2023 upgradation. Each

⁵⁸ UNICEF. (2017). *Political economy analysis of education reform in South Africa*.

⁵⁹ Novelli, M., Higgins, S., Ugur, M., & Valiente, O. (2014). The political economy of education systems in conflict-affected contexts: A rigorous literature review. Department for International Development (DFID).



reversal reinforced the suspicion that performance linked reforms diminish, rather than enhance, job security⁶⁰.

KP's teacher bodies are not merely occupational unions; they function as politically embedded actors whose influence is magnified by party linkages and their status as a numerically significant vote bank. Party aligned wings such as Malgari Ustazaan and Tanzeem-e-Asatza have historically mediated between government and the teaching workforce, securing selective concessions (e.g., rural hardship allowances) when allied parties are in power and spearheading protest when those alliances fray. Their leadership networks, especially in districts like Peshawar, Mardan, Swat, and Bannu, interface daily with MPAs and local powerbrokers. This enables them to frame reforms in political rather than technical terms. For example, during the 2024 and 2025 provincewide mobilisation, union leaders publicly framed upgradation delays as “state betrayal”, mobilising over 100,000 teachers and shutting down 26,000 schools across KP. Such mobilisation capacity creates a credible threat to any reform perceived as eroding entitlements.

Union influence is not monolithic, however. Field evidence shows a geographical and generational split:

- i. Urban district unions wield disproportionate influence because teachers in these districts have stronger networks, closer access to political actors, and denser mobilisation potential.
- ii. Merged districts' unions/union representatives are weaker, fragmented, and less politically connected; they often express frustration that major unions/teacher groups focus on settled districts.
- iii. Younger, merit based recruits often express ambivalence toward union resistance. As one newly inducted teacher in Swabi noted: “If licensing helps us get a fair chance at promotion, why should we oppose it?”
- iv. Female teachers, especially in remote districts, report minimal union representation and at times feel excluded from decision-making spaces.

This heterogeneity is important as it suggests potential entry points for coalition-building if licensing is framed as professional recognition rather than compliance.

International experience reinforces this strategic reading. In Indonesia, certification reforms only gained traction when unions were offered a central role in shaping professional standards, rather than being sidelined⁶¹. Similarly, reforms in Peru succeeded when the state reframed certification as a source of teacher prestige and created material incentives that unions could defend⁶². Conversely, in South Africa and Sudan, unions mobilised aggressively when reforms signalled surveillance or punitive filtering⁶³.

Licensing in KP will therefore be interpreted primarily through a political rather than a technical lens. If the reform is perceived as a gatekeeping mechanism—one that restricts progression, introduces new compliance burdens, or reopens anxieties around job security—it is likely to trigger organised union

⁶⁰ Focus Group Discussions (2025)

⁶¹ World Bank. (2015). *Teacher reform in Indonesia: The political economy of certification and performance*.

⁶² Crouch, L., & De Hoyos, R. (2020). *Politics and the transformation of education systems: Lessons from Peru 2007–2020*. RISE Programme

⁶³ UNICEF. (2017). *Political economy analysis of education reform in South Africa*.



resistance. Conversely, if licensing is framed as a pathway for professional recognition, explicitly aligned with existing CPD structures, linked to predictable and accelerated career progression, and developed through meaningful consultation with representative bodies, it has the potential to attract conditional support. In this context, unions function simultaneously as potential spoilers and potential stabilisers: their opposition can stall implementation, but their endorsement can provide legitimacy and reduce political risk. The sustainability of the reform will therefore hinge on early and structured engagement, transparent incentive design, and a clear demonstration that licensing reinforces.

4.3 Reform Champions within the System

Amid the dominant narrative of teacher politics, KP's landscape also contains actors who could serve as credible champions of licensing, provided the reform is sequenced, framed, and institutionally located in ways that reinforce rather than destabilise their authority. Evidence from field indicates that a small but steadily expanding cohort of younger, merit-recruited teachers, along with mid-level officers in DPD and DCTE, view structured professional standards as an overdue shift away from personalised discretion and toward predictable, transparent pathways⁶⁴. For many of these new entrants, who have experienced competitive recruitment, induction, and classroom-based assessment, licensing represents the possibility of advancing on the basis of demonstrated competence rather than political brokerage. As one newly inducted teacher noted, "If licensing links to fairer progression, why would we oppose it?" a sentiment echoed in multiple FGDs. While many newer teachers, especially in urban areas, express openness to licensing, others, particularly in merged districts, remained cautious, shaped by local norms, limited exposure to CPD, and weaker professional networks.

Within the education bureaucracy, DPD and DCTE occupy an increasingly central position in the emerging coalition. Their mandates span induction training, CPD reform, teacher standards, curriculum alignment, etc., making them the logical institutional home for any licensing regime⁶⁵. Officers within these directorates repeatedly emphasised that licensing can only succeed if embedded within an upgraded CPD ecosystem, with clear workflow division, dedicated assessment units, and resourcing for district-level implementation⁶⁶. Crucially, these actors also understand the political limits of reform therefore, their support is contingent on ensuring that licensing is presented as a mechanism for enhancing professional identity rather than disciplining the workforce.

Reform-minded officers within E&SED also recognise the opportunity to reposition the department from a reactive administrative body to a standards-driven governance institution. This mirrors international cases where mid-level bureaucrats became pivotal reform anchors. Indonesia's district supervisors and Peru's UGEL officials being such examples, provided reforms strengthened their discretionary authority, improved their professional standing, and supplied them with operational tools for implementation⁶⁷. However, these reform champions operate within what the TWP literature terms "intermediate settlement spaces," where influence exists but autonomy is conditional and easily

⁶⁴ Key Informant Interviews (2025)

⁶⁵ I-SAPS. (2023). *KP Induction Programme Review*, Islamabad: Institute of Social and Policy Sciences.

⁶⁶ Key Informant Interviews (2025)

⁶⁷ World Bank. (2015). *Teacher certification and quality reforms: Lessons from Indonesia*.



overshadowed by unions and education managers⁶⁸. Their ability to mobilise around licensing will therefore depend on how the reform redistributes authority. Whether it equips them with the resources, legitimacy, and institutional clarity to administer standards, or whether it creates new burdens that leave them exposed to resistance without any gains.

If strategically cultivated, these mid-level education officials, managers, and younger teachers constitute the foundation of a feasible reform coalition. They are not powerful enough to drive system wide change alone, but they are essential brokers who can translate standards into practice, mediate district-level compliance, and buffer political shocks during early implementation. International experience repeatedly demonstrates that reforms anchored in such mid-level coalitions, rather than solely in top-down directives, are more likely to survive electoral cycles and bureaucratic turnover⁶⁹. In case of KP, the challenge is to convert this latent constituency into an active alliance by aligning licensing with their incentives, which may include, professional recognition, fairer progression, etc. and by ensuring that they remain central to both design and rollout.

4.4 Diverging Impacts Across Teacher Cohorts

Licensing and certification will not affect all teachers uniformly; its perceived benefits and risks will diverge sharply across cohorts whose service histories, expectations, and institutional positions differ markedly. The evidence from similar contexts shows that reforms which alter the terms of the employment bargain, particularly those touching progression, confirmation, or status, generate diverse reactions depending on whether actors expect gains or anticipate losses⁷⁰.

For newly recruited teachers, especially those inducted through competitive NTS/ETEA examinations after 2013, licensing is widely interpreted as a potential leveller. Many of these teachers entered service with higher academic qualifications, completed structured induction under TIP, and often view themselves as professionally distinct from pre-2013 cohorts. FGDs indicate that a substantial proportion believe that licensing, if aligned with CPD and linked to fairer pathways for career advancement, could rebalance an incentive system long dominated by seniority rather than competence. Their support is therefore conditional, but real: licensing is attractive in so far as it expands merit-based progression and reduces reliance on “connections”⁷¹.

Regularised teachers, by contrast, interpret licensing through a fundamentally different lens. Their service legitimacy is rooted in years, sometimes more than a decade, of ad hoc employment, political mobilisation, and eventual absorption through the 2018 and 2022 Regularisation Acts. For this cohort, the employment relationship with the state is not defined by pre-service qualifications or formal

⁶⁸ Levy, B. (2018). *Working with the grain: Integrating political economy into education sector reform*. RISE Programme

⁶⁹ TWP Community of Practice. (2020). *Thinking and Working Politically in fragile education systems*

⁷⁰ Carmen Belafi. (2019). *The Role of Political Will in Aligning Education Systems for Learning* (RISE Insight Series 2019/020, Research on Improving Systems of Education). & Brian Levy, *How Political Contexts Influence Education Systems: Patterns, Constraints, Entry Points* (RISE Working Paper Series 22/122, Research on Improving Systems of Education, 2022)

⁷¹ Focus Group Discussion. (2025)



professional standards but by demonstrated endurance and negotiated recognition. Introducing a new credentialing requirement is therefore perceived as retrospective judgement, or worse, a selective filter that undermines the status they fought to obtain. Key Informant interviews with teachers, repeatedly surfaced the sentiment that “after 10 or 12 years of service, no one should have to prove they are a teacher again”, underscoring deep sensitivity rooted in past policy reversals, including the failed 2003-2012 KPPSC promotion reform and the stalled 2023 upgradation, both of which eroded trust in performance-linked reforms.

Geography further mediates these divergent perceptions. Teachers in settled districts, Peshawar, Mardan, Swat, Abbottabad, generally benefit from denser CPD networks, better supervision, and easier access to assessment or renewal procedures. Their concerns are more political than logistical. In merged districts, however, licensing raises acute feasibility anxieties. Teachers cite weak connectivity, limited access to training venues, incomplete service records, and the absence of functional CPD infrastructure. For many, licensing is not a question of willingness but of visibility. Without district-level modalities, such teachers fear disproportionate penalisation. (*For more details see Section 3 above.*) Gender intersects with both geography and cadre history. Female teachers, especially in rural and merged districts, face significant mobility constraints and frequently operate in professional isolation. Licensing that requires recurrent attendance at district-level centres or digital platforms risks further entrenching these disparities unless designed with decentralised or school-embedded options.

Comparative experience reinforces the importance of attending to these cohort-specific dynamics. Indonesia’s teacher certification reform gained traction only when the state sequenced rollout, prioritised recognition for in-service teachers, and provided differentiated pathways for older cohorts⁷². Whereas, Peru adopted a staggered model that allowed veteran teachers to opt into professional categories without punitive consequences, reducing resistance and widening legitimacy⁷³. By contrast, Bangladesh’s early certification attempts collapsed partly because uniform requirements were imposed on heterogeneous teacher cohorts, triggering union mobilisation and political fallout⁷⁴. Sudan shows similar patterns: reforms perceived as retroactive performance filters quickly became political flashpoints⁷⁵.

In KP, licensing will therefore be interpreted not as a single reform but as a distributional shift: one that reallocates opportunities and obligations across teacher cohorts. Its political viability will depend on whether these divergent impacts are anticipated and managed. A reform that recognises and protects the trajectories of regularised teachers, offers credible mobility opportunities for merit recruits, and adapts modalities for geographically and gender-disadvantaged groups stands a significantly greater chance of securing cross-cohort acceptance. Conversely, a uniform licensing requirement that disregards these distributional realities risks activating the strongest veto players while alienating the

⁷² World Bank. (2015). *Teacher certification and professional standards: Insights from Indonesia*

⁷³ Crouch, L., & De Hoyos, R. (2020). *Education reforms, political settlements, and system performance: Lessons from Peru*.

⁷⁴ UNICEF. (2017). *Political Economy Analysis of Education Reform: South Africa and Bangladesh*.

⁷⁵ Beverley Jones and Daniel Oosthuizen, with Abdelgalil Elmekki and Esraa Ahmed, *Political Economy Analysis in Sudan: Handy Tools for Everyone?* (Birmingham: Thinking and Working Politically Community of Practice, University of Birmingham, 2024).



very constituencies most inclined to support professionalisation.

4.5 Coalitions, Alliances, and the Construction of Political Space

Licensing reform in KP necessitate a coalition strategy capable of aligning actors whose interests, authority, and incentives diverge significantly. Comparative evidence underscores that reforms altering career incentives, such as certification, appraisal systems, or progression restructuring, succeed only when reformers cultivate cross-actor coalitions that distribute gains credibly and minimise concentrated losses⁷⁶. KP's institutional terrain is characterised by dispersed authority, entrenched informal norms, heterogeneous teacher cohorts, and powerful union actors. Against this backdrop, building political space for licensing involves identifying existing alignments, recognising sources of resistance, and constructing new alliances that can sustain reform through early uncertainty and future electoral cycles.

The emerging coalition most favourable to licensing is composed of actors whose mandates, professional identity, or recent service trajectories position them to benefit from clearer standards. DPD and DCTE occupy the core of this alignment. Their institutional mandates, spanning induction, CPD, standards, supervision, curriculum, and assessment, give them both a normative interest in structured professional pathways and a bureaucratic claim to steward licensing. Reinforcing this centre are newer merit-recruited teachers, particularly those inducted post-2013 through competitive testing and structured induction. Many such teachers view licensing as an opportunity to differentiate themselves from older cohorts and to access progression mechanisms less dependent on personal networks (FGDs, Peshawar, Swabi, Abbottabad). A subset of mid-level officers in E&SED and DESE also recognise the potential to reposition the department from rule-processing to standards-driven governance, provided licensing strengthens rather than complicates their discretionary authority.

Parallel to this pro-reform cluster is a functional, though often informal, alignment between DEOs, senior teacher cadres, and union leadership. This coalition does not systematically oppose reforms but tends to resist any initiative perceived as eroding negotiated authority or introducing compliance burdens without compensating benefits. DEOs in particular emphasise that reforms adding verification, monitoring, or enforcement responsibilities without resourcing or procedural clarity generate institutional friction⁷⁷. For unions, the calculus remains political: alignment is conditional on whether the reform reinforces or destabilises the long-standing settlement around job security, predictable increments, and negotiated discretion. The mobilisation observed during 2024-2025 upgradation delays demonstrated the continued strength of this coalition's capacity to produce political costs for governments.

Licensing provides reformers with an opportunity to reshape coalition incentives by reframing the reform not as a compliance mechanism but as a professionalisation pathway. International experience demonstrates that certification reforms in Indonesia gained traction when framed around teacher

⁷⁶ Crouch, L., & De Hoyos, R. (2020). *Education reforms, political settlements, and system performance: Lessons from Peru*. & Brian Levy, *How Political Contexts Influence Education Systems: Patterns, Constraints, Entry Points* (RISE Working Paper Series 22/122, Research on Improving Systems of Education, 2022).

⁷⁷ Key Informant Interview.



prestige and linked to meaningful recognition, turning unions from opponents into defenders once certification became a political resource that strengthened, rather than weakened, their bargaining position⁷⁸. In KP, similar strategic opportunities exist. A phased model that allows regularised teachers to enter licensing through recognition-of-prior-learning modalities, while offering accelerated pathways for younger cohorts, creates distribution-sensitive incentives that broaden reform acceptability. Embedding licensing within an upgraded CPD architecture, anchored in DPD/DCTE, also strengthens the legitimacy of reform champions and reassures teachers that the licensing process is pedagogically grounded rather than punitive.

Coalition-building in KP requires more than ad hoc consultation; it demands structured engagement that reduces uncertainty and generates predictable commitments across the system. Three elements are central. First, institutional anchoring, situating licensing within DPD and DCTE, with clear workflow division, (RPDCs), district-level mechanisms, and stable assessment structures. Second, distributional credibility: licensing must articulate clear value propositions for each cohort, prestige and progression for newer teachers; recognition and protection for regularised teachers; and minimal compliance burdens for teachers in remote districts. Third, political stabilisation: unions must be engaged early not merely as consultees but as co-authors of standards, reinforcing their political ownership and reducing mobilisation risks. Evidence from KIIs suggests that unions' hostility decreases substantially when reforms reinforce predictability and professional dignity rather than introducing unilateral filters.

If sequenced effectively, licensing can cultivate a multi-layered coalition comprising mid-level reform bureaucrats, newer teachers seeking professional identity, union elements seeking recognition, and political actors interested in demonstrating system improvement without triggering conflict. Ultimately, the political viability of licensing in KP hinges not on the technical correctness of the model, but on the strategic assembly of actors who perceive the reform as advancing their interests. Constructing this political space is therefore not ancillary but central to reform success.

4.6 Excluded and Marginal Actors

Any licensing regime that aspires to legitimacy must take seriously the actors who routinely fall outside the dominant structures of representation, visibility, and administrative reach in KP's education system. In KP, the dynamics identified in earlier sections, geography, gender, cadre history, and institutional inequality, create distinct vulnerabilities that will shape how these groups experience licensing.

The integration of the erstwhile FATA (merged districts) into KP has not been accompanied by equivalent expansion in CPD infrastructure, assessment capacity, or administrative visibility. Key informant interviews with teachers and education managers from South Waziristan, Bajaur, Kurram, and Mohmand highlight persistent gaps. These include, incomplete or inconsistent service records, weak connectivity, limited access to training venues, and episodic supervisory presence. Teachers in these districts frequently noted that policies requiring repeated "verification," "renewal," or "attendance at district headquarters" inadvertently penalise those serving in high-risk, mobility-constrained environments. For many such teachers, the core concern is not resistance to standards but the fear of

⁷⁸ Chang, M., et al. (2014). *Teacher Reform in Indonesia: The Role of Political Incentives*. World Bank



becoming administratively invisible. Without alternative modalities, school bases observations, cluster-based verification, or mobile assessment teams, the licensing risks exacerbating the existing inequities.

Female teachers, particularly in rural and merged districts, face mobility constraints, limited access to district offices, and weaker representation within union structures. Evidence from FGDs suggests that certification processes requiring travel, repeated attendance, or digital submissions could disproportionately burden female teachers unless supported by decentralised and flexible arrangements. Comparative cases reinforce this risk. Peru's early certification model had to be redesigned after female teachers, particularly in rural provinces, faced disproportionate procedural barriers⁷⁹.

The inclusion of marginal actors is not simply an equity imperative; it is a structural requirement for system stability. Political economy analysis across multiple countries shows that reforms perceived as urban-centric, male-centric, or biased toward well-connected districts erode legitimacy from the bottom up, producing soft resistance through delays, workarounds, or non-reporting⁸⁰. In KP, where merged districts, female teachers, and contract cadres already experience administrative invisibility, licensing must avoid creating a two-tier system in which reform is effectively operational only for those in well-resourced districts.

4.7. What the Actor Landscape Means for Reform Trajectories

The stakeholder configuration in KP's teacher management system reveals a reform arena shaped not by formal hierarchies alone, but by negotiated authority, historical bargains, and asymmetric influence. Licensing will enter a landscape where DEOs and district managers exercise frontline discretion; DPD and DCTE hold normative authority without equivalent enforcement power; unions possess the strongest mobilisation capacity; and younger, merit-based teachers and mid-level bureaucrats represent a nascent but politically constrained constituency for professional standards. As the analysis in foregoing sections illustrate, these actors do not occupy symmetrical positions. Their interests diverge, their incentives differ, and their power to shape or stall the design or implementation varies across geography, cadre history, and institutional location.

The primary takeaway emerging from KP's actor map is that the reforms which alter career incentives succeed only when coalitions are deliberately built around them, and when the distributional impacts on different cohorts are anticipated and managed. Licensing that is framed as another tier of accountability will activate the system's strongest veto players; licensing that strengthens the professional identity of teachers, protects the employment bargain of regularised cohorts, and offers credible mobility for newer entrants has a plausible pathway to legitimacy.

The analysis also reveals the cost of exclusion. Teachers in merged districts, female teachers with mobility constraints, contract cadres navigating precarity, and administrative actors at the system's periphery face structural disadvantages that could convert licensing from an opportunity into an inequitable burden. A reform that overlooks these groups risks silent non-compliance, uneven

⁷⁹ Crouch, L., & De Hoyos, R. (2020). *Education reforms, political settlements, and system performance: Lessons from Peru*

⁸⁰ Novelli, M., Higgins, S., Ugur, M., & Valiente, O. (2014). *The political economy of education systems in conflict-affected contexts: A rigorous literature review*. Department for International Development (DFID).



implementation, and long-term erosion of legitimacy. Taken together, the power dynamics mapped underscore that the licensing needs to proceed as a politically attuned reform that aligns interests where possible, mitigates losses where necessary, and sequences change in a manner that strengthens rather than destabilises existing institutional settlements.



PATHWAYS TO CHANGE

KP: Reform Feasibility

The political economy of teacher management in KP demonstrates that licensing will succeed only if it aligns with the province's negotiated governance order. As the analysis showed, formal rules are interpreted through union influence, district-level discretion, political brokerage, and workforce expectations built over decades of seniority-based progression and periodic regularisation. This system is not dysfunctional—it is adaptive, redistributive, and anchored in a settlement that protects predictability for teachers and management authority for DEOs and DESE.

Reforms that destabilise this equilibrium, particularly those perceived as introducing new filters, threatening job security, or redistributing power away from district managers, have historically stalled or been reversed. Conversely, reforms that enhanced professional dignity (TIP), reduced uncertainty (regularisation), or worked through existing routines (CPD) found space to consolidate. International evidence reinforces this pattern: licensing gained traction in Indonesia and Peru when framed as recognition and sequenced through early coalition-building, and collapsed in Bangladesh and Sudan when framed as control.

KP's licensing pathway must therefore build legitimacy before demanding compliance, work through existing workflow structures rather than bypassing them, and offer credible benefits that resonate with teachers' lived incentives. The reform must be introduced not as a rupture, but as an evolution of what already exists.

Strategic Pathways for a Politically Feasible Licensing Reform

Reframe Licensing as Recognition, Not Regulation

Teacher licensing should be framed as a formal authorization to teach that reinforces professional legitimacy rather than as a tool for workforce discipline. To gain acceptance, communications should emphasize the validation of experience, recognition of CPD, and clear career progression, presenting licensing as a means to strengthen teachers' professional dignity and existing employment rights.

Sequence Through Low-Resistance Entry Points

A politically viable licensing reform in KP will require sequenced introduction through low-resistance entry points, demonstrating feasibility without triggering system-wide contestation. Early uptake is far more likely where professional identity is already evolving and where institutional actors have shown



openness to structured standards. In this regard, newly inducted teachers, particularly recent TIP graduates, constitute a natural constituency for piloting, as they have engaged with competency-based induction, classroom observation, and structured CPD cycles, and therefore tend to view licensing as a logical extension of existing professional expectations. Subject specialists offer a second zone of opportunity, given their relatively strong grounding in disciplinary standards and their historical distance from the more contentious politics surrounding primary cadres. A third entry point lies in selected merged districts, where union mobilisation remains comparably weaker, professional networks are thinner, and teachers often express a desire for visibility and recognition within the provincial system. Carefully designed voluntary pilots across these groups can generate early proof of concept by demonstrating that licensing enhances clarity, professional recognition, and predictable progression rather than imposing additional administrative burden. The purpose of such sequencing is not merely technical; it will produce credible examples of low-conflict adoption, reassures sceptical actors that the reform is neither punitive nor exclusionary, and creates internal demand before broader rollout.

Construct a Minimum Viable Coalition:

A politically durable licensing reform in KP will require assembling a minimum viable coalition that aligns the interests of actors who hold different forms of authority across the system. At the apex, the Elementary and Secondary Education Department (E&SED) provides the political mandate and statutory cover without which no reform can gain legitimacy. Yet the technical credibility of licensing depends on DPD, whose ownership of TIP, CPD, and teacher standards positions them as the natural custodians of a professionalised framework. Equally critical are DESE and the DEOs who, in practice, control the operational levers of teacher management. The coalition must also bring younger, merit-recruited teachers into the fold, a constituency that increasingly views structured standards as a means of levelling a system dominated by seniority and negotiated discretion. For this coalition to hold, each actor must see a tangible benefit. DPD and DCTE gain renewed relevance as the centre of professional governance; DEOs retain a clearly defined role in validation and operational oversight; E&SED consolidates its position as a standards-driven department; unions gain voice in co-design rather than confrontation; and teachers secure clearer, fairer, and more predictable pathways for progression. A reform framed in this way becomes not a redistribution of authority but a shared institutional enterprise, one that strengthens, rather than unsettles, the political settlement underpinning teacher management in KP.

Embed Licensing Within Existing Architecture:

For licensing to take root in KP, it must be designed as an extension of the existing institutional architecture rather than as a standalone system that the province lacks the capacity to sustain. The reform will only be administratively viable if it is embedded within the structures that already govern professional development, record-keeping, and district-level oversight. This requires positioning DPD's CPD ecosystem as the primary vehicle for both initial licensing preparation and periodic renewal, ensuring that professional learning and credential maintenance are understood as part of the same continuum rather than separate bureaucratic demands. Likewise, DESE's authority over service matters, personnel records, and HRMIS must anchor the verification, tracking, and renewal processes; integrating licensing workflows into HRMIS avoids duplication and reinforces the credibility of teacher records that are currently fragmented or incomplete. At the frontline, RPDCs, district CPD coordinators, mentors, and school heads must play a defined role in classroom-based assessment and portfolio validation, recognising that only actors with routine proximity to teachers can provide credible evidence of practice. To coordinate these components and prevent institutional friction, a jointly governed



Licensing Cell, co-owned by DPD and DESE, should be established with clear mandates on assessment, verification, appeals, and data management. Such integration not only mitigates the risk of turf battles but also signals that licensing is a system-level reform anchored in KP's established governance machinery, not a parallel experiment imposed from outside.

Align Incentives with Compliance

In KP's context, licensing will only gain traction if it is anchored in a credible incentive structure that makes compliance materially worthwhile for teachers across cohorts. The province's experience with stalled reforms, demonstrates that teachers respond not to abstract professional claims but to concrete improvements in their career trajectory and workplace predictability. For licensing to avoid being dismissed as yet another procedural burden, it must confer visible advantages that differentiate licensed teachers within the service framework. These may include eligibility for accelerated promotion pathways, preferential consideration during annual transfer rounds, modest recognition allowances signalling professional status, and the ability to convert CPD participation into renewal credits rather than undertaking additional requirements. For teachers in remote or merged districts, the inclusion of portfolio-based validation or school-embedded assessment mechanisms ensures that licensing is not only attainable but perceived as fair. When these incentives are transparently defined and consistently applied, licensing shifts from an administrative hurdle to a valued opportunity, aligning teacher behaviour with the reform's objectives and reinforcing the perception that professionalism yields tangible returns within the KP education system.

Sequencing of the Reform

In a politically fluid environment such as KP, the timing of licensing reform is not a technical detail but a determinant of feasibility. The province's recent history shows that reforms launched during electoral cycles, periods of fiscal tightening, or moments of heightened union mobilisation tend to stall, become politicised, or are reversed before institutional footing is secured. Licensing should therefore be introduced during periods of administrative stability and relative political calm, when the system is able to absorb change without perceiving it as an existential threat. A sequenced, phased approach is particularly suited to KP's governance rhythms: the reform should begin with small-scale pilots that allow the system to test modalities, correct design flaws, and build confidence among frontline actors. Only once operational workflows and institutional responsibilities have stabilised should the reform be codified administratively through notifications, SOPs, and integrated HRMIS processes. The timing logic aligns the reform with KP's adaptive governance culture, reduces the risk of politicisation, and increases the likelihood that licensing becomes a durable institutional feature rather than a transient policy experiment.

Integrate Equity Safeguards

In KP's context, where gendered mobility constraints, geographic isolation, and uneven administrative capacity already shape who participates in professional development and who is left out, licensing can only be credible if equity safeguards are built into the design from the outset. Female teachers in rural and peri-urban areas, particularly in the newly merged districts, often lack safe, reliable transport and operate with minimal supervisory presence; for them, any licensing model that requires repeated visits to district centres or high-bandwidth digital engagement would be exclusionary by design. Likewise, teachers in NMDs face weak connectivity, intermittent electricity, and incomplete service records due to years of ad hoc appointments, conflict disruptions, and administrative turnover. To avoid deepening



these structural disadvantages, licensing procedures must be designed around school-based or cluster-based assessments that minimise travel; offline, low-bandwidth, and mobile-friendly options that recognise connectivity constraints; bilingual (Urdu–Pashto) learning and assessment materials that reflect linguistic realities; and transitional or conditional licensing pathways for teachers whose service books, probation records, or training histories are incomplete through no fault of their own. A licensing system that demonstrably accommodates the realities of female teachers, NMD-based teachers, and administratively disadvantaged cohorts will be perceived as a professional support mechanism rather than an exclusionary filter, thereby widening its political acceptance and institutional durability.

Build Iterative Learning into the System

In KP’s landscape, licensing can only endure if it is treated as an adaptive institution rather than a fixed regulatory instrument. This requires embedding structured, iterative learning mechanisms from the outset. Six-monthly review cycles, drawing systematically on feedback from DEOs, RPDC leads, and teachers participating in pilot phases, should inform refinements to procedures, assessment modalities, and workload expectations. Regular dashboards tracking renewal rates, CPD licensing alignment, district-wise uptake, and bottlenecks in verification or record keeping would provide the evidence base for timely course correction. Such iterative loops are essential in a province where administrative capacity varies widely and political resistance can mount rapidly if reforms feel rigid or unresponsive. An adaptive licensing system that visibly listens, adjusts, and responds to frontline realities is far more likely to secure legitimacy, maintain coalition support, and survive beyond initial pilots.

Looking Ahead

Teacher licensing in KP can take root as a negotiated settlement, one that strengthens professional identity while respecting long-standing expectations of security and predictability. By reframing licensing as recognition, sequencing change through low-resistance pathways, aligning incentives with teacher aspirations, and embedding the reform within KP’s existing institutional architecture, licensing can move from a technical proposal to a politically durable reform. In a system defined by adaptive governance, success will depend not on disruption, but on design that works with the grain of how KP’s education system actually functions.



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Annexures







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