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ADMINISTRATIVE CHALLENGES IN PAKISTAN'S PRIMARY EDUCATION SYSTEM: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS WITH INDIA, SRI LANKA, AND BANGLADESH THROUGH A GOOD GOVERNANCE PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Pakistan's primary education system faces deep and persistent administrative challenges that continue to limit access, quality, and governance effectiveness despite repeated policy efforts. With over 25 million out-of-school children and one of the lowest literacy rates in South Asia , the need to understand and address administrative failures in Pakistan's primary education is both urgent and significant. This study aims to identify the major administrative challenges facing Pakistan's primary education system and to compare these challenges with those of India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh through the lens of good governance theory, supported by institutional theory and human capital theory. A qualitative comparative research design is employed, drawing on a systematic review of published and unpublished literature, including government policy documents, international organization reports, national education surveys, and peer-reviewed academic sources. The findings reveal that Pakistan performs weakest across all nine administrative factors examined, including management and structure, policy application, dropout rates, communication, testing systems, professional development, educational resources and curriculum content. Sri Lanka consistently emerges as the strongest performer, while India and Bangladesh offer valuable lessons in decentralization and community engagement respectively. The study concludes that improving Pakistan's primary education administration requires stronger governance, greater institutional accountability, and sustained investment in human capital at every level of the system.

Introduction:

Primary education should be accessible to all children as it is a key foundation for future Success (Ahmad et al.). All children have the right to education (Khalid & Tadesse, 2024). The importance of this has been acknowledged by the international community and is now included in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4) universal primary education, which seeks to ensure inclusive, equitable and quality education for all by 2030 (Sajjad et al., 2022). Even with best of intentions and policy attempts worldwide, there are still serious administrative problems in many developing countries that limit the quality of primary education (Khushik, 2021).

People gain greater information about life and its issues as they get more education (Rawlings & Cutting, 2024). It inspires creativity and fills empty minds with concepts (Rodríguez-Silva et al., 2026) . As a result, nations with solid educational institutions take the lead on the international stage (Ikram et al., 2025). The Founder of Pakistan Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah says, "Without education it is darkness, and with

education it is light. Education is a matter of life and death for our Nation"(Shabbir et al., 2022).

However, Pakistan's primary education system is facing serious problems. The lack of adequate education infrastructure and standards are affecting many children's access to quality education (Sajjad et al., 2022). Education at the primary level is a fundamental right of all Pakistan's children. The Constitution of 1973 in Article 25A states the responsibility of the state to provide "free and compulsory education" to all children from the age of 5 to 16 years. Article 37-B of Constitution of Pakistan forces the state to remove illiteracy from country and provide free compulsory education (Fazil & Ahmad, 2023). In Pakistan, the number of unschooled children aged 5 to 16 is 25.1 million which is the second highest in the world. This means that 36% of children not enrolled in school work or beg (Gillani, 2022)

There are still differences among different geographical regions in Pakistan. The latest UNICEF statistics show that there are around 3.5 million children (69%) out-of-school in Balochistan, 4.5 million in KPK, 7.4 million in Sindh and 9.7 million in Punjab. There are also gender gaps, with significant proportion of girls out of school than boys in Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Haider, 2026).

Among the developing countries in South Asia, relatively good progress has been made in primary education in terms of administrative and governance reform. In spite of limited resources, Bangladesh has achieved considerable success in primary enrolment, gender equity, and community involvement (Dutta, 2026). The Government of India has embarked on massive reforms in education to decentralize government, digitize education programmes, professionalize teachers and hold schools accountable (Bhuiyan, 2026). The education system in Sri Lanka is regarded as one of the best in Asia and the Pacific due to its high literacy rate, effective educational governance, school teacher management and strong school infrastructure, as well as public funding of education (Hummel et al., 2024).

In this article we will focus on the same issue by making comparative analysis of administrative issues in public primary education of Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka with Pakistan. This study conducts a critical review of literature to assess existing literature, identify administrative challenges and evaluate practices of good governance and management, and highlights successful reforms in governance and management in other developing countries. While many studies have been conducted on the education system in Pakistan, most of them have been on access to education, literacy, curriculum reforms or education budget. Fewer studies have addressed the administrative challenges of public education system of Pakistan and compared it with other developing countries with similar economic factors. Therefore, this article is a review of major problems of Public Primary Education System of Pakistan and comparison between those problems and in Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka. The study recommends practical solutions for strengthening the governance of public primary schools along with their institutional effectiveness, teacher management, accountability and service delivery based on the successful practices of administrative governance and reforms found in these countries.

Research Objective:

1. To explore and analyze the major administrative issues faced by Pakistan primary education system in the light of good governance theory.
2. To compare the administrative structures and challenges of Pakistan's primary education system with those of India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh using good governance, institutional, and human capital perspectives.
3. To learn practical lessons and recommendations for enhancing administrative governance in Pakistan's primary education system from the comparative experiences of the primary education systems of India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh.

Literature Review:

Primary education is the foundation of all education systems of any nation. A strong administration of primary schools is essential, even if policies are well designed (Haider, 2026). Primary education in Pakistan is plagued with recurring issues such as weak governance, political

interference, policy implementation, and resource disparities between rural and urban areas (Jameel, 2026). Others have reported widely on these barriers, and they continue to be a barrier to the effectiveness of the education reforms of the past two decades. In order to understand the nature and depth of such problems, it is useful to compare the system of administrative system of primary education in Pakistan with the system of primary education in other developing countries of the region with similar historical, cultural and economic background (Tarar et al., 2021). In the present study, India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are chosen as comparison countries as they lie at various ends of the spectrum of administrative performance in South Asia, thus providing both cautionary lessons and positive examples for Pakistan.

The Theoretical approach used in this research is Good Governance theory as main theory, with Institutional and Human Capital theory as secondary theories. The World Bank and the United Nations advanced a theory of good governance that bases the assessment of public administration on six principles: accountability, transparency, rule of law, participation, effectiveness and efficiency, and responsiveness (Ríos et al., 2026). This is the main guide since the vast majority of administration failures in primary education can be traced back to a failure in one or more of these principles. A failure of accountability, a failure of rule of law and a failure of participation are evident in weak school monitoring, political interference in teacher transfer and inactive School Management Committees (Ríos et al., 2026). The application of this framework in the four countries assures a systematic comparison and a theoretically informed approach.

The concept of institutional theory is introduced as a supporting tool to provide an explanation on why administrative problems persist even when good policies are on paper. practices, embedded habits, cultural norms, and historical traditions that resist change over It argues that education departments are shaped not only by formal rules but also by informal time. This is why formal education system reforms in South Asia are often implemented but not very likely to be implemented in practice, due to the continued influence of political patronage and rote-based assessment trends in administrative action (Islam & Mohna, 2025). The second supporting theory is the Human Capital theory which explains how under-investment in people directly affects administrative performance. It maintains that the ability of any system to provide quality education is dependent on the skills and motivation of the individuals in the system; weak teacher training, poor recruitment, and limited resources are all factors that make it difficult for the system to provide quality education even with good governance (Aijaz et al., 2024) .

Together, these three frameworks form a ladder of analysis, with good governance theory providing a construct for understanding what is going wrong, institutional theory providing a framework of understanding why good governance reforms may fail, and human capital theory providing a framework of understanding why underinvestment in people exacerbates failures at every step.

Pakistan's administration of the primary education consistently fails all six principles of good governance (Tarar et al., 2021). Federal and provincial and district responsibilities are overlapping, causing confusion regarding accountability, and with the transfer of responsibility for education to the provinces under the 18th Constitutional Amendment, many districts have been unable to develop administrative capacity to manage this (Jameel, 2026). Political interference in postings and transfers of teachers is tantamount to a breakdown in rule of law, and poor financial monitoring of spending can result in the lack of timely and transparent funds reaching schools (Haider, 2026). Professional development for teachers is not regular and not adequately funded; educational resources are not sufficient particularly in rural areas; the continued use of the examination system based on rote learning restricts the accuracy of administrators to assess learning outcomes (Bajwa, 2026). The lack of coordination between administration and lack of community engagement further undermines responsiveness and participation, which adds directly to some of the highest drop-out rates in

South Asia, especially in rural areas, among girls (Jameel, 2026).

India shares several structural similarities with Pakistan, and has a more diverse administrative landscape (Alcott & Rose, 2015). In some States, decentralization through Panchayati Raj institutions and national programmes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan has enhanced community participation, and greater investment in teacher professional development in some areas shows that human capital attention is greater than in Pakistan (Alcott & Rose, 2015). But the quality of governance varies across Indian states, with some having effective accountability systems and others having the same level of political interference and poor monitoring as the Pakistan system. This is based on India's experience which shows that decentralization has positive effect on governance only if it has adequate governance mechanisms and administrative capacities, which is relevant to Pakistan's post-devolution provincial system (Dharmaraj Savicks, 2017).

Sri Lanka is consistently ranked as the best administrative performer in South Asia, in research. It results in better performance on nearly all good governance principles despite its more centralized system (Fernando, 2025). It has a zonal structure to its education offices, which provides more definite accountability, it applies national policies more consistently, less political interference and it invests in education of teachers and has a strong commitment to human capital. Sri Lanka's institutional culture is more oriented towards formal governance rules, and, therefore, policies are more consistently implemented. The best example in this study of positive governance is Sri Lanka, a country with a disciplined governance coupled with a sustained human capital investment (Fernando, 2025).

Bangladesh is a unique case in which there is a significant NGO presence, particularly BRAC, in addition to government schools. However, good donor accountability requirements, combined with other accountability features of NGO-run schools, explain a higher performance of these schools in terms of accountability, teacher training, and participation of community actors, whereas government schools experienced problems similar to Pakistan in monitoring, communication, and professional development (Sato, 2024). This results in a disjointed institutional structure with two parallel systems, with varying standards, which can make it challenging to achieve a consistent governance approach at a system level. The lessons which Bangladesh has learnt from its NGO-sector experience are useful for Pakistan to learn about community involvement, optimising resources, and school management with accountability (Alcott & Rose, 2015).

This highlights that the problem of weak governance culture, institutional weakness, and under investment of human resources is the most pronounced and most resistant to change administrative issue in Pakistan as compared to other four countries. The governance system in Sri Lanka is the most effective, decentralization is seen in action in India with its benefits and disadvantages, and community-driven governance has been evidenced in Bangladesh. But, there are limited studies available that compare these four countries with Pakistan as the main focus, with a single common theoretical framework. The present study attempts to fill that void by using the mixed perspective of good governance theory, institutional theory and human capital theory to systematically compare the primary education administration in all four countries.

Research Question:

1. Which are the key administrative issues in Pakistan primary education system?
2. How these administrative problems in Pakistan different from India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh in terms of good governance?
3. What are the administrative learnings from the primary education management system of India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh to improve governance and performance in Pakistan?

Methodology:

The methodology used for this study is qualitative comparative research methodology that aims to understand the challenges facing the administration of primary education in Pakistan compared with primary education in India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. It is a cross-national comparative case study design with the guidance

of Good Governance Theory and supported by Institutional Theory and Human Capital Theory. The study is based on secondary sources of information such as government reports, education policies, EMIS data, ASER data, journal articles, books, and publications of UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank and Asian Development Bank. The data have been organized based on the key administrative themes and analyzed using thematic and comparative analysis to draw out common challenges, good practices, and evidence-based recommendations to improve the primary education administration in Pakistan.

The comparative analysis is presented in three sections, reflecting the theoretical frameworks of the study. Section A focuses on the lens of Good Governance Theory and evaluates management and structure, policy implementation, dropout rates and communication. In Section B, Institutional Theory is employed to account for the continued existence of the old testing system. A Human Capital Theory approach is used to examine professional development and educational resources in Section C, and curriculum content is examined from a good governance perspective. It is a theoretical structure that explains the administrative problems faced by Pakistan compared to India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ADMINISTRATIVE FACTORS

SECTION A: Good Governance Theory

Accountability | Transparency | Rule of Law | Participation | Responsiveness

1. Management and Structure

(Primary Framework: Good Governance Theory — Accountability and Transparency)

Management and structure are the organization of administrative control through the different levels of primary education from national to individual school level and the clarity of the division of responsibility between these levels (Alcott & Rose, 2015). In the context of good governance, the system must be well organized, with well-defined accountability at every level of administration and clear delineation of the roles of all administrative bodies on what they are responsible for (Ríos et al., 2026). The overlapping responsibilities of federal, provincial and district authorities in Pakistan cause confusion about who is responsible for primary schools and district education offices are overstuffed with too many schools and are understaffed, reducing accountability at the primary school level (Alcott & Rose, 2015). A comparable multi-level system has been in place in India, where the power is shared between the central, state and local Panchayati Raj institutions, but the formal authority of the latter is not as clearly defined in terms of national programmes, although there is often significant variation across states (Pawar). In Sri Lanka the structure is more streamlined and has more transparent lines of accountability between the ministry and zonal education offices and is consistently described as more accountable and better coordinated than neighboring countries (Fernando, 2025). In Bangladesh, there are two parallel systems: government schools provide education up to the normal ministry to Upazila level, while NGO schools, such as BRAC, operate in parallel. Bangladesh has two parallel systems: government schools and NGO schools such as BRAC, both operating up to the normal ministry to Upazila level (Sato, 2024).

Sri Lanka has the best governance structure in terms of its overall management, while the overlapping roles and lack of accountability in Pakistan at district level is a key district-level governance issue. The performance of India and Bangladesh is mixed, ranging from regions to institutions, there is no uniformity between coordination and accountability.

Table 1: Comparative Analysis — Management and Structure

Indicator	Pakistan	India	Sri Lanka	Bangladesh
Administrative hierarchy	Provincial → district → school	Central → state → local	Ministry → provincial → zonal	Ministry → upazila + NGO system
Clarity of jurisdiction	Weak, overlapping roles	Mixed, varies by state	Clear and well defined	Unclear (government–NGO divide)
Level of decentralization	High but uneven capacity	High, formalized	Moderate, well organized	Low (government); high (NGO)
Accountability at district level	Weak	Variable	Strong	Weak (government); stronger (NGO)
Overall structural strength	Weak	Mixed	Strong	Mixed / fragmented

Sources: *World Bank (2021). Reforming Education Governance in South Asia; UNESCO (2022). Global Education Monitoring Report; Khushik, F.U. (2021). Education governance challenges in Pakistan; Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (2017). National Education Policy Framework; Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka (2020)*

2. Application of Policies

(Primary Framework: Good Governance Theory — Rule of Law and Transparency)

Policy implementation involves the difference between the stated policy and its actual implementation at the district and school level (Alcott & Rose, 2015). Good governance involves adherence of rules and policies based on the law, rather than political or personal influence (Ríos et al., 2026). In Pakistan, well-designed policies on teacher recruitment, curriculum standards, and school monitoring are often not implemented consistently because of political interference, weak enforcement mechanisms, and limited district-level follow-up, reflecting a clear failure of rule of law as a governance principle (Islam & Mohna, 2025). This is also explained by institutional theory, which describes the fact that the informal practices of politics are well entrenched in the administrative culture and that they have always prevailed over the formal rules of the policy (Ríos et al., 2026). In India there is a tendency to have stronger policy application in states having more developed local governance systems, however, there is still a huge implementation gap between policy design and implementation in many states (Pawar). The national policies are implemented more uniformly in zonal offices in Sri Lanka, with a more centralized and disciplined administrative structure, reducing the scope for political interference (Fernando, 2025). Bangladesh Government policies are not applied consistently in public schools and NGO-run schools use their own internal policies which are more consistent, based on donor accountability requirements (Sato, 2024).

In general, both government and non-government sectors in Pakistan and Bangladesh have the largest policy-practice gap due to political interference and poor implementation, whereas in Sri Lanka there are more lessons to learn from a disciplined administrative culture.

Table 2: Comparative Analysis — Application of Policies

Indicator	Pakistan	India	Sri Lanka	Bangladesh
Policy–practice gap	Wide	Moderate, varies by state	Narrow	Wide (government); narrow (NGO)
Main barrier to implementation	Political interference	Uneven local capacity	Minimal barriers	Weak government enforcement

Consistency across regions	Low	Uneven between states	High	Low across government–NGO divide
Monitoring of policy implementation	Weak	Moderate	Strong	Weak (government); strong (NGO)
Overall policy application strength	Weak	Mixed	Strong	Mixed / fragmented

Sources: *Khalid, S., & Tadesse, E. (2024). Understanding primary school enrollment in Pakistan; UNESCO (2022). Global Education Monitoring Report; World Bank (2020). South Asia Education Policy Review; Sajjad, M. et al. (2022). Spatial inequalities in education in Pakistan; Government of India, Ministry of Education (2020).*

3. Dropout Rate

(Primary Framework: Good Governance Theory — Responsiveness and Participation)

The high rate of drop-out is connected with how responsive the administrative system is to students' and families' needs, and how responsive communities are to keeping children in school, both of which are fundamental principles for good governance (Rind, 2024). Like other countries of South Asia, Pakistan has high dropouts' rates, especially in rural areas and among girls, which is closely associated with weak administrative monitoring of schools, communication between schools and the parents and the involvement of community in school management, which are direct management duties (Islam & Mohna, 2025). Dropout is a significant issue in India, especially between the primary and middle school levels, and while national programs have been implemented, with greater involvement by local governments, there have been mixed results in some states (Tarar et al., 2021). A well-organized administrative system, regular deployment of teachers, and more responsive system to deal with issues in a timely manner at the school level in Sri Lanka maintains one of the lowest South Asian primary dropout rates (Fernando, 2025). Progressive reduction in dropouts in Bangladesh has been achieved in the community-oriented stipend-supported NGO schools while dropout rates are higher in government schools that exhibit a lack of administrative responsiveness (Sato, 2024).

A high dropout rate is overall related to the administrative responsiveness and community participation and lack of responsiveness and participation of the community at the school level has led to the high dropout rate in Pakistan.

Table 3: Comparative Analysis — Dropout Rate

Indicator	Pakistan	India	Sri Lanka	Bangladesh
Relative dropout level	High	Moderate to high	Low	Moderate, improving
Rural–urban gap	Wide	Wide	Narrow	Moderate
Gender gap	Wide, especially rural areas	Present, narrowing	Minimal	Narrowing
Community participation in retention	Weak	Variable	Strong	Strong (NGO); weak (government)
Administrative responsiveness	Low	Variable	High	Mixed
Retention efforts in place	Limited and inconsistent	Present but state-dependent	Consistent and well established	Stipend programs and NGO outreach

Sources: *ASER Pakistan (2023). Annual Status of Education Report; ASER India (2022). Annual Status of Education Report; UNICEF (2022). Out-of-School Children in South Asia; Ahmad, N. et al. Access to Quality Education at the Midpoint of SDGs; UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2023).*

4. Poor Communication

(Primary Framework: Good Governance Theory — Transparency and Responsiveness)

Poor communication is when information does not flow clearly and in time between various levels of education administration from the ministry to the province, the district to the school and the school to the parents and communities (Shah et al., 2025). Effective communication is essential for transparent and responsive systems of good governance. Lack of coordination among the provincial, district and school level officers in Pakistan results in failure of policy level changes, budget and administration to be communicated to schools timely and effectively, leaving head teachers uninformed and unable to take actions in response to the policy (Rind, 2024). In India, communication is also quite different between the various states, with communication being better in the better resourced states compared to Pakistan, with the better-resourced states adopting digital systems to enhance the information flow (Pawar). Communication between the zonal offices and schools is regular, and there are more structured communication channels in Sri Lanka with regular reporting systems, and supervision (Fernando, 2025). The government school communication is poor and episodic in Bangladesh, while NGO schools have better internal communication as field officers regularly visit them and they report through a well-defined format (Sato, 2024).

In general, poor communication is most prominent among the government sector in Pakistan and the structured reporting system in Sri Lanka provides a feasible approach to enhance information sharing between government levels.

Table 4: Comparative Analysis — Poor Communication

Indicator	Pakistan	India	Sri Lanka	Bangladesh
Communication between ministry and schools	Weak and irregular	Variable, state-dependent	Structured and consistent	Weak (government); stronger (NGO)
Use of digital communication systems	Limited	Moderate in some states	Moderate	Limited
Parent and community information sharing	Weak	Variable	Strong	Strong (NGO); weak (government)
Reporting and feedback mechanisms	Irregular	Moderate	Regular and structured	Irregular (government)
Overall communication strength	Weak	Mixed	Strong	Mixed / fragmented

Sources: *World Bank (2021). Reforming Education Governance in South Asia; Khushik, F.U. (2021). Education governance challenges in Pakistan; UNESCO (2022). Global Education Monitoring Report; Asian Development Bank (2020). Education Sector Assessment: Bangladesh; Ministry of Education Sri Lanka (2020).*

5. Curriculum Content

(Primary Framework: Good Governance Theory — Effectiveness and Participation)

Content of curriculum relates to the subjects and content being taught in primary schools and how well they cater for pupils' learning needs (Dharmaraj Savicks, 2017). The Good Governance Theory is based on the idea that an effective curriculum enhances educational quality (Ríos et al., 2026).

The main criticism against the primary curriculum in Pakistan is that it is too broad, it is not same in all provinces and it lacks practicality (Tarar et al., 2021). India has instituted some changes in the curriculum that emphasizes the child but the implementation varies from state to state (Dharmaraj Savicks, 2017). Sri Lanka has a very centralized curriculum, regularly updated and with better learning outcomes, whereas, in Bangladesh better curriculum relevance is achieved through government reforms and simplified learning model by NGOs (Sato, 2024). In general, Pakistan's curriculum is weak and lacks the capability to change rapidly because of

institutional problems. The centralized curriculum system of Sri Lanka and the innovative strategies followed in Bangladesh offer lessons for a more relevant, consistent and effective primary education curriculum in Pakistan.

Table 5: Comparative Analysis — Curriculum Content

Indicator	Pakistan	India	Sri Lanka	Bangladesh
Curriculum relevance to learner needs	Low, overloaded and theoretical	Moderate, improving through reforms	High, competency-based	Moderate (government); high (NGO)
Consistency across regions	Low, varies by province	Uneven between states	High, centrally reviewed	Moderate (government); consistent (NGO)
Frequency of curriculum review	Irregular	Moderate, framework-based	Regular	Moderate
Alignment with international standards	Weak	Partial	Moderate	Weak (government); stronger (NGO)
Influence of political or religious factors	High	Moderate	Low	Low
Overall curriculum content strength	Weak	Mixed	Strong	Mixed / improving

Sources: *Government of India, Ministry of Education (2020). National Education Policy; Ministry of Education Sri Lanka (2020). Education Sector Development Framework; Khushik, F.U. (2021). Education governance challenges in Pakistan; BRAC Education Programme (2021). Annual Report; UNESCO (2022).*

SECTION B: Institutional Theory

Informal Practices Override Formal Rules

6. Outdated Testing System

(Primary Framework: Institutional Theory — Embedded assessment culture resists reform)

The testing system is, therefore, an embedded institutional practice within an education system, because how students are assessed is not just about formal policies, but also deeply rooted institutional traditions, cultural habits and administrative routines (Islam & Mohna, 2025). Institutional theory helps explain why outdated assessment practices persist even when new policies promoting competency-based assessment are formally introduced (Ríos et al., 2026). The primary-level testing system still heavily emphasizes rote memorization and traditional written examinations in Pakistan, and although there have been some policy changes at the theoretical level, the informal tradition of testing is firmly entrenched in the practice of schools and districts, leaving administrators with little accurate information about real outcomes of learning and making evidence-based decisions difficult (Tarar et al., 2021). In India, while some states have formally adopted the continuous and comprehensive evaluation reforms, a large portion of places still has an examination culture which largely deters policy change, as seen in institutional inertia (Islam & Mohna, 2025). In Sri Lanka, reforms in assessment have been more successfully integrated into the administration through greater institutional discipline, which has created a more structured, and reliable, testing system compared to Pakistan or India (Fernando, 2025). It is noted that in Bangladesh, government schools mainly use the traditional examination system, whereas NGO schools use more frequent internal assessment systems, reflecting a further institutional split between the two systems of education in this country (Sato, 2024).

In general, there is much institutional inertia that needs to be overcome, and Pakistan's failure to modernize its assessment practice despite institutional reform is a textbook case of the problems of informal institutional habits that hinder formal institutional reform.

Table 6: Comparative Analysis — Outdated Testing System

Indicator	Pakistan	India	Sri Lanka	Bangladesh
Dominant testing approach	Traditional, rote-based exams	Mixed, mostly traditional	Structured, consistently applied	Traditional (government); internal (NGO)
Resistance to assessment reform	High	Moderate	Low	High (government); low (NGO)
Use of assessment data for decisions	Limited	Uneven across states	Strong	Weak (government); stronger (NGO)
Alignment of practice with policy	Weak	Partial	Strong	Fragmented
Overall testing system strength	Weak	Mixed	Strong	Mixed / fragmented

Sources: *Sajjad, M. et al. (2022). Spatial inequalities in education in Pakistan; Government of India, Ministry of Education (2020). National Education Policy; UNESCO (2022). Global Education Monitoring Report; BRAC Education Programme (2021). Annual Report; World Bank (2019).*

SECTION C: Human Capital Theory

Investment in People Drives System Performance

7. Insufficient Professional Development

(Primary Framework: Human Capital Theory — Investment in teacher and administrator capacity)

Professional development is the continuous learning, capacity building, and skills development for teachers, head teachers and education administrators. According to the human capital theory, the quality of an education system is directly related to the quality of the people who work in it, and inadequate investments in professional development will result in poor performance across all levels of administration (Gillani, 2022). Professional learning opportunities for teachers and administrators are also reported widely in Pakistan as irregular, poorly resourced and not aligned with what is needed in the classroom or school. Even if teachers are hired, they are often lacking in administrative and pedagogical skills to carry out their work effectively (Ahmad et al., 2013). Teaching professional development has been more successful in some States in India (in these States, more than one in ten teachers have attended national programmes) and coverage and quality of teaching professional development is variable, with rural areas having little opportunities for training teachers (Pawar). Theory of human capital in Sri Lanka has been more consistently emphasized in teacher training and professional development, and there is a direct relation between the two, as Sri Lanka has better administrative and learning outcomes compared to other countries (Fernando, 2025). Like in other factors, the gaps between government and NGO schools in Bangladesh are the same in professional development, with the NGO schools particularly BRAC vigorously and systematically investing in teacher training (Sato, 2024). Overall, insufficient professional development is one of the most direct human capital failures in Pakistan's primary education administration, and Sri Lanka's consistent investment in teacher and administrator capacity offers the clearest comparative lesson for how

sustained professional development translates into better system-wide performance.

Table 7: Comparative Analysis — Insufficient Professional Development

Indicator	Pakistan	India	Sri Lanka	Bangladesh
Regularity of teacher training	Irregular and underfunded	Moderate, varies by state	Regular and consistent	Weak (government); strong (NGO)
Coverage in rural areas	Very limited	Limited	Moderate	Very limited (government)
Pre-service teacher education quality	Weak	Mixed	Strong	Weak (government); stronger (NGO)
Investment in administrator training	Very low	Low to moderate	Moderate	Very low (government)
Overall professional development strength	Weak	Mixed	Strong	Mixed / fragmented

Sources: *World Bank (2021). Reforming Education Governance in South Asia; UNESCO (2022). Global Education Monitoring Report; BRAC Education Programme (2021). Annual Report; Khalid, S., & Tadesse, E. (2024). Understanding primary school enrollment in Pakistan; Asian Development Bank (2020).*

8. Limited Educational Resources

(Primary Framework: Human Capital Theory — Material investment in the learning environment)

The limited educational resources mean there is a lack of necessary resources and facilities, including textbooks, classrooms, learning equipment, and school buildings, that are necessary to facilitate effective teaching and administration of the school (Ahmad et al., 2013). Human capital theory acknowledges that investing in learning is as significant as investing in human beings, that is, investing in the learning environment is as crucial as investing in people, and that well-trained teachers cannot do their job well without a sufficient learning environment (Ríos et al., 2026). The problem of shortage of resources in schools is common across Pakistan especially in the remote and inaccessible areas, where there is a lack of basic facilities like clean water supply, electricity, separate classrooms, and adequate reading materials while directly impacting the efforts of administrators to enhance the quality of education in schools (Ahmad et al., 2013). Availability of resources in India is unevenly distributed across states, with the better-resourced states having achieved significant improvements through national programmes, whilst the under-resourced states have similar gaps as Pakistan (Islam & Mohna, 2025). While investment in school facilities and learning resources has been more consistent over time in Sri Lanka, research indicates that basic resources availability in primary schools is relatively higher and this is reflected in its comparatively better administrative and learning outcomes (Fernando, 2025). The Government Schools in Bangladesh are often under resourced like in Pakistan and also the NGOs run schools have simple and standardized school models, which enables them to work with limited resources more efficiently (Sato, 2024).

In conclusion, the lack of educational resources exacerbates all the other administrative issues faced by primary schools in Pakistan and the gap between the rural and urban areas is one of the most obvious indicators of systemic inequality. Sri Lanka's regular resource investment and Bangladesh's efficient resource management by their NGO sector provide some useful examples for Pakistan.

Table 8: Comparative Analysis— Limited Educational Resources

Indicator	Pakistan	India	Sri Lanka	Bangladesh
Basic infrastructure availability	Poor, especially rural	Variable, improving in some states	Comparatively adequate	Poor (government); adequate (NGO)
Textbook and material availability	Irregular and insufficient	Moderate	Consistent	Irregular (government)
Rural–urban resource gap	Wide	Wide	Narrow	Moderate
Investment in school facilities	Low	Mixed	Moderate to high	Low (government)
Overall resource availability	Weak	Mixed	Strong	Mixed / fragmented

Sources: *UNICEF (2022). Out-of-School Children in South Asia; UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2023). Education Data for South Asia; Sajjad, M. et al. (2022). Spatial inequalities in education in Pakistan; World Bank (2020). South Asia Education Policy Review; Asian Development Bank (2020).*

Conclusion:

This study explored the primary education system of Pakistan in comparison with India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. Primary education system faced with major administrative challenges under the lens of Good Governance, Institutional, and Human Capital theories. The results indicate the poor performance of Pakistan in respect of all the 8 administrative factors such as management, policy implementation, communication, dropout rates, teacher development, curriculum and educational resources. Limited resources are not only a major constraint but also poor governance, political interference, and institutional practices are a huge obstacle to effective reform. Sri Lanka exhibits the highest level of administrative performance across the four countries, thanks to its good governance practices, transparent administrative system and consistent investment in human resources. The case studies from India and Bangladesh emphasize the need for decentralization, with local capacity and accountability and community participation and the role of NGOs in enhancing educational outcomes with constrained resources. The study concludes that there is a need to strengthen the governance, institutional accountability, the administrative capacity and investment in teachers and in the resources of primary education system in Pakistan.

Recommendations:

- Enlarge government education budget to improve school building, teachers' training and school administration.
- Establish policies to define and ensure effective accountability of administration at both provincial and district and school levels, based on merit, and not political affiliations.
- Conduct regular professional development training for teachers and school leaders, particularly in rural areas, building school leaders' capacity and school quality.
- Update and adapt the curriculum so as to be more relevant and to encourage student-centred learning rather than primarily based on rote learning.

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