

GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS: ASSESSING INSTITUTIONAL PERFORMANCE IN PAKISTAN'S EDUCATION SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

Within the context of Pakistani education, governance has undergone substantial reforms with key aspects including the introduction of decentralization, engagement of stakeholders, and the increased use of public-private partnerships (PPPs) for educational access, efficiency of education institutions, and service delivery. Despite these reforms, governance and accountability issues persist such as poor institutional capacity, non-implementation of policy, little consultation with stakeholders, and weak monitoring systems, which limit achievements in education. This study investigates the accountability mechanisms and institutional governance aspects of the educational PPPs in Pakistan and its impact on institutional performance. The study is conducted using qualitative research method of secondary data analysis in which the researcher reviews literature, government reports, policies and institutional records in a systematic way. Using Institutional Theory, the interaction of formal governance structures, informal institutional practices and organisational performance can be examined. The results show that PPPs can help to enhance administrative efficiency, establish monitoring mechanisms, build institutional coordination, and foster effective partnership building among stakeholders, provided that there is transparent governance, well-defined responsibilities in the PPP contracts, proper performance monitoring, and cooperative participation of stakeholders. Nevertheless, while good governance leads to good education, this does not always materialize in terms of quality of education and equity of provision or long-term sustainability, due to constraints in implementing good governance at the institutional level. The study suggests the need for enhancing governance capacities, accountability mechanisms, contract management, and incorporation of communities to make the PPPs in education more effective and sustainable in Pakistan.

Keywords: Educational Governance; Public-Private Partnerships; Institutional Theory; Accountability; Institutional Performance; Pakistan; Education Policy

Introduction

The educational governance in Pakistan has moved from the centralized administration towards the collaborative governance model with features of decentralization, participation, and greater involvement of the private sector. While

local autonomy and decision making has been encouraged, the state remains the central player in determining the education policy and ensuring coordination at the whole system level (Tunio et al., 2022).

This shift has helped increase the use of public-private partnerships (PPPs) as a key governance tool in education. Typically, under these arrangements the governments are responsible for financing and regulation, while the private sector is involved in service delivery, school management or infrastructure development. In line with the efforts to increase educational access and efficiency through shared governance, Pakistan has embraced various models of PPPs, such as foundation-assisted schools, voucher schools, adopt-a-school programmes, and Education Management Organisations (EMOs) (Ali et al., 2024).

The importance of institutional accountability has grown in these mixed governance systems due to the fact that educational results are not only a product of formal powers, they are also a product of well-defined responsibilities, good monitoring and joint decision making of several parties. Transparency, engagement of stakeholders, performance monitoring, and defining institutional responsibilities have been shown to be key in ensuring the long-term success of education PPPs (Gupta & Prusty, 2025).

Even after continuous reforms and changes in the education system, governance issues are still widespread in Pakistan. Research has documented a tendency for disconnect between policy development and execution, inadequate monitoring systems, inefficiencies in the bureaucracy, little involvement of stakeholders in policy development and limited institutional transparency. While decentralization has delegated some administrative functions to provincial and local bodies, the speed of change in institutional structures has been outpaced by the speed of change in governance, and organizational capacity has been a significant challenge in implementing decentralization (Farooqi & Forbes, 2019).

The governance failures are especially critical in the context of PPPs, where accountability is split between the public and private parties. There is international evidence that the use of hybrid governance can result in weak accountability coordination in cases where public goals and private motives are poorly aligned. The level of

contractual predictability, the maintenance responsibilities, and the extent of community involvement have often been insufficient to make educational PPPs sustainable and effective, especially in developing countries (Stafford & Stapleton, 2021).

However, there is evidence to suggest that institutional performance under PPP is uneven even in Pakistan. Although there are positive indications of increased autonomy, increased monitoring, and increased administrative accountability in the schools, evaluation of the Education Management Organisations (EMO) programme in Sindh indicates that these improvements have not yet been reflected in increased quality, access, and equity of education. Educational reforms in other provinces are also experiencing similar challenges in implementation, such as resource inequities, lack of capacity and inconsistent stakeholder participation (Ind et al., 2022).

In this context, the present study aims at exploring the impact of governance structures on the performance of the educational public-private partnerships in Pakistan, to find out the accountability mechanisms that facilitate the implementation of the educational PPPs, and to suggest some reforms in the governance system of educational PPPs to strengthen them. Specifically, the study will analyse governance structures, review accountability mechanisms, measure institutional performance and recommend context-sensitive institutional reforms focused on governance and transparency, institutional engagement, contractual clarity and performance-based governance. The study adds to the emerging literature on educational governance, public administration, PPPs and institutional reform, by filling the gap of empirical studies on the effectiveness of governance in the growing partnership based education system in Pakistan.

Literature Review

Educational governance is the mechanism of authority, control, decision making and relationships that govern education systems. Modernist scholarship views governance as a shift from a state-centered approach to administration

to a more collaborative form of governance that is decentralised, includes stakeholder involvement, is performance driven and has public-private partnerships. In Pakistan, there have been reforms that have created a hybrid governance model that integrates aspects of traditional public administration, new public management and network governance instead of substituting one governance system with another (Riaz et al., 2023). There have been governance reforms that have increased local discretion (school councils, devolution and the increasing role of non-state actors) but implementation has been inconsistent. There has been a tendency to go slowly when it comes to formal institutional reforms, as continued central oversight and limited capacity have been a barrier to adaptation of governance practices alongside policy reform (Farooqi & Forbes, 2019).

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) in education are a form of cooperation between public and private parties in which the private entity is responsible for the provision of educational services, the management of schools, school buildings, or the provision of infrastructure and institutional support and/or the financing of educational services while the public body is responsible for financing and regulating. These collaborations can take various forms, such as voucher schemes, school under a foundation, adopt-a-school programmes, charter type arrangements and Education Management Organisations (Ali et al., 2024).

Globally, PPPs are encouraged as ways to provide access to extra resources, skills and creativity in education systems struggling with budget and administrative problems. Although evidence shows that PPPs often enhance access to education, in developing countries, their influence on educational quality, equity, and institutional development has been inconsistent (Duodu & Egyin, 2025).

Governance and accountability are thus the key elements in the effectiveness of PPP. The key elements of successful partnerships include effective stakeholder engagement, clear institutional accountability, good decision-making, strong contractual agreements, and the

use of monitoring systems based on performance, which have the potential to ensure accountability to the public and quality of the services provided (Gupta & Prusty, 2025).

Comparative studies also illustrate the impact of institutional designs on the accountability outcomes of hybrid governance arrangements. In some cases, partnership arrangements have unnecessarily weak accountability, often by dividing responsibility, and creating a complex reporting process for public monitoring, while in other cases, they have broadened the accountability framework and enhanced accountability reporting. As a result, accountability is more about governance design than about having a public-private partnership in place (Stafford & Stapleton, 2021).

Student achievement is not the only component of institutional performance under educational PPPs, but also administrative efficiency, financial management, institutional sustainability, service quality and institutional capacity. The literature on education infrastructure partnerships suggests that effective maintenance planning, shared governance, contract flexibility, and multi-stakeholder approaches to evaluation frameworks are key factors in ensuring long-term success (Junhao & Li, 2025).

The Pakistan experience is typical of the opportunities and problems faced by educational PPPs. In order to enhance access to education, governance and school management, several partnership models, such as Education Management Organisations, foundation-assisted schools, voucher programmes, and adopt-a-school arrangements have been put in place at provincial level. These measures have shown to be effective in increasing institutional autonomy and administrative accountability, but in achieving better educational outcomes, quality, equity and access have been relatively modest (Ind et al., 2022).

Widespread research on educational reform also points to the poor governance situation in the education sector in Pakistan. The lack of administrative efficiency, irregular policy implementation, corruption, ineffective monitoring systems, limited stakeholder

participation, and poor institutional capacity are still causing educational reforms to be less effective and unsustainable (Bukhari et al., 2025). Similar governance issues exist in the higher education sector, as the lack of democratic engagement and communication and centralized decision-making limit the quality of the sector's performance and function. The results show that governance problems are not just limited to partnerships at the school level, but are present in the wider education sector of Pakistan (Hussain & Shoukat, 2026).

Further evidence from the provincial reforms confirms that even best administration is not enough to secure good educational results. While some schemes like public schools reorganization program in Punjab have enhanced the management of available resources and enhanced organizational efficiency, implementation gaps, lack of enough professional training, and low participation of stakeholders have affected the effectiveness of these schemes over time (Qurashi et al., 2025). Likewise, administration capacity, human resources and institutional support are identified as ongoing challenges in improving education, especially in rural public schools (Khan et al., 2024).

The effects of PPPs on the development of educational infrastructure have also been demonstrated in other developing countries, with a focus on the role of the government. In other words, the success of a PPP depends not only on the nature of the partnership but also on the quality of its governance (Omachi, 2025). Other findings of school infrastructure projects show that for maintaining educational facilities and for long term institutional performance, it is essential to have a collaborative governance, maintenance planning and well -defined operational responsibilities (Dimaculangan & Lunar, 2026).

The literature does however show two important research gaps. First, most studies focus on access to education, rates of enrolment, financing and learning outcomes and relatively little attention is given to governance quality and accountability mechanisms. While past reviews have recognized that governance evidence on PPPs is still incomplete despite its widespread application in developing countries (Hares, 2021). Second, there

is a paucity of empirical studies that explicitly and systematically use the concepts of governance to understand how accountability systems affect the performance of institutions in Pakistan's educational PPPs. While there are good examples of governance frameworks internationally, empirical studies in Pakistan remain primarily on implementation issues and have not yet explored the institutional link between transparency, participation, contractual governance and accountability. This gap is addressed in the present study in the main contribution.

Methodology

The method used in this study is a qualitative method with a secondary data analysis approach. It is suitable because governance in an educational public-private partnership (PPP) encompasses policy intentions, institutional rules, implementation processes, and accountability practices that are best documented, interpreted, and understood in a context rather than as numbers. In education policy, qualitative research can be especially useful because policy reforms in the education system can be different in different institutional and/or regional contexts, and it is important to understand how and why policy outcomes occur (Bingham et al., 2019).

Documentary secondary qualitative analysis is suitable to be used when information is synthesized from several documents and/or recurring patterns are identified. This method allows researchers to study governance structures in a systematic fashion, without conducting their own fieldwork (Lochmiller, 2021). The study is based on the government reports, policy documents, provincial education reform plans, publications of international organizations and peer-reviewed articles in journal publications. Institutional documents, policy papers, legal frameworks, contractual agreements, and archival documents have also been used in previous studies to explore educational governance and PPPs, as well as governance structures and implementation processes (Tunio et al., 2022). The use of official documents and scholarly literature not only helps establish the credibility of the results but also facilitates analysis of the policy intentions and

academic evidence, while also enriching the policy relevance of the analysis (Pandey, 2025).

The following types of publications are included in criteria: peer reviewed journal articles and official policy documents in English between 2015 and 2025. Thus, the review has been limited to the most recent literature to ensure that the analysis is based on current reforms, debates on accountability, and new developments in governance of educational PPP (Ali et al., 2024). Analyses of data are done by thematic analysis with comparative policy analysis and document analysis. Thematic analysis can be used to identify recurring concepts and governance patterns in qualitative evidence and comparative policy analysis can be used to systematically compare institutional reforms and governance models in different education contexts (Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

A mixed coding strategy is used, which involves both an inductive and deductive strategy. This enables emerging themes in governance to be understood in the light of the themes developed in the literature and allows for an understanding of this through the theoretical concepts of Institutional Theory (Xu & Zammit, 2020). The role of document analysis in the analysis of policy documents, contracts, implementation reports, and institutional records is also a tool to gain a systematic understanding of governance arrangements and accountability mechanisms in educational PPPs (Saeed et al., 2018). Ethically, the study is based only on the availability of secondary sources of information which are of public domain and therefore do not involve direct participation of human subjects. However, ethical guidelines are upheld with proper citation, unbiased selection of criteria, interpretation of evidence, and reporting of analytical methods.

Theoretical Framework

This study utilizes the Institutional Theory, which elucidates the influence of formal rules, informal norms and governance structures on organizational behavior and institutional performance. The theory is especially applicable to the study of educational PPPs as the success of a governance outcome will also hinge on the

institutional legitimacy and organisational capacity of the PPP as well as the interaction between the public and private actors (Casady et al., 2020). This framework is particularly pertinent in the context of Pakistan as the governance of education has shifted from public administration to a blend of managerial and collaborative governance, with none of the three being the exclusive norm (Riaz et al., 2023). Formal Institutions are legislations, contractual arrangements, regulatory frameworks, accountability procedures and performance standards, within the context of Institutional Theory. Informal institutions refer to norms of behaviour, trust, culture and expectations that shape the relationship between public and private partners (Wang & Kuchynska, 2026).

The importance of institutional legitimacy is also worth emphasizing; governance systems will be more sustainable if stakeholders believe that they are transparent, credible, and serve public goals. Decentralisation, PPP adoption, and mechanisms of accountability are some governance reforms aimed at reshaping institutional relations, but these are often hampered by prevailing bureaucratic practices and institutional capacity (Farooqi & Forbes, 2019).

In this study, the governance mechanisms that affect institutional accountability and organizational performance are transparency, stakeholder participation, contract management, monitoring systems, collaborative decision making and risk sharing arrangements. Accountability is also different in different PPP models, which can be understood by using the concept of Institutional Theory. The way accountability is strengthened or weakened in the partnership depends on the type of partnership, with some arrangements involving collaborative governance and effective institutional coordination and others involving multi-organisational distribution of authority that can result in a lack of accountability. (Stafford & Stapleton, 2021).

Governance quality also impacts on institutional performance. There is comparative evidence that proper governance structures enhance the quality and continuity of educational services and organizational coordination while providing

suitable institutional capacity and financing mechanisms and ensuring sustainability (Duodu & Egyin, 2025). Research on the infrastructure component of education further indicates that the sustainability of the performance of a PPP is closely related to institutional responsibilities, maintenance planning, and partnership environments that are conducive to partnership management in the long term (Dimaculangan & Lunar, 2026). Results from Pakistan also show that the implementation of PPP-initiated reforms, which has bolstered school autonomy, monitoring systems and accountability at the institutional level, has had more modest impacts on educational quality, access and equity (Ind et al., 2022). Another research on higher education partnerships also shows that institutional readiness, such as the capacity of governance, leadership commitment, and institutional support, is crucial in implementing PPP initiatives successfully (Hassan & Ahmed, 2024).

Overall, Institutional Theory offers an extensive framework into how governance systems, accountability systems, and institutional rules affect the performance of educational PPPs in Pakistan. The theory does not focus on the design of the policy and their consequences but on the interaction between formal regulations, informal practice and the capacity of the organisations.

Discussion

Governance arrangements, accountability systems and institutional barriers are influential for the performance of Educational PPPs in Pakistan. It is observed across the evidence that clear roles, credible monitoring, and institutional capacity enabling coordination and transparency is best suited for the implementation of PPPs (Gupta & Prusty, 2025). The government is the main actor in the governance of health systems, even when there are partnerships, as it is responsible for financing, regulating and supervising the development of the health system, while the private actors are responsible for management, services and operational flexibility (Tunio et al., 2022). Educational PPPs are not about state withdrawal but about sharing responsibilities, and there are continuum of models including EMOs

and foundation-assisted schools, vouchers and adopt-a-school models (Ali et al., 2024). The EMO model was created to integrate public accountability with private innovation in Sindh, where it included KPIs like enrolment, attendance, and retention to delineate accountability (Rind, 2024). Moreover, a network analysis study also reveals that the coordination of public and private institutions is enhanced through the assistance of intermediaries, institutions which are intermediaries between the two sectors, and which are also public institutions that guide, rather than private institutions that represent dispersed actors (Caves & Oswald-Egg, 2021). This means that the quality of governance will not only be influenced by who is participating, but also how roles are coordinated within the partnership.

These governance arrangements impact on implementation primarily via accountability mechanisms. The research from the PPP field in recent years reveals that transparency, responsibility, performance, stakeholder involvement, contract management and performance management are fundamental parts of a comprehensive accountability mechanism (Dove et al., 2025). Monitoring matters, as PPPs with explicit monitoring and evaluation provisions have better reports of monitoring, and performance information is regularly used as a tool to make modifications to implementation over time (J. & Li, 2025). Contract management is also vital as it promotes better cooperation and minimizes drift in operations through well-defined contractual terms, amendment processes, and communication channels (Benitez-Avila et al., 2018). Financial accountability is also important for the legitimacy of PPPs as financial transparency, budget discipline, independent audits, and real-time tracking of finance, are linked to improved resource allocation and reduced accountability gaps (Akinsulire & Ohakawa, 2022). Participative monitoring and stakeholder dialogue enhance trust, ownership, and external control of the process, which means community oversight is still required (Eric et al., 2025).

The performance of institutions involved in PPPs varies, rather than being consistently good. Enhanced administrative effectiveness and operational responsiveness are best documented benefits of PPPs, particularly where private managers are allowed greater autonomy, and there are performance systems in place (Fuya et al., 2021). Evidence from reform in Punjab suggests that governance enhancement and school development are correlated with administrative efficiency, though the challenge of resource and bureaucratic constraints is greater in rural schools. (Sjoquist, 2015) Finally, resource utilisation can also be improved as PPPs are designed to merge the public funding with the private management capacity and some models have successfully increased access in the low-income areas at a comparatively low cost to government (Verma & Verma, 2022). However, evidence of service quality gains is less uniform: PPPs seem more effective in improving access than quality of learning, equity and long-term outcomes (Fomba et al., 2022). This will result in an increase in organizational efficiency before a wider increase in educational quality.

This disparity can be attributed to a number of governance issues. The broader education reforms in Pakistan still face challenges with weak implementation (Bukhari et al., 2025), policy inconsistencies, administrative inefficiencies, and low involvement of stakeholders. In reality, local managers found that devolution was an opportunity to augment their lack of organizational capacity and limited resources, and to mitigate the continued exercise of top-down control (Farooqi & Forbes, 2019). More general evidence from developing countries suggests that weak institutions, inconsistent regulation, corruption, and poor project management skills are barriers to development (Das et al., 2025). Political instability and corruption are particularly harmful as it stunts the efficiency of investment in education and education quality through unskilful and corrupt recruitment and conduct of teachers (Hussain & Shoukat, 2026). Transparency in decision-making, communication difficulties and lack of stakeholder participation remain to be a challenge in institutions more broadly in Pakistan.

Viewed from Institutional Theory, the results indicate that not only the formal rules, but also the informal ones have an effect on PPP performance. Data in formal institutions like contracts, KPIs, reporting systems, and regulations can hold people accountable, if roles are clearly defined, risk is shared, and there's a way to enforce oversight (Chileshe et al., 2021). Informal institutions like trust, relational norms, dialogue and collaborative habits are also equally important as they would only work if the partners could internalise contractual controls in day to day interactions. If organizational institutional arrangements are hybrid but coherent, organizations become legitimate and do better (Riaz et al., 2023). This could be the reason for some PP schools demonstrating high levels of autonomy and monitoring and yet not achieving improvements in equity, quality, or sustainability (Dimaculangan & Lunar, 2026).

The policy implications are obvious. Education partnerships in Pakistan require robust institutional capacity building in terms of well-trained public officials, stable PPP learning systems, knowledge transfer and benchmarking. They also require a harmonized accountability system that combines monitoring, risk sharing, contracting, and financial monitoring throughout the project life cycle (Fuya et al., 2021). Monitoring systems should employ credible indicators, periodic evaluation, and feedback mechanisms instead of focusing solely on self-reporting or limited enrolment goals. Governance practices should be transparent, with public reporting, digital tracking and enhanced community engagement to ensure accountability is visible beyond government and contractors (Eric et al., 2025).

The last lesson is that PPP reform must pay less attention to the expansion of partnership models and pay more attention to enhancing the governance quality of the partnerships. Private participation, in and of itself, does not lead to better educational outcomes; rather, the outcomes are influenced by whether or not private institutions are aligned with incentives, the public purpose is protected, and accountability is maintained across actors. Improving education

PPPs in Pakistan will need concerted state leadership, clarity in contracts, robust monitoring, transparent finance, and meaningful citizen oversight, to improve institutional governance and performance, not just to shift responsibility.

Conclusion

In this study, Institutional Theory was used to analyze the relationship between the governance arrangements and accountability systems of educational public-private partnerships (PPPs) in Pakistan and their institutional outcomes. The analysis also shows that good educational partnerships are not the ones that are present but the ones for which good governance is provided. The study shows that despite the growing trend of introducing PPPs in Pakistan to enhance access, management and institutional efficiency in education, governance problems remain as a bottleneck that limits the overall performance of the PPPs. PPPs still face challenges in achieving lasting benefits on educational quality and equity, due to weak institutional capacity, inconsistent policy implementation, lack of accountability systems, low participation by stakeholders and inefficiencies at the administrative level. On the other hand, partnerships set up with good governance, with clear contractual obligations, with good monitoring tools, with co-decision making, with good accountability mechanisms, are likely to have a better institutional performance. The results of this study further underline the view that good governance is the key to the success and sustainability of educational PPPs, not just the involvement of the private sector.

The study contributes to the literature on educational governance by bringing Institutional Theory to the discussion to explain the governance dynamics of educational PPPs in the 'hybrid governance' context of Pakistan. This research focuses on governance and accountability rather than the access, enrolment or educational quality that are the focus of most previous evaluations of PPPs. It illustrates that formal institutions, including policies, contracts, regulatory frameworks and monitoring systems, need to complement informal institutions, including trust, collaboration, leadership and organizational

norms and conventions, to achieve effective educational outcomes. The results indicate that the future reform of education would need to go beyond an expansion of PPP programs to reinforcing the institutions and context in which PPPs are conducted. To improve the impact of educational partnerships in the long term, policymakers should focus on promoting a common approach to accountability, effective monitoring and evaluation systems, open financial management, digital governance tools, ongoing institutional strengthening, and engaged community involvement. The findings from the study are constrained by the use of secondary qualitative data that can only be used to gauge the perceptions and institutional practices of stakeholders in various provinces indirectly. In future, mixed method research, comparative provincial studies and primary data collection from the stakeholders of policy-making, school administration, teachers, private partners and local communities should be used to investigate the impact of governance reforms on educational quality and equity, institutional sustainability and student learning outcomes in various PPPs in Pakistan.

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