

A REVIEW OF **SCALABLE EDUCATION INTERVENTIONS IN PAKISTAN:**

Enablers, Challenges, and a Framework for Scaling



A Review of Scalable Education Interventions in Pakistan: Enablers, Challenges, and a Framework for Scaling

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Executive summary

This report explores the potential for scalability of education interventions in Pakistan, where scalability refers to institutional embedding and sustainability, together with the incorporation of gender and social inclusion (GESI). The report combines data from a review of secondary documentation (project evaluation reports) and key informant interviews with six project implementers whose interventions were recognised as having the potential to scale, and with six evaluators or experts in the field. Through this analysis, the report highlights the key enablers and barriers that determine whether an intervention can be successfully embedded within government systems and expanded at scale. In this report, 'education intervention' refers to a structured programme or approach aimed at enhancing access, quality, equity, or governance in education. This broad definition allows for capturing diverse activities relevant to this analysis in the Pakistan context.

The findings reveal that political will and bureaucracy, human resources and expertise, cost effectiveness, data monitoring and evaluation, and alignment with donor and government agendas are central to the scalability of interventions. These factors do not operate in isolation and can act as both enablers and barriers, depending on how they are navigated. Political will, for example, can facilitate the expansion of an intervention if high-level champions support it, but frequent changes in government leadership and bureaucratic turnover can also hinder continuity. Similarly, while cost effectiveness is a priority for government adoption, interventions that prioritise equity considerations may struggle to scale if they are not framed in terms of financial sustainability. Data monitoring and evaluation also play a critical role, as interventions with measurable impact are more likely to gain government buy-in, yet fragmented data systems often undermine evidence-based decision-making.

GESI considerations are largely absent from considerations regarding scaling education interventions in Pakistan. According to those interviewed, equity considerations do not play a major role in the conducting and continuation of education interventions, with equity considerations largely being driven by local organisations and donors.

Building on these insights, the report develops a framework for conceptualising scalable interventions that incorporate GESI, drawing from both the analysis of data and global scaling frameworks. The framework outlines the key considerations necessary for designing, piloting, and expanding education interventions within the Pakistani context that incorporate GESI. It underscores the importance of early engagement with government actors, investing in institutional capacity, demonstrating value for money, and ensuring the effective use of data building on an implementation science approach. The report argues that scalability must be considered from the outset, rather than as an afterthought, and that to be successful interventions must align with both government priorities and donor funding cycles, while maintaining a clear focus on long-term impact and GESI.

This report also includes a scalability checklist that integrates global best practices with Pakistan-specific challenges, ensuring education interventions are effective, sustainable, and inclusive. The checklist focuses on government buy-in, institutional capacity building, financial sustainability, and evidence-driven adaptation, enabling interventions to scale while maintaining impact and alignment with policy frameworks.

This report offers practical guidance for policymakers, project implementers, and funders seeking to scale education interventions in Pakistan. It provides a structured approach to navigating the complexities of education reform, with the aim of ensuring that interventions are not only expanded but also sustained in a way that contributes to

long-term systemic change. By embedding GESI considerations, the report also seeks to ensure that marginalised groups are not left behind in efforts to scale up education interventions.

Table of contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	ii
1 INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE	1
2 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS	4
2.1 RESEARCH METHODS.....	4
2.1.1 <i>Documentary review</i>	4
2.1.2 <i>Key informant interviews</i>	4
2.2 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS.....	5
2.3 ETHICS.....	5
3 FINDINGS	6
3.1 SCALABLE AND NON-SCALABLE EDUCATION INTERVENTIONS IN PAKISTAN.....	6
3.1.1 <i>Defining education interventions in Pakistan</i>	6
3.1.2 <i>How is scaling understood in the context of Pakistan?</i>	7
3.1.3 <i>List of scalable interventions</i>	8
3.2 ENABLERS OF AND BARRIERS TO SCALING.....	24
3.2.1 <i>Political will and bureaucracy</i>	24
3.2.2 <i>Human resources and expertise</i>	27
3.2.3 <i>Cost effectiveness</i>	29
3.2.4 <i>Data, monitoring, and evaluation</i>	31
3.2.5 <i>Aligning with government and donor agendas and timing</i>	33
4 CONCEPTUALISING SCALABLE EDUCATION INTERVENTIONS IN PAKISTAN	36
LIST OF REFERENCES LINKED TO THE INTERVENTIONS REVIEWED	42
OTHER REFERENCES	45

1 Introduction and rationale

Many governments across the world seek to scale up education programmes that increase access to schooling and improve learning outcomes for large numbers of school-age children. Whilst there has been great progress in increasing enrolment in school globally, recognition that many of these children are in school but are not learning has created momentum around efforts to ensure meaningful learning takes place (World Bank, 2021a). It is also recognised that in some contexts children from marginalised backgrounds are also still not able to enter, or to stay in, school (UNESCO, 2020). For instance, in low- and middle-income countries, young people from the richest 20% of households are three times more likely to complete lower secondary education than young people from the poorest families (UNESCO, 2020).

Pakistan presents an important case for exploring how to ensure education interventions are scalable. The magnitude of educational challenges facing the country remain significant. The country has the second largest number of children out of school in the world (26.2 million (MOFEPT, 2024)). In addition, large numbers of children in Pakistan are not learning the basics in literacy and numeracy. The latest [ASER report \(2023\)](#), which reports on the assessment of 42,045 students aged five to 16 years across Pakistan in Urdu, English, and maths, shows that while 76% of Grade 5 children could read a Grade 2-level story in Urdu, only 60% could do two-digit division, and only 51% could read a Grade 2-level English sentence, suggesting a gap in foundational skills.

There is an urgent need to understand how best to ensure the scalability of education interventions, alongside building GESI into the design of such interventions. GESI here is defined as follows:

'Gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GE[DISI]) is a concept that examines **unequal power relations** between different social groups. The GE[DISI] approach...focuses on the need for action to **re-balance these power relations and ensure equal rights, opportunities, and respect for all individuals regardless of their social identity**' (GESI Working Group, 2017, p. 37).

Evidence from programmes such as the Girls' Education Challenge demonstrates how scaling can be effectively integrated with embedding inclusive strategies at the core of education interventions. This approach not only facilitates widespread and sustainable impact but also ensures that no child is left behind.

Scaling up evidence-based education interventions that have been designed at a small-scale is notoriously challenging (Gibbs *et al.*, 2021), particularly due to contextual variations (Horner, Sugai, and Fixsen, 2017; Ryan *et al.*, 2024), political hurdles, and logistical issues, such as resource constraints (World Bank, 2018).

The interplay between systemic and practical factors highlights the need for a holistic approach to scaling education interventions. With the increasing demand for more evidence-driven policies there is a clear call for more research and frameworks that address both the systemic and political dimensions of scaling. In response to this gap, recent global education-focused initiatives, such as [Scaling Access and Learning in Education \(SCALE\)](#) and the [What Works Hub for Global Education \(WWHGE\)](#), have been developed with funding from the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO) to explore scalable, cost-effective education reforms.

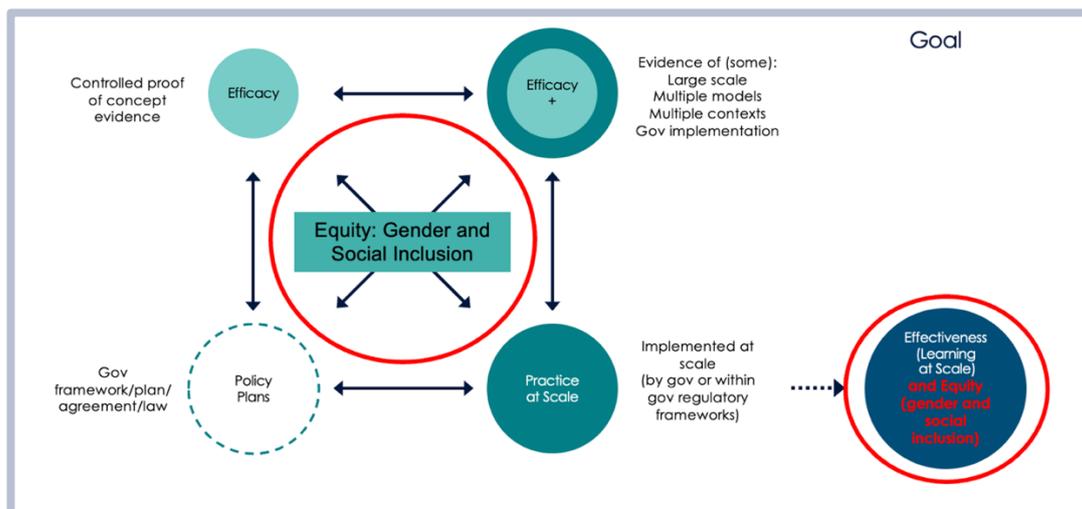
SCALE aims to improve the effectiveness of education financing in low- and lower middle-income countries by increasing the uptake of proven, cost-effective interventions, particularly for the most marginalised children. It provides demand-driven

support for adapting evidence-based interventions to new contexts and implementing rigorous test-learn-adapt pilots to ensure scalability within national education systems.

WWHGE has developed an intellectual framework for scaling, drawing on implementation science. Implementation science refers to scientific inquiry into the implementation process to discover how and why that process is working, or going wrong. This research aims to use evidence to scale successful practices and improve less effective ones. However, systematic documentation and publication of such evidence efforts are rare, especially in education (Dowd, 2024). WWHGE's scaling framework has four key stages: **efficacy**, which focuses on controlled studies that test where there have been improvements in learning outcomes; **efficacy+**, which tests whether interventions remain effective in diverse contexts, including government settings; **policy plans**, which involve developing government strategies and regulations to enable scale-up; and **practice at scale**, which examines whether large-scale implementation aligns with evidence and policy.

The original WWHGE framework did not include GESI, but scaling interventions must take account of the needs of the most marginalised to ensure solutions are inclusive and benefit all learners, and so they should ensure GESI is embedded in scaling. Figure 1 provides an adapted version of the WWHGE framework for scaling, incorporating GESI.

Figure 1: WWHGE's conceptual framework for scaling



This scoping review of scalable interventions in Pakistan has been commissioned by DARE-RC, with the aim of developing a framework and guide for scalability and to understand what works in scaling education interventions in Pakistan. This report is based on a synthesis and review of information on promising reforms and interventions that have the potential for scale, and seeks to answer the following question: **'What does scaling education interventions mean in the context of Pakistan?'**

It is important to clarify what we mean by scale. Often associated with reaching larger populations, scaling does not just involve expanding reach, it also involves embedding lasting change within schools, communities, and government systems to ensure sustainability. This approach prioritises reaching the most marginalised, recognising that genuine scalability requires both depth and breadth of impact.

Details of the review's methodology are provided in the next section. Data included in this report were obtained through a review of secondary documentation and through key informant interviews with stakeholders involved in the design and implementation of

a variety of education interventions in Pakistan, together with those with significant experience and knowledge in the field. An important aim of this research is to understand the enablers of and barriers to scaling in the context of Pakistan. Insights from the data are then used to create a framework for conceptualising GESI-embedded scalable education interventions in Pakistan.

2 Research design and methods

The aim of this scoping review is to identify critical success factors and challenges that influence scalability, as well as gaps in the existing evidence base. It prioritises interventions addressing pre-primary, primary, and secondary education levels.

This scoping review employed a two-stage approach to review and understand the scalability of education interventions in Pakistan. The first step included a documentary review, followed by key informant interviews.

2.1 Research methods

2.1.1 Documentary review

A review of existing documentation and studies (from the past 10 years, since 2015) was undertaken, focusing on impact evaluation reports assessing the impact of interventions in Pakistan that have either been scaled or that show potential for scalability. As a first step, all provincial government portals and the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training were searched. Due to limited availability of project evaluation documents on government portals, a further step involved searching information gathered by the DARE-RC team and the stakeholders who were interviewed. Initial discussions with the DARE-RC team helped identify interventions that have been scaled or have been identified as having the potential to scale, which were then further explored and reviewed. We identified interventions led by non-governmental organisations, local think tanks, international organisations, and local and national governments that were initially piloted with the goal of scaling up or developed on a small scale but that demonstrated strong results. These were recognised by other interviewed stakeholders as having the potential for broader implementation. Additionally, the websites of development partners were examined based on information from the interviews.

2.1.2 Key informant interviews

12 key informant interviews were conducted with a diverse group of stakeholders to gather qualitative insights. These stakeholders included the following:

- **Implementers:** We interviewed six practitioners and professionals involved in the design and delivery of education interventions. Their expertise shed light on practical challenges, and strategies for successful implementation at scale.
- **Evaluators and experts:** We interviewed six individuals from academic, research, or donor organisations who possess a deep understanding of the education landscape in Pakistan and/or have conducted impact evaluations of scalable interventions. These stakeholders provided insights into best practices and innovative approaches for scaling interventions.

Efforts were made to ensure representation from all provinces in Pakistan, to capture diverse perspectives on education interventions. The six implementers were selected for interview after an initial documentary review of scalable interventions in Pakistan, while the six evaluators and experts were chosen through consultations with the wider DARE-RC team.

2.2 Data collection and analysis

In the first step, the documentary review involved examining evaluations of education interventions over the past 10 years in pre-primary, primary, and secondary schooling, as well as wider school governance and teacher training-related reforms. This included reviews of the Punjab Education Sector Reform Programme (PESP II) and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Sector Reform Programme (KESP II). Other relevant literature was also reviewed, such as evaluations of Pakistani education initiatives, including those available in the [Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel \(GEEAP\) 2023 study on Smart Buys](#) in education for low- and middle-income countries and documentation for WWHGE, SCALE, and Research for Improving Systems on Education (RISE).

We conducted semi-structured interviews to explore themes related to enablers of, and barriers to, achieving scalability, as well as questions related to equity and cost effectiveness. Each interview lasted between 50 and 60 minutes, with 11 interviews being conducted online via Microsoft Teams and one interview being conducted in person. For the in-person interview, an audio recording device was used to record the interview, following which the interview was transcribed and the audio deleted. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interview.

Data analysis followed a three-step coding process to systematically manage and interpret qualitative data. This included open coding, where initial codes were assigned to the data collected; second-level coding, where initial codes were reviewed to identify frequently used codes and relationships among them; and thematic coding, where second-level codes were analysed to generate overarching themes from the data (Creswell, 2014).

2.3 Ethics

Ethical permissions were obtained from the Faculty of Education at the University of Cambridge. Consent forms were provided to all respondents before the interview. These consent forms provided detailed information about the planned research, including information about the content and purpose of the interview, the anticipated uses of the data, and details of how participants would be able to leave the interview and/or remove their data at a later stage. Respondents were also assured that they were not required to answer all questions and that they could stop the interview at any point of time. We implemented several processes to ensure compliance with our General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) commitments to the FCDO around the transfer and storing of data. All data are stored on our secure drives, meeting our stringent requirements around data protection. All identifiers (such as name and location) were removed from all interview transcripts. All notes, audio files, data transcripts, and consent forms were stored in a safe server on Microsoft Teams, with access limited to the report authors (Professor Pauline Rose and Dr Laraib Niaz).

3 Findings

3.1 Scalable and non-scalable education interventions in Pakistan

3.1.1 Defining education interventions in Pakistan

During our key informant interviews, we observed that the term 'intervention' was often interpreted in different ways by stakeholders, with many referring to system-level reforms rather than specific programmes or initiatives. Therefore, this report considers a range of programmes and activities, including ones that start as a pilot with the intention to scale, those that are designed by non-government partners with the potential to scale through government, as well as broader system-level reforms that include a range of interventions within them. These system-level reforms include ones initiated and expanded by the government, as well as public-private partnership (PPP) models embedded within government agencies and foundations. Similarly, the terms of reference for the study include a similar range of programmes, activities, and broader system-level reforms.

As such, in this report, an education intervention is defined as a structured programme or approach that is designed to improve access, quality, equity, or governance in education. These might have been implemented, assessed, and in some cases scaled, beyond their initial phase. The definition is deliberately broad to enable us to capture a range of activities being undertaken in Pakistan that are of relevance to this analysis.

The process of scaling is understood as institutional embedding, meaning the intervention is formally adopted and expanded by the government, rather than remaining a one-off initiative or an externally managed programme.

Types of education interventions considered:

1. Pilot-to-scale and designed-for-scale interventions

These interventions can broadly be categorised into two types:

a) Pilot-to-scale interventions¹

Pilot-to-scale interventions include interventions initiated by local organisations, non-government organisations (NGOs), or donors, often as innovative solutions addressing specific educational challenges, such as Sustainable Transition and Retention in Delivering Education (STRIDE) by the Institute of Social and Policy Sciences (I-SAPS). If proven successful, they are later institutionalised by the government, either through policy integration or direct programme expansion. These may also be developed under technical assistance programmes, such as PESP and KESP, where externally supported pilots are continued beyond the technical assistance period through government mechanisms. Examples of such pilot-to-scale interventions include the scaling of the Waseela-e-Taleem programme in Punjab.

b) Government-run interventions that are designed for scale from the outset

¹ While we define scaling as embedding interventions within government systems, we have included insights from the Citizens Foundation (TCF's) self-sustaining Rahbar programme as an example of how interventions can achieve sustainability independently, in the section on enablers and barriers.

Government-run interventions include those implemented directly by government departments and agencies, as well as those run by government-affiliated foundations, such as ones that focus on PPPs. Key government-affiliated foundations that manage large-scale interventions include the following:

- Punjab Education Foundation (PEF), which is responsible for PPP interventions such as Foundation Assisted Schools, the Education Voucher Scheme, and the New School Programme.
- Sindh Education Foundation (SEF), which oversees interventions such as Adopt-a-School, Assisted Schools Programme, and SEF Promoting Private Schooling in Rural Sindh.

2. System-level reforms and government-run interventions

- System-level reforms refers to programmes associated with broader structural changes in education governance, policy, or institutional frameworks that impact multiple schools or programmes. These may include teacher recruitment policies or budget allocation changes. These are likely to have specific interventions or programmes associated with them, which can provide lessons for scaling.

Challenges in tracking scaling and sustainability:

A key challenge in documenting the trajectory of interventions is the lack of data and/or documentation on whether and how certain reforms have scaled and sustained over time. Many interviewees who had been involved in specific interventions or reforms were uncertain whether scaling had occurred. Given this limitation, the report relies on triangulated evidence from policy documents, available evaluations, and stakeholder perspectives during interviews to assess the status of interventions.

By mapping these education interventions, the report aims to provide insights into which initiatives have influenced Pakistan's education system, what factors have facilitated or hindered scaling, and what lessons can be drawn for future education policy and programme design.

3.1.2 How is scaling understood in the context of Pakistan?

Perspectives from all interviewed stakeholders suggest that scaling in Pakistan is a complex, multi-dimensional process that goes beyond mere replication and expansion. For four of the stakeholders, scaling aligned with the idea of increasing reach. As one key informant stated:

'Scaling would mean an intervention which can eventually reach out to all targeted populations – if we are doing an intervention for out-of-school children, then that means reaching a larger population.'

This definition resonates with traditional accounts of scalability, which emphasise extending an intervention from a controlled environment to broader real-world conditions (Milat *et al.*, 2013).

Nearly all of the respondents emphasised how scaling is an outcome of institutional embedding and sustainability. For instance, one government stakeholder emphasised:

'Scaling from a government perspective means any intervention that has a legal framework or policy and then funding allocation at some scale-up level. Many interventions take place, but if the government has not adopted it and created no institution for it, then it's no scale-up.'

This view highlights that for an intervention to be genuinely scaled in Pakistan's education sector, it must be institutionalised within government structures. Given that donor-funded initiatives often operate during limited time periods, the government plays a crucial role in embedding and sustaining initiatives through policy adoption and financial commitment. Here, respondents were referring to both interventions that were being conducted by local think tanks, NGOs, donors, international organisations, and the government (local, provincial, national).

One informant suggested that *'instead of scaling, always be more comfortable with embedding – scaling is a logical consequence of embedding.'* This implies that sustainable scaling occurs when interventions are deeply integrated into existing education systems, rather than merely expanded as standalone initiatives. The ultimate test of successful scaling, according to another stakeholder, is whether an intervention continues to function effectively when external monitors or interventionists are no longer present:

'Scaling is reasonably obvious – it impacts many classrooms, people – width and depth. The fact that it is not just on the surface but actually finds a space when those managing and monitoring disappear and are not there – without the interventionists and monitors. If it has found enough rhythms, rituals, and routines and become a part of it – happens when no one else is looking.'

When asked to define scaling, none of the informants explicitly referenced equity or GESI considerations. This implies that scaling is understood as reaching large numbers – without necessarily considering who is being reached.

Different approaches to scaling were identified in the interviews, particularly by the six project implementers. One interviewee differentiated between scaling an intervention by *'making copies and scaling up as is to a wider target audience'* and scaling impact, which they described as *'a bit more complex'*. The latter involves examining not just how an intervention is expanded but also its broader effects – both positive and negative – on beneficiaries and the system at large. This perspective underscores the importance of studying the unintended consequences of scaling and assessing whether an intervention is truly beneficial at a larger scale.

In summary, scaling in Pakistan is not merely about expanding an intervention to more beneficiaries: it is understood as embedding interventions within existing structures, securing government ownership. It requires the assessment of both the intended and unintended impacts of scaling efforts. Successful scaling requires not just increasing reach but also ensuring depth, sustainability, and integration into the broader education system. Further consideration is needed on how to embed GESI within scaling approaches.

3.1.3 List of scalable interventions

Based on our scoping review, we have created a list of interventions in Pakistan that have scaled or have the potential to scale (Table 1). This is in no way an exhaustive list of interventions in Pakistan but is indicative of relevant ones that were included in the terms of reference, as well as identified through the review of documentation and from the key informant interviews. The type and level of detail in the descriptions added for each intervention in the table varies due to differences in the availability of data for each intervention. The information in Table 1 is sourced from evaluations of interventions, while updates on scaling numbers are taken from the portals of the implementing organisations. All data are complemented by insights from key informant interviews. Where information is unavailable, we have highlighted the gaps.

Interventions that have scaled

Table 1: List of interventions that have scaled

Intervention	Objective	Intervention design	Implementation strategy	Scale	Success factors	Challenges
Pilot-to-scale interventions						
<u>STRIDE</u>	Increase transition rates from primary to middle and secondary education by addressing access barriers.	Focused on four building blocks: (i) local and targeted planning; (ii) school upgradation; (iii) transport for students; and (iv) community mobilisation.	Implemented in partnership with the Government of Punjab, I-SAPS, and FCDO as a pilot initiative. Was then taken to scale by the Punjab government.	Pilot phase launched in 2017 in 180 schools (50% girls' schools) in Bahawalpur and Muzaffargarh, enrolling 8,420 students. Scaled up in 2018 as the Insaaf Afternoon School Programme across Punjab. Also scaled in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) by the KP Government.	<p>Strong political and bureaucratic support: Government buy-in facilitated smooth implementation.</p> <p>Cost effectiveness: More affordable than traditional school construction, making scaling feasible.</p> <p>Alignment with public financial management systems: Reduced bureaucratic resistance and ensured efficient fund allocation.</p>	<p>Lack of robust performance evaluation: Only one systematic evaluation has been undertaken (W/WHGE, 2022).</p>
<u>Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Camps – Punjab</u>	Enhance foundational literacy and numeracy skills among students,	Short-term intensive learning camps focused on core subjects (maths, Urdu, English). Conducted for 40 working days, Monday	Implemented by the School Education Department under the Taleem	In 2023, 2,051 camps were established across five districts (Muzaffargarh,	- Community engagement: Parents and school council members actively supported the initiative, advocating for its expansion.	- Lack of robust performance evaluations: While initial assessments indicate <u>positive outcomes</u> , extensive evaluations

Intervention	Objective	Intervention design	Implementation strategy	Scale	Success factors	Challenges
	particularly in Grades 1 to 3, including out-of-school children.	to Friday, from 7 am to 9:30 am. Camps provided resource packs, activity calendars, and structured learning materials.	programme in Punjab. Designed as a pilot initiative to test and refine strategies for enhancing foundational literacy and numeracy skills among young learners. Going to scale following success of the pilot.	D.G. Khan, Mianwali, Rahim Yar Khan, and Bahawalpur), enrolling 79,982 students, including 21,816 out-of-school children. Following the success of the 2023 pilot, the Foundational Literacy and Numeracy camps expanded to 12 districts in 2024, enrolling 176,588 children across 6,060 camps with smaller class sizes and level-based grouping. A third cycle is planned for summer 2025 under the DARE-RC programme, with further	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Baseline and endline assessments: These showed a 6% improvement in learning outcomes for enrolled students and out-of-school children. - Cost effectiveness: Utilising existing school infrastructure minimised additional costs, making it financially sustainable. 	<p>measuring long-term impact are lacking (see reference list).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scalability issues: Concerns exist regarding whether the model can be effectively expanded across all schools in Punjab. - Short-term nature: The 40-day period may not be sufficient for deep, lasting learning improvements.

Intervention	Objective	Intervention design	Implementation strategy	Scale	Success factors	Challenges
				scaling supported by the Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Compact under the GPE System Transformation Grant, potentially led by the World Bank.		
Waseela-e-Taleem Programme – Pakistan	Increase enrolment and attendance rates of primary-aged children from low-income households through conditional cash transfers.	Launched in 2012 under the Benazir Income Support Programme. Provides Pakistani rupees (PKR) 750 per quarter per eligible child, conditional upon maintaining at least 70% attendance. Recently expanded to cover secondary and higher secondary education. Eligible families receive a quarterly stipend per child, contingent upon maintaining a minimum school attendance rate of 70%.	Waseela-e-Taleem is primarily funded by the Government of Pakistan through the Benazir Income Support Programme, with significant financial support from international partners, including the World Bank and FCDO. Launched in October 2012, it began as a pilot in five districts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As at 2021, enrolled approximately 4.45 million children. - Planned expansion to 1.75 million more students, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 million in primary education; - 500,000 in secondary education; - 225,000 in higher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Significant increase in school enrolment and attendance among low-income families. - Integration of technology for attendance monitoring, enhancing transparency. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensuring compliance monitoring across all districts. - Availability and quality of schools remain key concerns. - Limited robust performance evaluation: Only three comprehensive studies have assessed the impact and effectiveness (see reference list).

Intervention	Objective	Intervention design	Implementation strategy	Scale	Success factors	Challenges
			and, following its success, expanded to 32 districts by 2015.	secondary education.		
The Reading Hour	The Reading Hour initiative aims to enhance foundational literacy among primary school students in Pakistan.	Implemented as a pilot programme, it dedicates a specific hour to reading activities within the school curriculum, to improve reading skills.	The programme was trialled in schools across Islamabad Capital Territory, Sindh, and Punjab, integrating reading sessions into the existing timetable.	Specific statistics on the scale are not available.	Strong support from Federal Education Secretary and collaboration with civil society organisations.	Lack of robust performance evaluation: No comprehensive studies have assessed the impact and effectiveness.
Government-run interventions designed for scale from the outset						
Punjab Public School Reorganisation programme	Improve education quality, increase student enrolment, and enhance school infrastructure by outsourcing the management of public schools to	Transfers underperforming public schools to private operators, including entrepreneurs, NGOs, and education technology firms. These partners manage school operations, staff recruitment, and infrastructure, while following the government curriculum and standards.	The programme follows a phased outsourcing model, starting with smaller schools and gradually expanding. Funded by the Punjab government, it provides PKR 650 per student per month to private operators.	14,000 out of 49,000 public schools in Punjab. 5,800 schools outsourced initially, with further expansion planned.	According to the provincial government authorities: - Cost savings: Expected to save the Punjab Government PKR 40 billion - Employment opportunities: Initiative aims to provide jobs for 70,000 educated youth. - Infrastructure improvements: Enhanced school buildings, improved cleanliness, and added facilities like laboratories.	- Capacity concerns: Ensuring private partners maintain educational quality and standards. - Lack of robust performance evaluation: No comprehensive studies have assessed the impact and effectiveness of the programme.

Intervention	Objective	Intervention design	Implementation strategy	Scale	Success factors	Challenges
	private entities.					
Girls' Community Schools – KP	Increase access to education for girls in remote and underserved areas of KP through community-supported schools.	Girls' Community Schools were designed as community-based, low-cost schools to provide primary education for out-of-school girls in underserved areas. The intervention involved recruiting local female teachers, using community-provided spaces, and implementing flexible learning models, including accelerated learning programmes (ALPs).	Operated under the Elementary and Secondary Education Department of KP. Funding came from the KP Government, with financial assistance also from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and GPE.	The Elementary and Secondary Education Department initially established 1,413 community schools for girls, investing PKR 1.35 billion. As at November 2024, approximately 2,200 Girls' Community Schools were operating across KP, employing over 5,000 teachers and serving around 276,000 students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community engagement: Strong local participation fostered ownership and ensured alignment with cultural norms. - Addressing teacher shortages: Recruitment of local female teachers was a major success factor. - Cost effectiveness: Utilising community-provided spaces and existing resources minimised financial burden on the government. - Government and donor support: Funding and policy backing from KP Government and international donors facilitated sustainability. - Digitalisation for transparency: Introduction of digital profiling for 3,000+ teachers and 145,000 students, with online attendance tracking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of robust performance evaluation: <i>No comprehensive studies</i> have assessed the impact and effectiveness of Girls' Community Schools. According to the interviewed stakeholders there are the following challenges: - Teacher absenteeism: Despite community involvement, teacher attendance issues persist, affecting learning outcomes. - Financial instability: Delays in teacher salary payments threaten retention and school sustainability. - Infrastructure gaps: Many schools lack proper facilities, including sanitation and secure learning environments.

Intervention	Objective	Intervention design	Implementation strategy	Scale	Success factors	Challenges
Education Management Organisations (EMOs) Programme (Sindh)	Improve governance, accountability, and quality of education in public schools.	This is a PPP where private entities, including NGOs and education firms, manage public schools. These organisations handle administration, teacher training, and curriculum implementation, while the government provides funding and oversight.	Launched in Sindh in 2015 as a full-scale initiative rather than a pilot project. The Sindh Government funds the programme, with a focus on capacity building, community engagement, and performance-based management to enhance school operations.	EMOs have outsourced the management of public schools in phases, with over 110 schools planned for transfer. By 2022, 81 schools had been outsourced, with additional agreements expanding the initiative through multiple procurement cycles.	Improved governance through autonomy and decentralisation, according to stakeholders interviewed.	- Limited robust performance evaluation: Three academic studies exist that evaluate the performance of EMOs (see reference list).
People's School Programme	Provide quality education to students across Sindh, ensuring free and inclusive learning environments.	Newly constructed government schools managed through partnerships with established educational institutions and NGOs. Integrate modern teaching methodologies and curricula, aligned with national standards.	Was initiated by SEF, under the Government of Sindh, and developed as a full-scale initiative rather than a pilot-to-scale initiative.	As at 2025, the People's School Programme operates 35 schools across Sindh, with enrolment of over 25,000 students. Aims to bring 300,000 out-of-school children	Improved governance through autonomy and decentralisation, according to stakeholders interviewed.	- Lack of robust performance evaluation: No comprehensive studies have assessed the impact and effectiveness.

Intervention	Objective	Intervention design	Implementation strategy	Scale	Success factors	Challenges
				into the education system over the next two years.		
Adopt-a-School Programme	Improve and develop public education by adopting existing schools and enhancing their infrastructure and educational outcomes.	Non-state actors, including NGOs and for-profit entities, adopt and manage public schools. Focus on improving infrastructure, monitoring teachers, hiring additional staff, and providing teacher training.	Launched in 1998 by SEF. Partners with individuals, NGOs, and corporations to improve public schools through infrastructure upgrades, teacher support, and learning resources. Funded by the Government of Sindh, it was designed as a full-scale initiative rather than a pilot, with adopters contributing additional resources to enhance school quality.	As at 2021, the programme supported 405 government schools across 22 districts, benefiting over 94,317 children and involving approximately 4,981 teachers. Recent statistics are unavailable.	Improved governance through autonomy and decentralisation, according to stakeholders interviewed.	- Lack of robust performance evaluation: Evaluations of the Adopt-a-School Programme include only one World Bank report on its impact and varied approaches, along with the Sindh Education Foundation's Annual Report 2020/21 assessing its progress and outcomes (see reference list).

Intervention	Objective	Intervention design	Implementation strategy	Scale	Success factors	Challenges
Girls Stipend Programme (Punjab)	Provision of conditional cash transfers to female students in Grades 6 to 10 to encourage enrolment and retention of, and address nutritional requirements that are essential for, adolescent girls.	Eligible female students from Grades 6 to 10 receive a monthly stipend of PKR 1,000, disbursed quarterly through a branchless banking system developed by the Punjab Social Protection Authority. Disbursement is conditional upon maintaining at least 80% attendance.	Launched in 2017 under the Khadim-e-Punjab Zewar-e-Taleem programme. Implemented in 16 districts with low literacy rates, including Bahawalnagar, Bahawalpur, Bhakkar, Chiniot, Dera Ghazi Khan, Jhang, Kasur, Khanewal, Kot Addu, Layyah, Lodhran, Muzaffargarh, Okara, Pakpattan, Rajanpur, Rahim Yar Khan, and Vehari.	As at the time of the latest reports, the programme had successfully disbursed stipends to 538,159 beneficiaries across the 16 target districts.	Strong political and bureaucratic support: The commitment from both political leaders and bureaucratic institutions has been instrumental in facilitating the implementation and sustainability of the stipend programmes, according to stakeholders.	<p>-Timely disbursement: Ensuring the punctual distribution of stipends remains a logistical challenge according to interviewees.</p> <p>- Cultural barriers: Persistent cultural norms in certain areas continue to hinder girls' access to education.</p> <p>-Limited robust performance evaluation. An impact evaluation of the Zewar-e-Taleem Programme is currently underway, commissioned by the Punjab Social Protection Authority and conducted by Himmat Consulting.</p>
PEF's Foundation Assisted Schools	Provide free quality education to students from low-income backgrounds by partnering with private schools.		The programme is funded by the Government of Punjab. Launched as a full-scale initiative in 2005, the Foundation Assisted Schools programme was	Started with 54 schools in 2005, expanded to over 3,200 schools, serving 1.1 million students, by 2018.	Low-cost, scalable model; strong political backing.	<p>There are concerns over misreporting of enrolment and quality control, and there is a need for better governance, according to interviewees.</p> <p>Limited robust evaluations.</p> <p>Limited evaluation studies available that individually evaluates Foundation</p>

Intervention	Objective	Intervention design	Implementation strategy	Scale	Success factors	Challenges
			not preceded by a pilot phase.			Assisted Schools (see reference list).
PEF's Education Voucher Scheme	Provides eligible low-income families with vouchers to enrol their children in approved private schools within a 500-metre radius.		The programme is funded by the Government of Punjab. Launched as a full-scale initiative in 2006.	Launched in 2006 with 11 schools, expanded to 1,730 schools, with 490,509 students, by 2018.	Targeted at the most vulnerable groups; provided parental choice in schooling.	Limited voucher value sometimes required families to top up fees; scalability concerns, according to interviewees. Limited robust evaluations. A study titled 'Evaluation of Financial Subsidy programme of PEF for Increasing Student's Enrolment and Retention in Private Schools in Punjab' assessed the programme's impact on enrolment and retention rates.
PEF's New School Programme	Private sector partners establish new schools; PEF funds students based on agreed criteria; focuses on enrolment expansion.		Funded by the Government of Punjab, it was launched as a pilot in 2008 across seven tehsils, before expanding province-wide.	By 2014, the New School Programme had enrolled 86,488 students, and by 2021, it had 2,133 partner schools, serving around 297,000 students. The programme ensures free	Addressed access gaps in underserved areas; strong private sector engagement.	Sustainability concerns due to dependence on government funding; monitoring challenges, according to interviewees. Limited robust evaluations. A study on the New School Programme assessed its role in enrolling out-of-school children, highlighting challenges and

Intervention	Objective	Intervention design	Implementation strategy	Scale	Success factors	Challenges
				education in areas that lacking government or PEF schools.		opportunities in education PPPs. Findings suggest improvements in outreach but also challenges in sustaining enrolment.
PEF's Public School Support Programme	Non-functional government schools are transferred to private partners (e.g. CARE Foundation, Akhuwat, TCF) under a performance-based model.		Funded by the Government of Punjab, the programme was launched as a full-scale initiative to enhance education quality and access.	Launched in 2016, expanded to 4,300 non-functional public schools by 2018; later segregated into Pakistan Education Initiative Management Authority (PEIMA).	Improved efficiency of underperforming public schools; engagement with experienced civil society organisations.	Political interference in school transfers; concerns over transparency and accountability, according to interviewees. Limited robust evaluations. The Public School Support Programme has been evaluated within broader assessments of PEF's PPP initiatives. For instance, a study by the National Centre for the Study of Privatisation in Education analysed four PPP programmes in Punjab, including the Public School Support Programme, focusing on aspects like choice, efficiency, equity, and social cohesion.
Teacher recruitment and training under	The Balochistan Education Project,	Focused on hiring more female teachers and providing pre-service teacher training to	Initiated in 2015, the Balochistan Education Project is primarily	Province-wide exact numbers are unavailable.	Lowering academic requirements for hiring local teachers. Changing recruitment policies so that	Lack of robust performance evaluation: No comprehensive studies have assessed the

Intervention	Objective	Intervention design	Implementation strategy	Scale	Success factors	Challenges
Balochistan Education Project	implemented from 2015 to 2021 by the Secondary Education Department of the Government of Balochistan, aimed to enhance school enrolment and retention, particularly among girls, and to improve educational management through better information collection and use. The project received financial support from the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), with the World Bank serving as the	enhance teaching quality.	funded by GPE and the European Union. It was launched as a full-scale initiative rather than a pilot programme.		locally trained teachers could apply.	impact and effectiveness of this initiative.

Intervention	Objective	Intervention design	Implementation strategy	Scale	Success factors	Challenges
	supervising entity and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) as the coordinating agency.					

System-level reforms that have scaled

The information on system-level reforms is included as stakeholders emphasised these initiatives in interviews, due to the significant opportunities to learn from them, even though they might not be categorised as interventions per se. Information on these initiatives is sourced from government reports, policy documents, and independent evaluations, including assessments by the Sindh Education and Literacy Department, and PESP II and KESP II evaluations, complemented by insights from the key informant interviews.

Table 2: List of system-level reforms that have scaled

Reform	Objective	Intervention design	Implementation strategy	Success factors	Challenges
Non-salary budget (PESP II)	Provide financial autonomy to schools and improve resource availability.	Allocating funds directly to schools through a formula-based approach.	Funded by the former UK Department for International Development (DFID) (now FCDO), the World Bank, and Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), with additional support from the Government of Punjab. Introduced in nine districts in 2014 and scaled province-wide by 2016, it replaced the previous school management committee funds, providing direct formula-based funding to school bank accounts to enhance operational autonomy.	Greater financial flexibility for schools; allowed targeted spending.	Insufficient allocation and delays in fund transfers. Limited robust performance evaluation: Other than the performance evaluation of PESP II, no comprehensive studies have assessed the impact and effectiveness of the reform.
Parent-teacher councils (PESP II)	Strengthen community participation in school management.	Formation of councils in schools to oversee expenditures and improvements.	Parent-teacher councils were strengthened under PESP II, with financial support from DFID and the Government of Punjab, as part of broader governance reforms. Implemented at scale rather than as a pilot, the initiative aimed to improve school governance and community participation, though engagement challenges persisted due to limited financial autonomy and resistance from school staff.	Improved engagement of local communities in school affairs.	Limited awareness among parents and inconsistency in council activities. Limited robust performance evaluation: Other than the performance evaluation of PESP II, no comprehensive studies have assessed the impact and effectiveness.

District Delivery Units (KESP II)	Improve education service delivery through data-driven planning and accountability.	Developed a system for planning, budgeting, and monitoring school performance.	District Delivery Units under KESP II were established with funding from DFID (now FCDO) and the Government of KP, with technical assistance from GIZ and UNICEF. Integrated into district education offices, they aimed to improve governance, budget execution, and monitoring at scale, though sustainability was affected by high staff turnover and limited technical capacity.	Supported better budget execution and planning at the district level.	Planning remained largely top-down; limited scope for localised needs. Limited robust performance evaluation: Other than the performance evaluation of KESP II, no comprehensive studies have assessed the impact and effectiveness.
Independent Monitoring Unit (KESP II)	Strengthen school monitoring and data collection for decision-making.	Monthly school visits by monitoring officers to collect key education indicators.	The Independent Monitoring Unit was initially launched in 2013 under KESP I and later institutionalised under KESP II with funding from the Government of KP and support from DFID (now FCDO). Designed as a permanent school monitoring mechanism, it evolved into the Education Monitoring Authority in 2020, though ongoing capacity-building challenges remained, requiring further investment in training and data management systems.	Enabled data-driven decision-making and accountability.	Initially ran as a project, with uncertain sustainability; later converted into a permanent Education Monitoring Authority. Limited robust performance evaluation: Other than the performance evaluation of KESP II, no comprehensive studies have assessed the impact and effectiveness.
Sindh School Monitoring System	Enhance monitoring of public schools in Sindh.	Use of technology to track attendance, infrastructure, and learning outcomes.	Funded by the Government of Sindh, with technical support from international development partners. Implemented at scale rather than as a pilot, the system aimed to improve data collection and transparency in school performance monitoring.	Enabled better data collection and transparency.	Sustainability concerns and integration challenges with existing systems. Limited robust performance evaluation: No comprehensive studies

					have assessed the impact and effectiveness of the reform.
Sindh Education Management Cadre	Improve education governance and administration by creating specialised management positions separate from teaching roles.	Established in 2014 by the Government of Sindh. Three distinct services were introduced: - School Executive Service: Decision-making at divisional and district levels. - School Management Service: Administrative roles at the district level. - School Finance Service: Handles school financial matters.	Funded by the Government of Sindh, with technical assistance from international partners, including the World Bank and UNICEF. Implemented at scale rather than as a pilot, the system focused on tracking student attendance, infrastructure conditions, and school performance metrics.	Specialisation: Separated management from teaching, allowing better administrative oversight. - Capacity building: The Provincial Institute of Teacher Education introduced leadership training programmes for education officers.	- Capacity issues: Limited delegation of powers and weak accountability systems. - Centralisation: Decision-making remained highly centralised, reducing the impact at local levels. Limited robust performance evaluation: No comprehensive studies have assessed the impact and effectiveness.

Despite the widespread implementation and scaling of numerous education interventions and system-level reforms across Pakistan, there remains a significant dearth of rigorous evaluations assessing their long-term impact, scalability, and sustainability. Many programmes have expanded over time. These include girls' stipend programmes (Zewar-e-Taleem in Punjab, Sindh and KP stipend programmes, and Waseela-e-Taleem), PPP models (such as PEF interventions, Sindh's EMOs, and the Public Schools Reorganisation Programme in Punjab), as well as initiatives like STRIDE, Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Camps, the Reading Hour, and Sindh's Education Management Cadre.

Some programmes – such as Waseela-e-Taleem, PEF's voucher scheme, and the STRIDE model – have received more structured assessments from external stakeholders, such as the World Bank and development partners (European Commission, 2019; World Bank, 2021b; WWHGE, 2022; IRC, 2023; IDEAS, 2023). Academic research has also examined the effectiveness of certain interventions, such as Halepoto *et al.*'s (2023) analysis of the Sindh School Monitoring System. Existing evaluations are often fragmented, outdated, or narrowly focused on access and enrolment metrics, rather than holistic learning outcomes, classroom dynamics, pedagogical effectiveness, or governance improvements. For instance, the PEF programmes (Foundation Assisted Schools, the Education Voucher Scheme, the New School Programme, and the Public Schools Reorganisation Programme) have been instrumental in expanding access to education, yet there is little independent research on learning improvements, teacher quality, or long-term student progression within these schools. STRIDE's integration into government policy was facilitated by strategic advocacy and cost effectiveness arguments, yet there is a gap in independent evaluations measuring its direct impact on student learning and teacher development. Even initiatives like the Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Camps and the Reading Hour, which are designed to improve literacy and foundational learning, lack longitudinal research studies and evaluations to verify their success in closing learning gaps.

Apart from the interventions that have successfully scaled, the stakeholder interviews highlighted several initiatives that were not expanded due to various challenges. Key reasons for this included funding constraints, lack of political will, implementation bottlenecks, and insufficient capacity within local education systems. These factors are further explored in the next section on enablers and barriers.

3.2 Enablers of and barriers to scaling

This section explores the broader enablers of and barriers to scaling education interventions in Pakistan, drawing on the key informant interviews. It highlights how factors such as political will and bureaucracy, financial feasibility/cost effectiveness, the availability of monitoring data, human resources and expertise, and alignment with existing government/donor structures and agendas, can facilitate or alternatively hinder scale-up and sustained expansion of education interventions.

3.2.1 Political will and bureaucracy

Across all of our 12 interviews, stakeholders emphasised that the predominant factors influencing the scaling of education interventions in Pakistan are political will and bureaucracy, and the ability to effectively navigate both.

The whims and wishes of political elites, particularly education secretaries, play a critical role in determining which interventions receive support, according to all the respondents. Project implementers must navigate the preferences of those in power to push forward their initiatives. As one respondent described:

'Unless you know which reforms and ingredients are in this pot – which will be as per the taste of the secretary – [you cannot scale successfully].'

This lack of systematic decision-making can result in an inconsistent policy landscape where evidence-based interventions are often sidelined in favour of politically expedient programmes. This is particularly the case for interventions focusing on learning, the outcomes of which would take a longer time to realise. Programmes with clear visibility and short-term impact – such as school feeding schemes – might be more likely to receive political backing than interventions focused on long-term learning outcomes. One stakeholder highlighted this dynamic by giving an example from Punjab:

'In Punjab during the caretaker government, the secretary added 500 million for the development of a school programme. Elections happened, and a new government came—the chief minister (CM) said, "I want to distribute food to kids." Every day X thousand kids will get a milk packet – 6 billion rupee for this have been allocated. School Education Department people say that it's a very expensive intervention and it's not something we can scale or sustain but cannot say that in front of the CM. Because the CM is so heavily invested in it. Every third picture is of the CM with the milk packet, which is why learning-centric interventions have not been successfully hooked with political success. Access is easier – provide milk, and it will look good. Learning is harder to measure; gains are found with difficulty.'

Political ownership at the highest level is therefore key to scaling. The six project implementers particularly emphasised how institutionalisation of reforms is a crucial enabler for scaling, but this is only possible when political ownership exists at the highest levels. As one respondent noted, creating new institutions within government is extremely challenging, and reforms are often dependent on donor funding, which is temporary. Sustainable interventions require strong government commitment:

'With the reference of government scaling it up – institution is the biggest problem. Under government, creating a new institution is a very difficult thing – donors are only associated for a limited while. An institution is made when there is highest level of ownership – because CM has ownership – PPPs and outsourcing have been scaled up – ownership at the highest level.'

Around half of interviewees who had worked closely with government highlighted a key dichotomy: donor-funded projects often prioritise gender and equity concerns, in line with international commitments, driving efforts to scale based on these principles, but these priorities do not always align with the government's internal planning and policy focus, leading to challenges in sustained adoption and integration. One stakeholder noted as follows:

'Programmes like PESP II and ASPIRE have made efforts to mainstream equity considerations, but they are still largely donor-driven ... On the other hand, government-led initiatives often operate in silos – departments like Special Education have their own budgets and mandates, but these are not always fully integrated into broader education planning.'

One barrier highlighted by three of the respondents is the lack of sustainability in government structures, both in terms of shifting political regimes and the frequent

turnover of education secretaries.² Policies and programmes often hinge on the priorities of individual bureaucrats, leading to discontinuity. As one stakeholder explained:

'There is a system problem in Pakistan linked to senior bureaucracy. If a secretary is transferred, then everything is gone.'

The lack of institutional continuity can mean that even well-conceived reforms fail to be sustained. Reforms may be sustained across regime changes if they are well embedded within government systems and not perceived as being tied to specific political actors or agendas. This volatility extends to the political landscape, with successive governments often reluctant to continue initiatives introduced by their predecessors, regardless of their effectiveness. As one respondent explained:

'Reasons for lack of sustainability include political party in power's legacy – for example look at PPPs and outsourcing; during PML-N's tenure this was given a lot of importance. When the political government changed, they didn't own it because they saw it as something owned by the previous government. Now the PML-N government is back again, and they are focusing on it. It's not really based on evidence.'

While bureaucracy provides a necessary structure for policy implementation, excessive red tape can also be a significant barrier to scaling interventions. Four of the interviewees with direct experience of working with the government emphasised the importance of understanding public financial management rules and aligning with government processes to ensure successful integration of new initiatives. As one expert explained:

'When designing and conceiving, you need to realise that reforms do not happen by my whims and wishes. But to make it happen, you need to understand how, in fact, it works – it needs to be responsive to various planning and public financial programming because interventions require resources to be run – even if external agencies provide money.'

Given the complexity of government systems, those seeking to implement reforms need to carefully balance both technical and political considerations. All the stakeholders highlighted the importance of working within the system's existing constraints to increase the likelihood of adoption. As one respondent put it:

'Everyone needs to remember that the person sitting on the desk is a different person – [you need to know] how to articulate and design the reform that fulfils both the touchstone – the reform mindset and the system mindset.'

Political will and bureaucracy can be both enablers of and barriers to scaling education interventions in Pakistan. While government ownership and alignment with bureaucratic systems are crucial for sustainability, excessive political influence, frequent leadership changes, and rigid bureaucratic structures often hinder long-term reform.

² Education in Pakistan is overseen by the Federal Ministry of Education and provincial governments, with the federal government focusing on curriculum, accreditation, and research funding. The Federal Education Secretary, a BPS-22 officer, leads policy direction, while each province has a Minister of Education assisted by a Provincial Education Secretary and supporting officers. The tenure of provincial and federal education secretaries in Pakistan varies, with some positions experiencing frequent turnover, while others maintain longer tenures.

Successful scaling requires a balance between working within existing systems and strategically navigating political interests to ensure that interventions are taken up and sustained, as evidenced in the example provided in Box 1.

Box 1: Political will for scaling – the case of STRIDE

The STRIDE initiative was a pilot programme designed to address the barriers that prevent children from transitioning to and completing secondary education in Punjab. Initially piloted in 2017 by I-SAPS, with support from FCDO, STRIDE targeted 180 schools across two districts: Bahawalpur and Muzaffargarh. The programme's approach was rooted in four key building blocks: localised planning to identify gaps; school upgradation to facilitate access; provision of transport to reduce distance barriers; and community mobilisation to enhance demand. The pilot's success, evident in increased enrolment and improved learning outcomes, garnered political and financial backing, leading to its rapid expansion. By late 2018, the Government of Punjab had incorporated STRIDE's core principles into the larger Insaaf Afternoon School Programme, which scaled the model across 20 districts, transforming existing primary schools into middle and secondary institutions by utilising second shifts.

The political will behind STRIDE's scale-up was a critical factor in its success. Interviewed stakeholders emphasised that engaging the government from the outset of the pilot intervention was key to securing its adoption. This involved providing detailed data and evidence to the provincial governments of Punjab and KP, assuring them that the organisation's expertise would be available on the ground to support both the pilot and the broader intervention.

The Government of Punjab's strong commitment to education reforms, combined with the School Education Department's confidence in the model's effectiveness, facilitated the programme's expansion. The same was applicable in the case of KP where the provincial government scaled the programme. A major factor in this support was the initiative's cost effectiveness: it enabled the government to utilise existing infrastructure rather than constructing new schools, resulting in an estimated saving of PKR 61 billion in a single year. Additionally, the programme's alignment with public sector regulations and financial management systems minimised bureaucratic resistance and reduced the risk of political interference. By integrating the intervention within government structures, the programme ensured its long-term sustainability, demonstrating how strategic alignment with political priorities can drive meaningful educational reform.

Source: WWHGE, 2022

3.2.2 Human resources and expertise

Tum Mein Hooron Ka Koi Chahne Wala Hi Nahin
Jalwa-e-Toor Tau Maujood Hai, Moosa Hi Nahin

('Not a single one among you is longing for hours

The Effulgence of "Tur" exists but there is no Moses')

During one interview, a stakeholder recited this poem, written by one of the founding fathers of Pakistan, the poet Allama Iqbal. In doing so they sought to highlight the issue of shifting human resources and expertise, as many education interventions in Pakistan are initiated and led by external donor organisations.

Since donor-funded projects operate on fixed timelines, the individuals managing these programmes often leave once the funding cycle ends. This lack of ownership presents a **significant challenge for long-term sustainability**. For STRIDE, an essential factor in ensuring its continuity was the partnership between I-SAPS and the Punjab Government.

Unlike many externally driven initiatives, I-SAPS had people on the ground, consistently pushing government actors to maintain the intervention. This institutional presence was key to sustaining the programme, as I-SAPS's on-the-ground personnel were crucial for STRIDE's ability to endure beyond its initial funding cycle.

One of the few **self-sustaining education models in Pakistan** that does not rely on government support is **TCF's Rahbar Programme**, which has a self-sustaining model. From its inception, Rahbar was designed with a clear long-term vision, ensuring that it could scale organically. Initially launched with just 20 *Rahbars* (mentors) and 17 mentees, the programme has now touched 70% of TCF students, with over 18,000 mentors, being transformed into a nationwide initiative over 15 years. The success of Rahbar highlights the importance of focusing not just on programmatic scaling – such as developing manuals and training materials – but also on scaling the operating model itself. As one stakeholder explained:

'When Rahbar started – a manual was made. The operating model is when you started being a Rahbar, someone said you can become one. But how do you collect people in a particular space? How do you make more coordinators? What is the selector pool? Rahbar focused on training a pool of individuals who would then sustain the intervention.'

The key takeaway from Rahbar's success is that ownership at the ground level is essential for true scalability. As another stakeholder emphasised:

'What does successful scaling look like in terms of breadth and depth? It will only happen if there is ownership – it does not come through authority. Cultivate that sense of ownership through humility – feedback loops through which you are able to see why it makes my life easier.'

Six of the stakeholders also emphasised that **human resource challenges affect** not only those implementing interventions but also those **participating in and benefiting from them**. A successful intervention must account for how the people involved at all levels – from policymakers to teachers to students – will sustain the initiative beyond its initial phase. For instance, a stakeholder noted how the World Bank-funded [Community Support Programme](#) focusing on girls' education in Balochistan in the 1990s could be sustained because of the presence of a trained cadre of individuals who were leading the programme, as well as teachers who were trained by the initiative. These people were able to work on community awareness and on helping girls access schools even without oversight from the World Bank.

A cadre of sustained human resources and expertise, as seen with the Balochistan Education Project (Box 2), or independent sustainability models that focus on developing the expertise of individuals, as demonstrated by Rahbar, are critical for ensuring that education interventions do not disappear once external funding ends. Without these elements, even the most well-designed programmes risk fading away.

Box 2: Teacher recruitment and training interventions under the Balochistan Education Project

The GPE-funded Balochistan Education Project was initiated in 2013–2014 under the provincial sector plan, with the objective of addressing critical gaps in middle school education in the province, particularly in remote and underserved areas. The project aimed to upgrade several hundred primary schools into middle schools, improve infrastructure, provide teachers, and establish new schools where none existed. Given Balochistan's unique geographic and socioeconomic challenges, the intervention had to navigate systemic inefficiencies and political complexities. The project was managed by an additional secretary who had a deep understanding of the education system, particularly how to integrate interventions into existing structures to maximise sustainability.

The teacher recruitment and training intervention under the project ended up being sustained by the government even after the end of the project lifecycle. A significant challenge in the implementation was the shortage of qualified female teachers, particularly in districts with literacy rates below 10%, where hiring women with undergraduate degrees was nearly impossible. To address this, the Balochistan Education Project introduced school-based hiring in 700 schools, ensuring that recruitment was adapted to the availability of local human resources. In areas where undergraduate-qualified teachers were not available, the criteria were lowered to matriculation, and, in some cases, middle school girls were recruited to teach primary school students. While this approach was not a perfect long-term solution, it enabled schools to function in areas that would otherwise have remained without teachers. Beyond immediate hiring, Balochistan Education Project successfully embedded a systematic framework for hiring of teachers based on population density and enrolment rates, ensuring that hiring of teachers was data-driven rather than politically influenced. By the project's conclusion, these processes had been institutionalised within the school improvement system, preventing politically motivated upgradations unless justified by established criteria. This combination of strategic embedding of hiring policies, school selection mechanisms, and the availability of human resources demonstrated how education interventions can transition from donor-driven projects to sustained government practices, ensuring long-term impact even beyond a project's funding cycle.

Source: Project Information Document (World Bank, 2022) and key informant interviews.

3.2.3 Cost effectiveness

Cost considerations play a critical role in determining the scalability of education interventions in Pakistan, with more than half of the stakeholders emphasising that the government prioritises cost efficiency over equity considerations:

'Government doesn't think much about equity – because they don't have such deep capacity – they are always thinking about cost – operating cost and capital cost – then equity access, marginalised communities comes much later.'

The implication here is also that often interventions that are designed to reach the most marginalised, such as children with disabilities, can be quite costly and hence the government's agenda is less focused on them, being more focused on interventions that are considered to be less costly.

Two of the stakeholders spoke about the potential trade-off between equity considerations, cost effectiveness, and subsequent potential to scale. Many of the interventions that have scaled concerned governance, teacher training etc, with limited focus on inclusive education. As a stakeholder explained:

'government doesn't have a holistic approach. When it's government money by school education – when they will build an equity argument, they will very silently shoot it down because the government wants to do cost-saving, is in a hurry, and wants to make a point.'

Five of the stakeholders argued that cost is not always the primary determinant of whether an intervention is scaled, as political visibility often plays a more significant role. One interviewee noted:

'this is not the main scale-up argument – scaling argument is mostly political – how much political visibility will they get – how is this satisfied – equity, value for money arguments are all departmental – government's cabinet and chief executives do not look into equity – unless and until it's on girls' education, disability.'

Yet there are important examples of interventions being discontinued for being cost intensive. The Punjab school improvement framework that was launched in 2020 by the Government of Punjab included 24 indicators. As one stakeholder noted, it was discontinued because:

'the data collectors stopped collecting data from all of the schools – its very cost intensive – schools themselves provide information you do a random check – but if you maintain this army one point or the other there will be fewer people because how will you pay them.'

Other examples include [SEF's scholarship programme](#) in public schools. According to a stakeholder, the cost for this programme is approximately PKR 20,000 per child. Due to the limited budget, the programme's size has also been limited. Costs are also high for education technology interventions, such as the Teleschool and Taleem Ghar initiatives by the federal and Punjab governments, respectively, which, although scaled initially, did not work. Similarly, interventions such as the Climate Resilient Classroom Construction project in Punjab struggled to scale due to high infrastructure costs and competing budget priorities ([e-PACT, 2022](#)). Box 3 further highlights how the Pakistan Reading Project was discontinued because of high costs.

In some cases, challenges beyond cost, such as security concerns in former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and rural Balochistan, prevent interventions from expanding. As such, financial constraints, while significant, are not always the sole limiting factor in the scalability of education reforms.

Box 3: Pakistan Reading Project

The Pakistan Reading Project, implemented from 2013 to 2020, was a comprehensive initiative designed to enhance early-grade reading skills across seven provinces in Pakistan, reaching approximately 1.7 million students. The project encompassed several key interventions, including the provision of reading and learning materials, face-to-face teacher trainings, monthly Teacher Inquiry Group meetings, and school support visits. These components collectively aimed to improve classroom learning environments, reform policies and systems for reading, and strengthen community-based support to establish a culture of reading in the country.

Despite its extensive reach, the project's cost effectiveness was a significant concern. A cost effectiveness analysis focusing on a two-year cohort in KP revealed that about half of the total expenses were allocated to fixed costs, including NGO operating expenses and support staff. This substantial overhead contributed to a total cost of US\$ 1,518 per school, equating to

roughly US\$ 45 per student. Such high per student costs posed challenges for scalability, especially considering the financial constraints of the Pakistani education system.

Further examination of PRP's components indicated that certain elements were more cost effective than others. The combination of reading and learning materials, face-to-face teacher trainings, and school support visits proved to be the most efficient, enhancing student reading comprehension by 0.42 to 0.69 standard deviations per component added. In contrast, Teacher Inquiry Groups were less effective, with some analyses suggesting a negative impact on reading comprehension scores. Given these findings, the overall high costs and mixed effectiveness of certain components hindered the project's scalability, limiting its broader implementation across Pakistan's diverse educational landscape. As one stakeholder noted:

'From what I talk to people – part of the problem was that it was so expensive and had so much potential – but it just could not keep going – for the government to keep up.'

Source: [International Rescue Committee \(2022\)](#)

3.2.4 Data, monitoring, and evaluation

Data, monitoring, and evaluation are critical in determining whether education interventions can be successfully scaled (Artuc *et al.*, 2020). Reliable data enable policymakers to design evidence-based strategies, improving policy effectiveness and resource allocation ([VanLandingham, 2020](#)). While there is a growing recognition of the importance of data and evidence-based policymaking in Pakistan, challenges such as institutional barriers, limited incentives for evidence use, and insufficient coordination between evidence producers and policymakers can impede the interventions' effective implementation ([SEDI, 2021](#)). Yet, where effectively utilised, data in Pakistan have played a crucial role in scaling interventions. For example, STRIDE successfully used data to highlight the mismatch in school distribution in Punjab. By demonstrating that fiscal constraints could be navigated within the existing system, STRIDE made a case for cost-effective upgradation of primary schools into middle schools, leading to the government piloting and later scaling the Insaaf Afternoon Schools school. One stakeholder explained:

'We just have to look at the numbers. If I display three figures – 32,157 primary schools, 7,177 elementary schools, and 8,023 high schools – you can immediately see the transition gap. 70% of dropout happens at primary level. They [I-SAPS] knew there was a fiscal constraint, and this thinking helped in developing the idea...found the solution from within the system, and when the results were good, the government was happy to take it forward.'

Similarly, a stakeholder from KP explained how a single financial year's data showed that upgrading 30 schools into afternoon shifts under the FCDO-supported technical assistance in KESP, instead of building new ones, saved PKR 450 million. Giving these estimates to the provincial government resulted in the afternoon shift programme being taken up by them.

These examples demonstrate the important role international organisations/donor funding have played in the introduction and scaling of education interventions in Pakistan. They also demonstrate how data can help develop cost-effective, scalable interventions, when effectively leveraged. For instance, in Balochistan, some stakeholders used data to build home-grown solutions to girls' education challenges. One respondent explained:

'We observed that the highest dropout rates for girls are after sixth grade. We looked at the data very closely and realised that puberty, nutrition, and mobility restrictions were major factors. We introduced a PKR 2,000 stipend for girls performing well in school, and retention rates have significantly improved. We now have over 100 girls in Grades 7, 8, and 10.'

Despite some positive examples, a lack of data integration and weak monitoring mechanisms continue to hinder the potential for scaling interventions effectively. Importantly, there is limited availability of disaggregated data across key GESI variables, such as gender, income levels, and disability. This gap makes it challenging to assess whether interventions are effectively reaching marginalised populations, and whether equity considerations are being meaningfully integrated into their design and implementation. While some stakeholders highlighted that the government has extensive datasets from the national census and administrative records, others emphasised that the real challenge lies in how these data are utilised, rather than their availability. Many respondents spoke about how data often exist in silos, preventing different government departments from making informed, evidence-based decisions. One stakeholder observed:

'the Social Welfare Department has four different portfolios linked to disabilities, girls' stipend programmes, and literacy. Non-formal education has its own datasets. None of these datasets speak to each other. Secretaries don't talk, and when decisions are taken, they are based on limited data.'

Another respondent explained how the lack of long-term data monitoring undermines scaled interventions:

'the government does not have institutional memory. When donors leave, they take the technical assistance with them. The things that don't have impact evaluations are hard to scale up.'

This challenge is compounded by the reluctance of political leaders to engage with system-level issues, such as poor learning outcomes. One interviewee explained:

'Quality data is difficult to gather, and there is no deep work on it. Learning indicators have been getting worse, and nothing has improved. The challenge is so enormous that no politician wants to engage with it. They know it's a black hole – within their political term, it's not going to change.'

While initiatives such as the Sindh School Monitoring System (Box 4) show that targeted data analysis can inform locally relevant solutions, the broader challenge remains that many large-scale government interventions are not monitored effectively after being implemented. While conducting the scoping review for this report, we also encountered a lack of systematic evaluations of education interventions, with only large-scale donor-funded projects like PESP II and KESP II having robust evaluations available. Without robust evaluation mechanisms, interventions risk being scaled without the necessary evidence to ensure their long-term impact.

Box 4: The Sindh Monitoring System

The Sindh School Monitoring System, established in January 2015 through an agreement with GPE donors, is a technology-based initiative of the School Education and Literacy Department of Sindh. Its primary objective is to monitor teacher attendance across schools in the province. The system collects, analyses, and disseminates data on key school-level indicators, including student enrolment and teacher presence, monthly. This approach allows for real-time monitoring and timely responses, to identify weaknesses within the education system.

The system has significantly reduced teacher absenteeism by implementing biometric systems and GPS-enabled monitoring, leading to disciplinary action against 40,000 absent teachers and 6,000 absconders. Additionally, the system collects real-time data on over 26,200 schools and 210,000 education staff, enabling data-driven decision-making and resource allocation. Regular assessments through the Sindh School Monitoring System have also contributed to improved school infrastructure monitoring, aiding in prioritising development and maintenance efforts.

However, challenges remain, particularly in regard to data collection inefficiencies and the need for system enhancements to improve overall performance.

Despite these limitations, the Sindh School Monitoring System continues to be a vital tool for promoting accountability and efficiency in Sindh's education sector.

Source: [World Bank \(2017\)](#); [Halepoto et al. \(2023\)](#).

3.2.5 Aligning with government and donor agendas and timing

Alignment between political priorities and donor agendas is needed to ensure interventions do not fail in contexts with weak institutional support ([Levy, 2022](#)). Almost all the respondents stressed how aligning with government and donor priorities and timing interventions appropriately serves as both an enabler and a barrier.

Technical assistance plays a crucial role in ensuring the sustainability of interventions by providing the necessary expertise, evidence-based guidance, and policy alignment. Over the past two decades, local and international organisations supporting the government in piloting or scaling education interventions have largely done so within large-scale education sector support programmes, particularly in KP and Punjab, often backed by FCDO and, at times, the World Bank. For example, in the case of STRIDE, FCDO-sponsored technical support through I-SAPS (as part of PESP II) was instrumental in facilitating government buy-in, ensuring effective implementation, and enabling the programme's long-term integration into the education system. Similarly, in KESP, FCDO-supported technical assistance played a key role in making the case for the introduction of double shifts in schools, demonstrating how such support can drive policy change. Given its critical role in the introduction and expansion of interventions, the contribution of technical assistance to scaling efforts in Pakistan warrants further recognition.

Some interventions scale effectively because they address an urgent systemic need, supported by both the government and donors, as emphasised by five stakeholders with experience working with the government. An example of this is the institutionalised use of the TEACH observation tool in Punjab. '*Classroom observation scaled because there was almost a thirst within the system*', explained one stakeholder, emphasising that the timing of an intervention matters. When bureaucrats see an initiative that is pitched by a donor as an opportunity to demonstrate impact or improve their own standing, they are more likely to champion it. Another respondent highlighted that:

'FCDO has given them an opportunity, and this was helped by personal connections – government bureaucrats want to look good.'

This suggests that, beyond the technical design of a project, its ability to scale often hinges on relationships, persuasion, and the right alignment between donor objectives and government incentives. The Reading Hour, detailed in Box 5, is an important example of this: here, donor and government agendas clearly aligned. However, this also creates risks, as interventions that do not fit within these dynamics – regardless of their effectiveness – may struggle. An example of how donor-driven urgency undermined a successful intervention was a World Bank-funded initiative in Balochistan in the 1990s, which successfully established over 2,200 girls' schools using a 12-step methodology developed in close collaboration with communities. This process, which involved identifying local female teachers, training them, and forging community partnerships, led to the enrolment of over 300,000 girls in five years. The success of the intervention led to further funding, but subsequent projects attempted to fast-track the process, reducing the 12-step methodology to a few steps so that schools could be established within weeks rather than months. One stakeholder expressed frustration over this shift, saying:

'The continued funding also came from the World Bank, but the same bank came in and said this is too long a process... how can you create institutions of learning in a month and hand it over to them?'

This rush to meet funding deadlines and demonstrate rapid results ultimately weakened the impact of the initiative. Similar patterns have been observed in other donor-driven projects, where initial success led to expansion but the very elements that made them effective were abandoned in the interest of greater scale and speed.

Another issue that arises is the varying programme-related terminology that is used by donors. Two of the stakeholders noted that the terminology and frameworks used by donors frequently change, creating confusion among government officials and implementers. As one respondent put it:

'We keep on shifting the goal posts. For example, UNESCO started off with campaigns on literacy. We called it LND [Learning and Numeracy Drive], then learning poverty... it confuses the government officials.'

These shifting priorities can make it difficult for local actors to maintain long-term, sustainable strategies, as they must constantly adapt to new donor preferences and funding conditions. This issue is compounded by the need for governments to align their education policies with global funding trends, rather than context-specific needs. While donor support is often critical in launching and sustaining initiatives, the inconsistency in donor frameworks can disrupt long-term planning and implementation. Without a more cohesive approach that aligns donor support with long-term government commitments, education reform in Pakistan will continue to face challenges in achieving meaningful scale.

Box 5: Aligning donor and government incentives – the case of the Reading Hour

The Reading Hour intervention, first piloted in 2023 across schools in Islamabad Capital Territory, Sindh, and Punjab, is a significant step towards improving foundational learning in Pakistan. The initiative emerged from longstanding efforts by academia, civil society, and international organisations to address the lack of dedicated reading instruction time in schools. Initially trialled in 30 schools over three weeks, the intervention has now expanded to all 432 schools in Islamabad. One reason for its success is its alignment with the federal government, as it is chaired by the Federal Ministry of Education and the Federal Directorate of Education, which makes it easier to implement nationwide. Unlike many interventions that struggle to gain traction, Reading Hour has been championed by key individuals in government, who are committed to making it work. As one stakeholder noted:

'it worked because it was championed by one or two very important people – it means key people really, really championed it and got behind it.'

Beyond individual leadership, the success of Reading Hour has also been driven by strategic donor advocacy and financial incentives. The World Bank and other investors played a crucial role in promoting the intervention, but it was the Secretary of Education at the time who pushed for its adoption. Civil society leaders have also contributed to a broader movement around foundational learning, creating a momentum that has made Reading Hour more than just another pilot programme. A key distinction is that the subject is not merely a topic of discussion at high-level conferences – there has been a clear commitment to action. As one stakeholder explained:

'there was a kind of zeitgeist around foundational learning – the Reading Hour was championed by the Ministry. It wasn't just the high-level secretary, but the person in charge of schools who said, "We are going to do it."'

The initiative has also benefited from government ownership over funding decisions, as demonstrated by the World Bank's decision to finance the development of foundational learning policies as part of a broader US\$ 200 million programme. However, this was not solely donor-driven – the same Education Secretary who championed Reading Hour influenced the World Bank to allocate funding for foundational learning policies.

This case illustrates that government leadership, backed by donor support, is key to scaling interventions successfully, ensuring that initiatives like Reading Hour can be sustained and institutionalised beyond donor funding cycles.

Source: Key informant interviews and [PFL Hub \(2024\)](#)

4 Conceptualising scalable education interventions in Pakistan

As the previous section has shown, there are different enablers of and barriers to scaling education interventions in Pakistan. Insights from the project documentation reviewed and from the key informant interviews highlight the landscape of interventions that it has been possible to scale up in Pakistan, and those that it has not been possible to scale up, as well as the key enablers and barriers for scaling. Drawing on this analysis, we present a framework providing a set of guiding principles that can help project implementers embed their initiatives into government systems, while ensuring GESI considerations are incorporated throughout. This framework is informed by insights from the WWHGE and SCALE intellectual frameworks that focus on embedding interventions in government policy plans and regulatory frameworks. The following framework outlines key considerations for those looking to design, pilot, and expand education programmes effectively and equitably within Pakistan's education ecosystem.

1. Obtaining government involvement and buy-in from the start

Successful interventions plan for scale right from the **design phase**, ensuring government involvement and buy-in from the outset. Even when projects are donor-funded pilots, keeping government actors in the loop early on can facilitate later integration into national systems. One key insight from all the interviewed stakeholders was that education reform is not just about finding solutions to problems, but also about positioning solutions so that when opportunities arise, they can be implemented. As one respondent put it:

'Policy entrepreneurs have solutions that they peddle – solutions are looking for problems rather than problems looking at solutions. The art is that when the window of opportunity opens, you make use of it.'

Understanding government incentives is also critical. Decision makers are not necessarily educationists: they are bureaucrats with their own career priorities and political considerations. Some secretaries are driven by political capital and visibility, while others are more focused on technical policy reforms. A key recommendation is the need to tailor advocacy to government interests. As one stakeholder noted:

'Government people are bureaucrats, not educationists. Their interests are: how do I make my political masters happy? Make your pitch accordingly...know your opponent.'

2. Building capacity and systems from the beginning

Scaling an intervention requires not just financial investment but also **investment in human resources and institutional capacity**. Stakeholders emphasised that at least 25% of time and resources should be allocated at the start of any project to creating the necessary systems and personnel to sustain that project (even after funding ends). This involves training implementers, decision makers, and frontline staff, ensuring knowledge transfer takes place. Without this, interventions risk collapsing as soon as external funding ends.

Having a non-salary budget is critical to sustainability. This is the budget that is accrued for the daily running of interventions. It is often overlooked in funding calculations. Project implementers and donors must ensure a non-salary budget component is attached to the funding.

3. Demonstrating cost effectiveness and value for money, and leveraging flexible funding

Government buy-in is significantly easier when an intervention can clearly demonstrate cost effectiveness and value for money. Decision makers operate within tight fiscal constraints, and their primary concern is how much investment will be required and what the expected benefits will be. If an intervention is not designed with affordability in mind, it will struggle to gain traction within government budgets. A well-structured breakdown of costs, potential savings, and measurable outcomes can help secure support. One stakeholder highlighted that:

'First layer of solution is value for money: am I getting value for money out of this? What is the way for this?'

Interventions that show clear cost savings – such as afternoon school models that make use of existing infrastructure – are far more likely to gain government endorsement, as was the case for STRIDE. In assessing value for money and cost effectiveness, it is important not to equate these with low cost. As the Girls' Education Challenge has shown, it is possible to achieve value for money with equity (Colquhoun *et al.*, 2024).

Avoiding seeking government funding during the pilot phase can be beneficial as projects can easily stall due to bureaucratic procurement processes. Governments often have limited flexibility in spending, especially at the provincial level. Engaging with provincial foundations, such as SEF, private sector partners, and non-governmental entities can yield alternative sources of funding, particularly in the early stages of scaling an intervention. One respondent pointed out that:

'Even if I want to support an intervention, as secretary education department, I have less flexibility. If I have a foundation, I have more space even though it falls under the remit of government, but it has less bureaucracy.'

Ensuring that interventions have financial models that accommodate local constraints can make them more adaptable to different provincial contexts.

4. Implementation science-driven decision-making

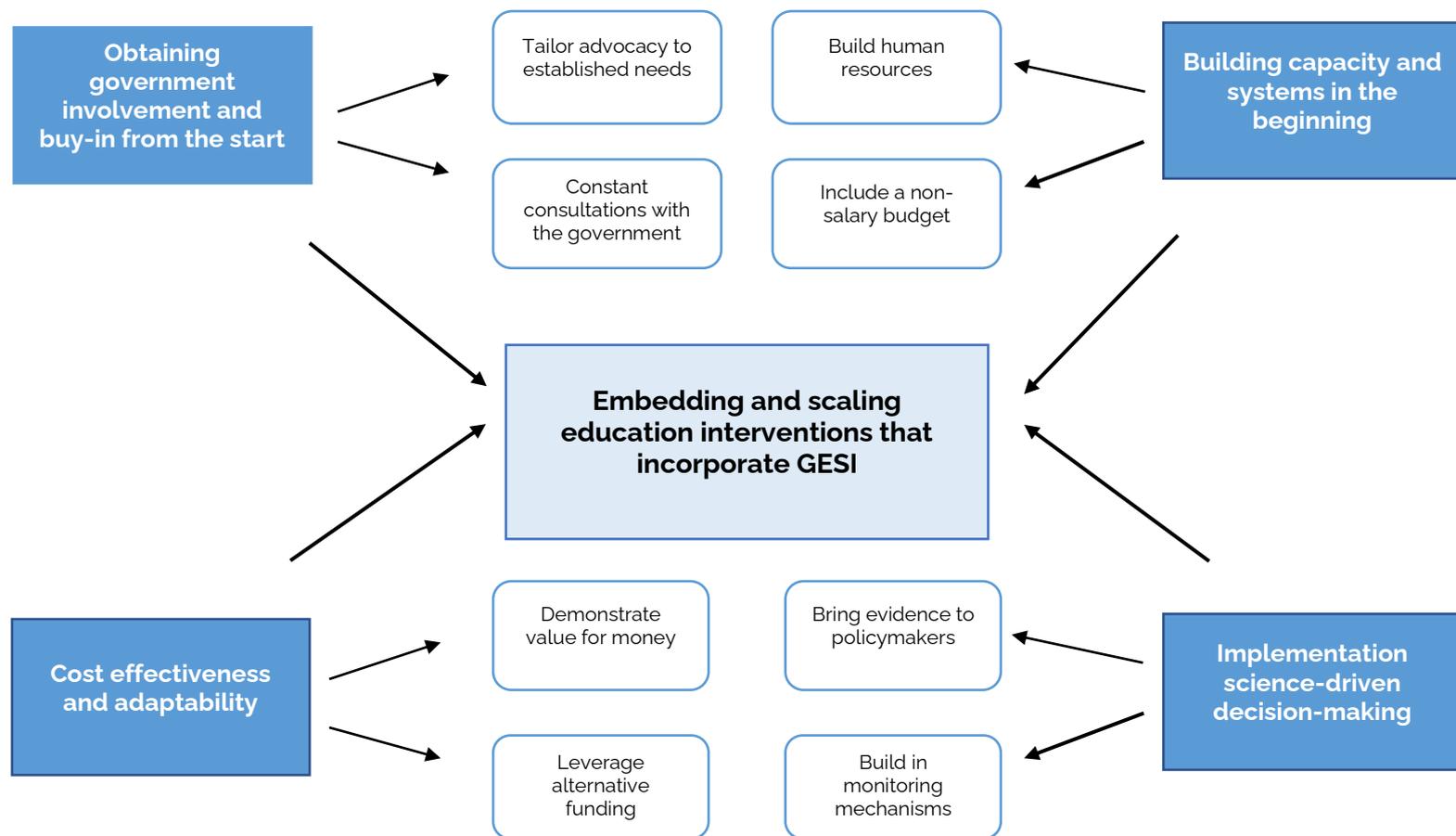
Successful interventions must be designed with **built-in monitoring and evaluation mechanisms**, ensuring that data are continuously collected and used to refine and improve implementation. A major barrier to scaling education interventions in Pakistan is the lack of robust data, with disaggregation according to GESI variables and utilisation. Many government departments have large datasets, but they are not always integrated or used effectively for decision-making. Such an implementation science approach where data and evidence is used to inform interventions and vice versa is therefore encouraged. Governments are often reluctant to commit resources to untested ideas, but they are more receptive when implementers bring data, case studies, and successful pilot results. As one stakeholder explained:

'Bring some proof, bring a concept note – give details on previous achievements, data is available.'

Ensuring that projects have strong learning outcome measurements, are subject to cost-benefit analyses, and receive independent evaluations can significantly increase their chances of being sustained and expanded.

These four components for conceptualising scalable interventions in Pakistan are visually presented in the framework in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Framework for scaling interventions in Pakistan



This framework highlights how scaling education interventions in Pakistan requires a combination of early government engagement, investment in capacity, cost effectiveness, flexible funding, and strong data-driven monitoring, while ensuring that GESI considerations are embedded throughout. There is no single formula for success, but interventions that align with government incentives, demonstrate financial sustainability, and adapt to local realities have the best chance of being integrated into national and provincial education systems. Similar to this framework, the WWHGE and SCALE programmes recognise that scaling is not just about replication: it is also about contextual adaptation, government ownership, and long-term sustainability.

The four stages of the WWHGE framework – efficacy, efficacy+, policy plans, and practice at scale – mirror key elements in our approach. The efficacy and efficacy+ stages align with our emphasis on evidence generation and contextual validation. The policy plans stage reflects our recognition that government buy-in and regulatory frameworks are essential for scaling, as interventions cannot expand meaningfully without systemic support. Finally, the practice at scale stage ties into our focus on embedding interventions into everyday education practices. All these components lead to the goal of effectiveness (learning at scale). However, we note that each of these frameworks requires further consideration of how scale can be achieved while embedding GESI, to ensure that scaling benefits all children and young people effectively.

Similarly, SCALE's approach to cost effectiveness and integration with national systems aligns with our focus on value for money, and institutionalisation of interventions, while recognising that these concepts need to take account of GESI. Notably, cost effectiveness and value for money do not mean low cost. Our framework highlights the need for leveraging existing structures, flexible funding, and embedding interventions within national education systems, which SCALE also prioritises through its demand-driven support and test-learn-adapt pilots.

Overall, these frameworks reinforce our argument that scaling is not a linear process but a dynamic and iterative one, requiring continuous collaboration, adaptation, and multi-stakeholder engagement. It is also important to understand that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to scaling. Crucially, scaling must happen in tandem with GESI considerations to ensure that all learners benefit. However, the framework presented in this report can act as a guide for implementers wanting to pitch, embed, and scale their interventions.

5. Scalability checklist for Pakistan

We conclude the report by bringing together lessons from the scoping review in a scalability checklist for Pakistan. Scaling in education is not merely about expanding the reach of an intervention: it is also about ensuring that its impact remains effective, sustainable, and contextually relevant. McLean and Gargani (2019) argue that scaling should be viewed as a process of amplifying impact, rather than simply increasing numbers, highlighting the need for adaptation rather than replication. Similarly, Muzaffar and Ansari (2023) emphasise that successful scaling requires alignment with policy frameworks, financial feasibility, and stakeholder coordination to ensure long-term sustainability. The Management Systems International (MSI) Scalability Assessment Checklist also stresses the importance of government buy-in, flexible funding, and continuous monitoring to assess whether an intervention remains effective as it expands. Finally, the Education Scalability Checklist, developed by organisations including VVOB-Education for Development, Brookings, Educate!, MSI, Pratham, and STiR Education emphasises the importance of aligning interventions with national policies, building institutional capacity, ensuring financial sustainability, and implementing robust monitoring and evaluation systems (Robinson, Wyss and Hanahan, 2023). Additionally, frameworks such as those of WWHGE and SCALE highlight the need for systemic reforms and institutional integration, ensuring that scaling efforts do not reinforce existing inequities but instead address structural barriers in education access and learning outcomes. A key insight from these frameworks is that education interventions must be designed with scalability in mind from the outset, incorporating governance alignment, financial planning, and robust evidence-generation mechanisms.

In Pakistan, scaling education interventions presents unique challenges due to decentralised governance, financial constraints, and capacity limitations within education departments (Muzaffar and Ansari, 2023). Provincial buy-in is crucial since education policy decisions are largely taken at the sub-national level, making it essential for interventions to align with local government priorities and administrative structures. Moreover, limited fiscal flexibility in provincial education budgets means that interventions perceived as expensive or resource-intensive struggle to gain traction, reinforcing the need to demonstrate cost effectiveness and explore alternative funding sources. Capacity constraints also necessitate a strong focus on institutional strengthening to prevent interventions from collapsing once external support ends. Furthermore, given the deep socioeconomic and gender disparities in education, scaling efforts must explicitly integrate GESI considerations to ensure that interventions reach, and benefit, marginalised groups.

Drawing on these insights, Table 3 presents the scalability checklist developed for Pakistan, which uses the MSI checklist as a starting point and then incorporates insights gathered for this report, including components of our scalability framework, ensuring that interventions are not only effective but also adaptable, sustainable, and inclusive. Notably, the scalability component on embedding GESI has been entirely designed by the authors, drawing on their own GESI assessment framework developed for the WWHGE. Such attention is often lacking in scalability frameworks and approaches, which risks leaving marginalised children and young people behind.

Table 3: Scalability checklist

Scalability component	Key considerations
Government involvement and policy alignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engage government stakeholders from the design phase to ensure government ownership and integration into national systems. - Align the intervention with national and provincial education policies and regulatory frameworks. - Address bureaucratic and political incentives to position the intervention effectively. - Establish multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms to ensure collective buy-in and sustainability. - Develop a strategic plan for scaling that allows for policy coherence across governance levels and adaptability to provincial contexts.
Capacity building and institutional strengthening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Allocate a proportion of resources to human and institutional capacity building. - Train government staff, teachers, and local implementers to ensure knowledge transfer and long-term ownership. - Ensure non-salary budget allocations to support operational costs beyond donor-driven salaries. - Use scalability assessments to identify capacity gaps and design targeted capacity-building plans. - Create partnerships with universities, teacher training institutions, and research organisations to enable professional development.
Embedding gender equality and social inclusion (GESI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote intersectional approaches to the design and conceptualisation of interventions that consider gender, socioeconomic, geographic, and disability-related inequalities in education access and outcomes.³ - Develop GESI-sensitive indicators within monitoring, evaluation, and learning frameworks to measure equitable outcomes. - Ensure inclusive participation of diverse stakeholders, including local communities, in programme design and decision-making to ensure the relevance of the intervention design and implementation. - Ensure there is gender diversity in the implementing team's composition. <p>Ensure GESI-sensitive methods for dissemination of intervention outputs are developed. This includes applying community-based approaches and inclusive language and representation, and using multiple formats for dissemination.</p>

³ Adapted from the GESI assessment framework created by the authors for WWHGE. This framework builds on the World Health Organization (WHO) gender assessment scale designed by WHO/TDR (the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases).

<p>Cost effectiveness and financial sustainability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Demonstrate the intervention's cost effectiveness to provide evidence to decision makers operating under fiscal constraints. This should take account of the potential higher costs of reaching marginalised populations, while assessing the potential benefits of doing so. - Ensure financial models are adaptable to provincial budget constraints and funding limitations. - Secure diverse funding sources (provincial education foundations, private sector, NGOs) to reduce government budget dependency in pilot phases. - Showcase value for money with equity considerations in terms of measurable long-term benefits, including for marginalised populations, rather than just focusing on low short-run costs.
<p>Evidence-driven and adaptive scaling</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implement robust monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems to track the effectiveness of implementation, including for those from marginalised backgrounds, to inform real-time adjustments for ensuring effectiveness and equity of the scaling process. - Use GESI-informed implementation science approaches that allow for adaptation based on emerging challenges. - Document qualitative case studies to document evidence on the effects of the scaling process, including for marginalised groups, to attract government and donor support. - Ensure data collection includes GESI variables to assess impact across different population groups. - Leverage existing government data systems to enhance institutional decision-making and sustainability, where possible.

Source: Developed by authors based on documents and interviews analysed in the paper and informed by the MSI scaling checklist.

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