



Implementation of School Cluster System in Balochistan: A Qualitative Perspective of Female Teachers

Hani¹, Niamatullah Baloch², Rafiq Ahmed³

¹ MS Scholar, Department of Educational Research and Development (DERAD), Faculty of Education, Lasbela University of Agriculture, Water and Marine Sciences, Uthal, Balochistan

Email: hanihasrat99@gmail.com

² Department of Educational Research and Development (DERAD), Faculty of Education, Lasbela University of Agriculture, Water and Marine Sciences, Uthal, Balochistan

Email: niamat.edu@luawms.edu.pk

³ Department of Educational Research and Development (DERAD), Faculty of Education, Lasbela University of Agriculture, Water and Marine Sciences, Uthal, Balochistan

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: March 22, 2026 Revised: April 06, 2026 Accepted: April 20, 2026 Available Online: May 04, 2026 Keywords: School Cluster System; Female Teachers; Educational Reform; Balochistan Corresponding author: niamat.edu@luawms.edu.pk	The School Cluster System (SCS) is a strategic initiative intended to enhance educational quality, strengthen administrative capacity, and promote professional collaboration among schools in Balochistan. This study examined the challenges experienced by female teachers during the implementation of the SCS in selected cluster schools. Data were collected from female teachers through semi-structured interviews; data were analysed through thematic analysis to develop a deeper understanding of participants' experiences. The findings indicate that the SCS has positively contributed to professional networking, collaborative learning, and the sharing of instructional resources. However, its effective implementation is constrained by inadequate training, insufficient infrastructure, weak administrative coordination, and limited institutional support. The study highlights the importance of continuous professional development, stronger leadership support, and the incorporation of gender-sensitive policies to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of the SCS. The findings provide useful evidence for policymakers, education planners, and development partners seeking to design equitable, context-sensitive, and sustainable educational reforms, particularly in under-resourced areas of Balochistan.

Introduction

The existence of multifaceted challenges, especially in the education of girls, is a major issue in Balochistan's education system. Balochistan province, which is located in an area with scattered rural villages and socio-cultural values that are deeply held in unity, is an overall barrier to the establishment of visible and inclusive education opportunities (Wardag et al., 2023). The conservative gender roles, young marriages, and limited mobility among the girls also limit their engagement in appropriate education (Chacharn et al., 2023). Therefore, gender disparity in education has been one of the most significant difficulties to attaining quality education in the area.

The challenges were recognized and continued to the Government of Balochistan, with the introduction of the School Cluster System (SCS) as a strategic intervention to enhance the education performance, particularly for girls. This idea is prompted by effective representations conducted in other provinces and recommended by global institutions such as UNESCO and UNICEF. The proposals

for this system include enhancing cooperation among schools, improving resource utilization, and promoting teacher training (Wardag et al., 2023; UNICEF, 2020). Recommendations from similar implementations in Bangladesh and India have suggested that cluster-based education fosters community interaction, enhances learning environments, and promotes reasonable access to quality education (Bray, 1987).

The semi-structured research approach is selected for its capacity to elicit comprehensive, in-depth narratives and personal likenesses, allowing for a deep exploration of the complex and context-supported experiences of female teachers (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). The purposive sampling strategy was used to select fourteen (14) female teachers from various schools within a defined cluster, confirming variety in relationships of age, years of experience, topographical location of the study area, and family responsibilities. Consequently, this study focused on investigating the experiences, perceptions, and vision of female teachers regarding the implementation of the school cluster system in Tehsil Tump, District Kech, Balochistan. It aims to provide suggestions based on perceptions into how the cluster-based education creativities support female teachers' professional development and empowerment within the exclusive socio-cultural and environmental context of Balochistan. Furthermore, this research is grounded in a feminist qualitative theory of knowledge, which values subjective practice and seeks to make evident the repeatedly ignored perspectives of women within social systems. Through the implementation a semi-structured interview methodology, the study was generated rich, refined data on the perceived benefits, hidden costs, and involuntary consequences of the SCS from the position of female teachers. In Pakistan, the implementation of the SCS is associated with broader decentralization policies pointed at improving school-level accountability, increased community participation, and improve educational quality (Razzaq & Forde, 2013). Provinces like Balochistan, illustrated by geographical dispersal, limited infrastructure, and socio-cultural restrictions, have assumed the cluster system as a strategy to combat isolation and support rural schools. However, evidence indicates that in low-resource systems, transference reforms often face operational, capacity-related, and governance challenges that delay positive implementation (Sayed & Singh, 2022; Faubert, 2020). Similar patterns have been described in Pakistan, where weak monitoring systems and unpredictable communication create spaces between policy and practice. These governance challenges are reduced by the limited use of data systems like EMIS, which are caused by divided information flows and reduced transparency (Malik & Bari, 2021; UNICEF, 2020). Teacher empowerment is a serious reason in the success of cluster-based improvements. International literature highlighted sustainable school improvement changes through continuous professional development, unified decision-making, and supportive instructional leadership (Fullan, 2021). However, in Pakistan, teachers, particularly female teachers, often experience constrained access to professional development and minimal involvement in management or administrative processes (Shah & Iqbal, 2022). Gendered restrictions, including cultural norms and structural power differences, further marginalize women teachers from participating in cluster-level governance (Agha & Saeed, 2023; Sperandio & Kagoda, 2021).

In Balochistan, the effectiveness of the SCS is extend affected by contextual barriers like poor infrastructure, insufficient facilities, limited communication systems, and unfair distribution of teaching materials. While teachers acknowledge some positive outcomes, such as improved access to basic learning materials and marginal improvements in student motivation, this progress remains constrained by broader systemic limitations, including infrastructural shortages and insufficient instructional support (World Bank, 2022).

With these dynamics, investigation into the implementation of the School Cluster System in Balochistan is crucial for a thoughtful scope to which decentralization reforms contribute to reasonable governance, teacher permission, and better learning environments. The views of female teachers, who are both central to classroom instruction and frequently excluded from governance processes, provided valuable insights into the operational experiences of the SCS. Considering their experiences is necessary for the policy reforms mentioned that aim to strengthen school clusters, increase fairness, and improve the overall quality of education in marginalized regions.

Literature Review

Cluster System and School Based Management

Wardeg et al. (2023) explored the perceptions of female teachers regarding the support provided by the school cluster system at Government Girls High Schools in Zarghon, Pakistan. Their descriptive study, involving 107 teachers from seven schools, revealed that most participants were familiar with the cluster structure but believed that financial constraints limited the system's effectiveness in addressing teaching and administrative challenges.

Cluster System for Teacher Professional Development

Shah, & Iqbal, (2022) emphasizes that the cluster based approaches encourage the continuous learning, collaboration, and improved teaching practices, clusters necessity to move beyond administrative meetings to meaningful professional engagement. indicate that cluster systems can improve access, equity, and school performance when supported by adequate policy, infrastructure, and monitoring systems.

Mohammed et al. (2022) concentrated on Lagos State, Nigeria and analysed the cluster training habits ought to outgrow administrative meetings to adoptive worthwhile professional learning. Their study emphasized the fact that effective clusters must open opportunities to collaboration, reflection and innovation other than being used to fulfil bureaucratic interests.

Cluster Systems and Technological Integration

Education has also been transformed digitally, which has extended the concept of cluster. The issue of information literacy of teachers in the introduction of technology into the teaching process was emphasized by Xu and Chen (2016), and the authors of Liu et al. (2021) suggested an effective framework of teaching quality evaluation based on the grey clustering analysis. Both the studies confirmed that clustering, conceptual or technological, encourages team enhancement and responsibility.

Educational Governance and Decentralization

The educational governance has also demonstrated varying changes that have in most cases emphasized on the aspect of decentralization as the path towards better accountability, resource allocation, and communal participation. Sayed and Singh (2022) suggest that reorganization in the Global South exhibited a challenging set of independence and the strong-willed limitation of poor institutional capacity. Although the decentralization capabilities made reasonableness of decision making, expertise identification, its application on numerous occasions showed wars such as politics, lack of direction, and ineffective power relations among the participants.

Gender Dynamics in School Governance

Gender difference remains a significant barrier to effective school governance in South Asia. Agha and Saeed (2023) provide comprehensions into rural Pakistan, revealed the women teachers' participation in decision-making remains imperfect due to cultural customs, male-dominated leadership structures, and minimum institutional support. Their research shows that even in decentralized models, women are often excluded from critical governance roles, limiting the diversity of perspectives in school planning and administration. Similar patterns with the correlated concept to Sperandio and Kagoda (2021) highlighted observing that the women teachers face complete barriers to leadership positions. These include male-controlled standards, insufficient professional development, and limited progress. Their findings emphasize the necessity for gender-inclusive strategies within school cluster systems and decentralized governance structures. Balancing this evidence, Shah and Iqbal (2022) identified significant gender differences in professional development opportunities in Pakistan. Women teachers have limited training opportunities, limiting their competence to participate importantly in leadership, cluster meetings, or EMIS-related responsibilities.

Educational Equity and Decentralized School Management

Pherali and Acharya (2021) examine decentralized school governance in Nepal, showing that while decentralization can increase community involvement and contextual relevance, it also risks reinforcing existing inequalities if poorer or remote schools lack the capacity to effectively participate. Their findings mirror challenges observed in Balochistan, where rural and female teachers often have limited influence in cluster-based decision-making. Moreover, decentralization improvement is attended by strong state support to prevent differences. Evidence from the World Bank (2022) stresses that learning increase requires suitable resources, teacher training, and affected involvements not only structural reforms. Lacking complete support, decentralization and cluster systems threaten appropriate administrative problems with limited impact on learning outcomes. Consequently, decentralization can democratize school governance but is limited by influential ability, injustice, and socio-cultural barriers. School-based management and cluster systems, improved relationship with resource-sharing but mostly reproduce differences when dominant schools control authority. EMIS is critical for evidence-based decision-making; however, weak data systems challenge decentralization efforts in Pakistan. Gender differences significantly affect teachers' involvement in governance, limiting the effectiveness of decentralized

and cluster-based systems. Effective improvement pressures not only structural changes but also capacity-building, accountability, and gender-inclusive management encouragement. Moreover, the information provided a strong theoretical base for investigate the implementation of school cluster systems in Balochistan, specifically from the perceptions of female teachers and governance challenges.

EMIS and Education Data Governance

Similarly, the study of Malik and Bari (2021) show that Pakistan's EMIS stay behind underutilized due to capacity differences at district and school levels. Their UNICEF report highlights issues like suspended data reporting, lack of accountability frameworks, and not enough digital infrastructure challenges the directly affect governance and cluster system implementation.

The UNICEF Global Report (2020) additional supports that in low-resource contexts, EMIS remains delayed by financial limitations, unpredictable data standards, and insufficient monitoring mechanisms, resultanted in misrepresented policy decisions and inefficient resource distribution.

Objectives of Study

1. To assess the level of awareness and understanding among female teachers regarding the School Cluster System in Balochistan.
2. To explore the experiences and perceptions of female teachers regarding the implementation and function of the School Cluster System.
3. To identify the extent to which the School Cluster System contributes to the professional growth, collaboration, and empowerment of female teachers in their educational practices.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions and levels of awareness of female teachers regarding the implementation of the School Cluster System in Balochistan?
2. How do female teachers perceive and experience the function of the School Cluster System in their respective schools?
3. To what extent does the School Cluster System support and empower female teachers in their professional development and teaching practices?

Research Methods

This study provided a systematic and structured framework suggested the process to conduct the research work. This work as a roadmap that assists researchers to efficiently plan, perform, and analysed their studies in a logical and scientific approach. The methods help to understand the reliability, strength, and credibility of the research findings. The primary objective is to describe the demographic characteristics of the study population and define the processes involved in collected, analysed, and interpreted data. Additionally, this study used a qualitative case study approach, considered the most suitable for investigated multifaceted educational phenomena and processes. This approach suitable to investigate the existence issues, provided the detailed explanations of a bounded system similar to base on large data collection (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998). Qualitative data from interviews and focus groups were subjected to thematic analysis, with texts coded to identify recurring themes related to the School Cluster System's impact on professional development and female teacher empowerment. The data management and analysis were conducted and similar qualitative data management techniques.

Data Collection & Instrument

A qualitative research approach used to gain in depth, related understandings into the experiences under investigation. The primary data collection instrument were the semi-structured interview. This method is ideal to explore multifaceted experiences and

perceptions, as it provided a flexible structure to allowed for both consistency across participants and the freedom to explore evolved, anticipated themes (Kallio et al., 2016; Roulston & Choi, 2018).

Implementation with the questionnaires for data collection, facilitated with the dynamic interaction with detailed, non-verbal keys observed and explored. The interview protocol has been adopted and developed, figured out series of open-ended questions designed to obtain rich, described narratives. This methodological consistency to provide a clear and reliable framework to conduct each interview.

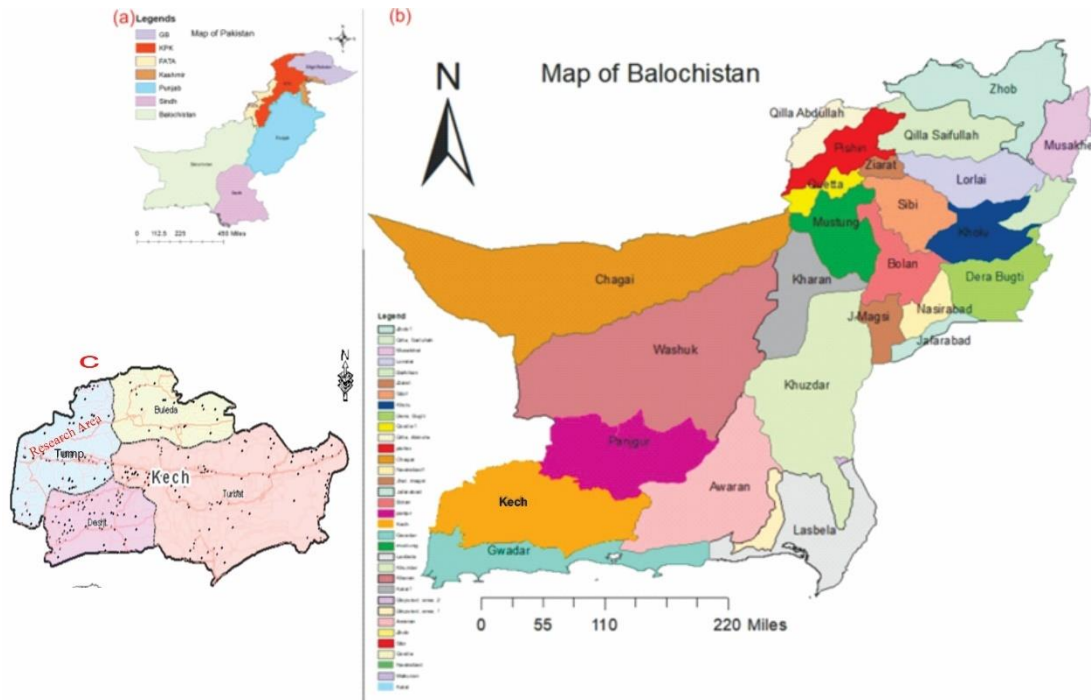


Figure 1 Map of the study area: (a) represents the map of Pakistan; (b) shows the map of Balochistan and (d) illustrates the specific research area along with the associate Tehsil, Kech (Source Arc GIS-based 10/ Map)

Sampling Strategy

The purposive sampling strategy was implemented to identify and selected information rich cases inner to the research question (Palinkas et al., 2015). The sampling for primary data via questionnaires was suitable because the research intended to explore the observed, challenges, and professional experiences of female teachers, who represent a key participant group within the SCS and are directly affected by issues of governance, communication, resource distribution, and professional development opportunities. Selection of participants was done according to predetermined criteria that comprised of: (a) the participant had to be a female teacher in an established cluster by the government school, (b) a participant must have at least 5 years of experience in working under the SCS system, and (c) willingness. Also, the only teachers whose direct engagement in cluster-level tasks such as receipt of resources, administration communication, or contribution in school-based conferences were considered and eligible to be certified as standard based selection, therefore, the integrity of the findings was consolidated. The approach made concerned participants to develop credible realizations of both benefits and drawbacks of the SCS. The final sample size was finalized using the principle of data saturation, anywhere interviews continued until no new themes or information occurred. This approach confirmed depth, strength, and significance of the qualitative data, making the sample sufficient for meaningful thematic analysis within the study's scope. The target population consists of fourteen (14) female teachers, ensured the diversity of ratios and a multi-disciplinary understanding, participants were selected similarly from different schools of the study area, the inclusion criteria for participants are. A minimum of five years of experience in academic teaching and learning. Shown involvement in practical, to work on cluster related based with DEOs' or related projects or consultancy. Direct experience in teachers skills training and development.

Population

In this study the mentioned to all individuals, groups, or objects to share common characteristics related to the study (Bhandari, 2023). Moreover, the population included female teachers worked in secondary schools within the Tehsil Tump, District Kech cluster system (Figure 1). The whole population under consideration included several female teachers. Furthermore, the research sample signifies to the population that imitates the characteristics of the entire group. The researcher implemented appropriate sampling technique, which allowed for the selection of participants based on accessibility, willingness, and nearness. Although convenience sampling carries potential bias risks, it is widely used in educational and social science research due to its practicality, low cost, and feasibility (Nikolopoulou, 2023; Explorable, 2009). This method allowed the researcher to collect rich, context-specific qualitative data from participants who were willingly available and willing to share their experiences related to the School Cluster System.

Data Collection Procedure

The data were collected through face to face, and the previous data collection, ethical agreements were obtained from the District Education Office in Turbat, Kech, and all participants were provided written informed consent. Interviews were scheduled at a time and location convenient for the participant, morally in govt. offices or meeting room on school and outside of the boundaries, to ensure a comfortable and familiar environment favourable to open dialogue. Each interview is estimated to last between 20 to 25 minutes.

The data collection process was followed to an exact protocol,

- *Introduction and Consent:* The session began with a brief introduction to the study's purpose, confirmation of confidentiality, and the completion of permission forms.
- *Interview Execution:* The researcher followed the semi-structured interview guide, starting with large, grand-tour questions before generate to more specific, pre-determined effects.
- *Probing and Clarification:* Strategic examined questions were used to produce explanation, clarification, and actual examples.
- *Audio-Recording and Field Notes:* With participant approval, all interviews were audio-recorded to ensure an exact precise record. Parallel, the researcher was maintained trusted reflective field notes to document contextual observations, non-verbal nods, and initial analytical judgments, provide the valuable extra data for the clarification phase (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The study used both primary and data sources. The primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews, cluster system discussions, and questionnaires managed to female teachers. However, the data had resulted from organizational documents, official reports, and previous studies followed by (Tirmazi, 2015).

Data collection investigated with numerous weeks, with participants certain from schools within the Tehsil Tump cluster (Figure 1 c). Each participant was briefed on the study objectives before data collection, and written permission was obtained. Observations and document analyses further improved the qualitative findings. In this study all collected digital audio files and recorded data were stored strongly on a password protected computer, with any identifying information anonymized to protect participant confidentiality.

Data Analysis

These data analysis with qualitative research contains to organize, interpret, and identified patterns within the collected data. In this study, thematic analysis was employed to analyze interview transcripts, field notes, and documentary data. The data collected through semi structured interviews, discussions were analyzed used thematic analysis. The procedure involved verified the responses, coding the data, and identified the key themes emerged regarding the role of the School Cluster System in improved

teacher ability, collaboration, and professional growth. Furthermore, in this research, for the Qualitative data were analysed with NVIVO 14 software used.

In this qualitative study on female teachers in Balochistan School Cluster System, validity was ensured through trustworthiness strategies like satisfied validity (expert-reviewed interview questions for clarity and relevance), construct validity (questions aligned with key themes such as professional development, collaboration, governance, and empowerment), credibility (data triangulation from interviews, questionnaires, documents, analytical, and field notes), dependability (systematic procedures and consistent methods), and confirmability (neutral interpretation grounded in participants' responses), making findings credible, reliable, and reflective of real experiences. These identifies ensured that the study findings are dependable, consistent, and reflective of the real experiences of female teachers within the School Cluster System in Balochistan.

Results

The findings from an inductive thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with female teachers in the Tump cluster (District Kech, Figure 4 a, b-c). The analysis addresses the study with three research questions: (1) female teachers perceptions and awareness of the School Cluster System (SCS); (2) how they experience the SCS in their schools; and (3) the extent to which SCS supports and empowers female teachers' professional development and classroom practice. Furthermore, this chapter presents the results gained from data collection and provides a detailed discussion and interpretation of the findings in relation to the research objectives and questions. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the data systematically to understand the impact of the School Cluster System (SCS) on the professional development and empowerment of female teachers of the research area. The results are organized thematically and supported by evidence strained from interviews, questionnaires, and collected analyses.

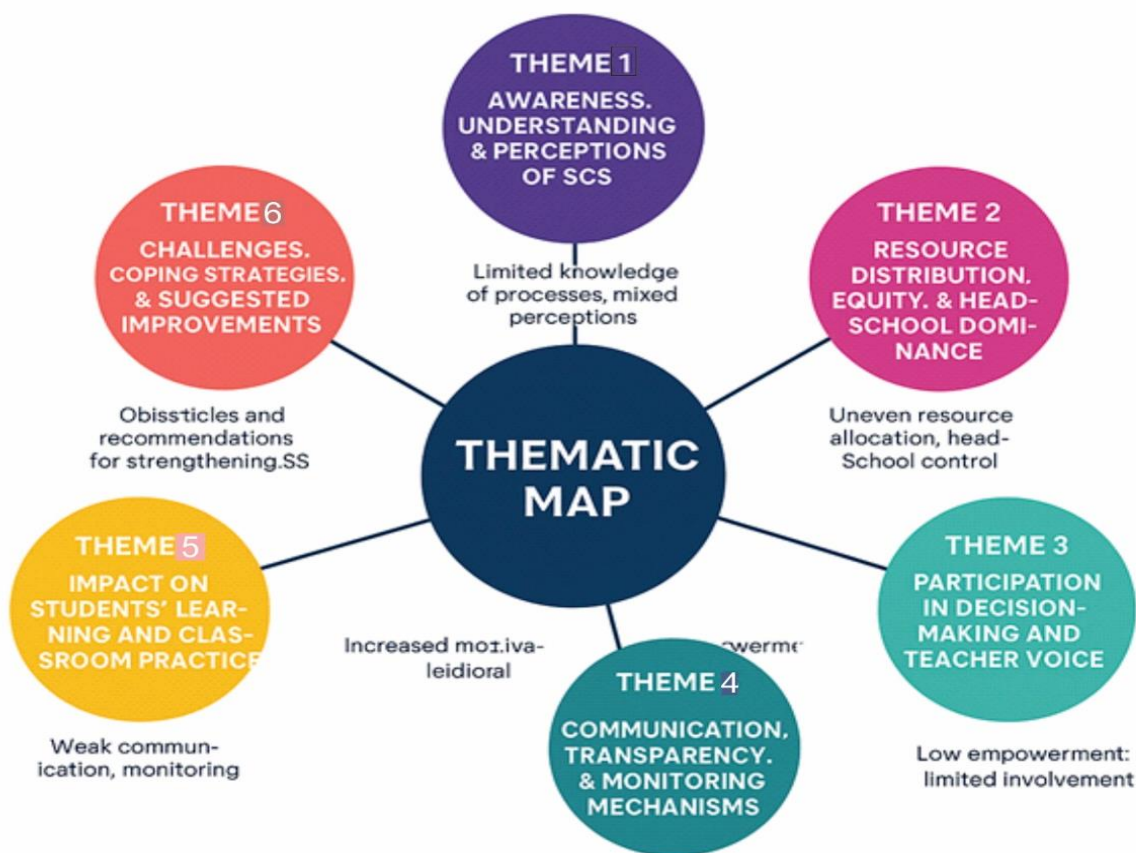


Figure 2 indicated the perceptions are mixed unclear processes (Theme 1). Resources distributed randomly clustered schools, and head schools maintain control, affects fairness (Theme 2). Teachers restricted participation in decision-making, the voices

ignored (Theme 3). Communication and transparency within clusters weak and inconsistent. Monitoring mechanisms are poorly implemented (Theme 5). Weakness communication delay improvements in learning, impact on students' classroom practices remains minimal (Theme 6).

Codebooks of Themes

The organized key themes and subthemes resultant from teacher interviews, showing how issues such as limited awareness, unbalanced resource distribution, weak communication, and restricted participation shape their experiences with the School Cluster System. This also provoked the linkages with each research question to the themes that directly address teachers' perceptions, daily experiences, and professional development opportunities. The provided a structured brief investigated the systemic gaps within SCS affect both school functioning and teachers' empowerment (Table 1 a).

Table 1 (a) presents a consolidated indication of themes, subthemes, and research question linkages that explain teachers' awareness, experiences, resource biases, communication gaps, and professional development challenges within the School Cluster System.

Theme	Subtheme	Code Definition	Example Quote
Awareness & Understanding	Partial Awareness	Teachers know SCS exists but lack procedural clarity	We don't know how the cluster budget comes. - P3
Resource Distribution	Head School Dominance	Head school prioritizes its own needs over feeders	Budget is used for his school first. - P7
Training & PD	Training for Heads Only	Most trainings delivered only to heads, not teachers	We have never participated in any training. - P1
Participation	Limited Involvement	Female teachers excluded from decision-making	Female teachers' opinions are ignored. - P1
Communication	Opaque Channels	Budget and decisions not communicated	Heads don't share anything with teachers. - P7

Table 1 (b) Link Between Research Questions and Themes

Research Question (RQ)	Themes Addressing the RQ	Brief Explanation of the Link
RQ1: What are the perceptions and levels of awareness of female teachers regarding the implementation of the School Cluster System in Balochistan?	Theme-1: Awareness, Understanding & Perceptions of SCS	Directly explains teachers' understanding (or lack of clarity) about SCS functions, budgets, roles, and total attitudes (positive/negative).
	• Partial Awareness • Mixed Perceptions	
	Theme-5: Communication, Transparency & Monitoring Mechanisms	Poor communication and lack of transparency influence how much teachers know about SCS, shaping their perceptions.
	• Communication Gaps • Inconsistent Monitoring	
	Theme-2: Resource Distribution & Equity	Perceptions are shaped by how fairly resources are distributed; inequity lowers trust and awareness.

RQ2: How do female teachers perceive and experience the function of the School Cluster System in their respective schools?	Theme-2: Resource Distribution, Equity & Head-School Dominance	Teachers' daily experiences are strongly affected by unfair budgeting, shortages, and head-school control.
	• Unequal Distribution • Prioritization of Head Schools	
	Theme-5: Communication, Transparency & Monitoring	Communication challenges shape teachers' experience of how well or poorly the system functions.
RQ3: To what extent does the SCS support and empower female teachers in their professional development and teaching practices?	Theme-6: Impact on Students' Learning & Classroom Practice	Teachers judge SCS based on what actually happens in classrooms—materials, attendance, learning resources, etc.
	• Positive Learning Support • Infrastructure/Pedagogical Gaps	
	Theme-3: Training, Professional Development & Mentorship	Directly responds to empowerment through PD; shows major gaps and teacher needs.
	• Limited Training for Teachers • Training Focused on Heads	
	Theme-4: Participation in Decision-Making & Teacher Voice	Empowerment is shaped by whether teachers have a voice in planning, budgeting, and cluster-level decisions.
	• Limited Involvement • Positive Inclusion Cases	
	Theme-6: Impact on Classroom Practice	Shows whether SCS enhances teaching practices or not.

Findings -Themes and Subthemes

The School Cluster System (SCS) faces considerable challenges including limited awareness among teachers, unequal resource distribution, weak teacher participation in decision-making, and poor communication and monitoring mechanisms. These issues collectively reduce the effectiveness of the system, leading to minimal improvement in classroom practices and student learning outcomes (Figure 2). Major barriers include the absence of a legal policy framework, lack of allocated operational resources like finances, infrastructure, and human resources, and weak implementation of monitoring and evaluation. Moreover, school leaders repeatedly lack sufficient training, and communication gaps continue both among cluster schools and with external participants. These factors contribute to fairness in resource control often concentrated in head schools and limit teacher involvement and voice. Weak transparency and poor monitoring decrease the ability to make informed improvements, results in least impact on student learning (Figure 2 – 1 to 6).

Theme-1 awareness, considerate and perception of SCS

This theme explores teachers' knowledge of the School Cluster System (SCS), including their comprehension of its operations and their attitudes toward it.

Subtheme 1- Partial awareness

Even though numerous teachers acknowledge the existence of the SCS and could identify some material productivities like school bags and books, they mostly lack a clear consideration of the operational procedures, budget allocations, and financial flows within the system.

- Presently, there is no communication channel, we do not even know how the cluster budget is received. (Participant 3).

- Female teachers are ignorant of the cluster system and are not consulted for opinions or feedback. (Participant 5)

Consequences

This limited responsiveness discourages effective participation and responses about the SCS, possibly decline the transparency and accountability. Improving statement way and involve with all teachers, mostly female staff, is essential to increase system engagement and effectiveness.

Subtheme 2- Mixes Perceptions Helpful but Limited

Teachers generally view the School Cluster System (SCS) as a potentially beneficial initiative, particularly for facilitating resource sharing. However, they repeatedly focus its limitations due to resource shortages and challenges in implementation.

- The cluster system has significantly improved the education system. (Participant 1)
- The benefits of the School Cluster are outweighed by the challenges, mainly due to budget constraints. (Participant 2)

Link to RQ1:

While awareness of SCS is present, it manages to be apparent. Teachers appreciate the concept but express limited consideration of its practical functioning.

Consequences

Positive perceptions regarding resource sharing indicate the system's potential but addressing budgetary and implementation issues is critical to fully realize its benefits. Enhancing practical clarity among teachers can improve engagement and effectiveness.

Theme 2: Resource Distribution, Equity, and Head-School Dominance

This theme of the study examined the flow of resources including materials, budgets, and miner infrastructure support within school clusters, focusing on the fairness of their distribution.

Subtheme 1- Head School Control and Inequitable Distribution

A widespread issue is Head schools receive and control many budgets, repeatedly prioritizing their own needs before distributing resources to feeding schools. This practice results in unequal resource allocation and significant disparities between schools.

- The budget is exclusively used by his school; only the remaining resources are passed on to other schools. (Participant 7)
- Feeding schools receive insufficient funding as the head schools' requirements are addressed first. (Participant 7).

Subtheme 2- Limited Quality and Poor Quality of Supplies

The subtheme in that resources influence schools, the quantity and quality are frequently inadequate to meet students' needs.

- The items provided through the Cluster System are limited in quantity for example, a single student's bag does not last even one month. (Participant 2).
- Materials are supplied in numbers fewer than the actual number of students, which compromises effectiveness. (Participant 14).

Link to RQ2 & RQ3:

One-sided resource distribution limits the School Cluster System's ability to adequately support female teachers and their students.

Consequences:

Partial resource distribution encourages differences between head and alimentation schools, discouragement system fairness and consistency. Lacking quantities and poor-quality materials further restrict the School Cluster System's effectiveness in supporting female teachers and student needs.

Theme 3 -Training, Professional Development, and Mentorship

This theme addressed the availability, quality, and accessibility of teacher guidance and mentorship within the School Cluster System (SCS), with a focus on whether female teachers have constant professional development.

Subtheme 1: Training Primarily for Heads/Cluster Supervisors, Not Classroom Teachers

Many teachers reported that formal training sessions are predominantly reserved for cluster heads or supervisors, while classroom teachers rarely have access to such opportunities.

- We have never participated in any training, and no such opportunities have been provided for us. (Participant 1).
- Only the heads of schools receive training as per cluster guidelines; classroom teachers are excluded. (Participant 5).

Subtheme 2: Desire for Regular, Practical and Cluster- Based Training

Teachers consistently expressed the need for regular, practical training programs delivered at the cluster level, ideally every six months.

- Female teachers should be legally entitled to training every six months, but this is not currently provided. (Participant 2).
- Training must be organized cluster-wise, with cluster heads facilitating the process. (Participant 4).

Link to RQ3:

Lacking professional development opportunities for female teachers delay their empowerment and limit improvements in classroom practices.

Consequences:

Limited training opportunities focused mainly on cluster heads leave classroom teachers, especially females, underprepared and unsupported. The lack of regular, practical professional development restricts teacher empowerment and hampers enhancements in teaching quality.

Theme 4-Participation in Decision-Making and Voice of Female Teachers

This theme explores the degree to which female teachers are accessed and involved in budgeting, planning, and decision-making within school clusters.

Subtheme 1- Limited Involvement and Tokenism:

Many participants reported exclusion from meaningful decision-making processes and noted a lack of transparency. Female teachers often feel their input is disregarded, with authority concentrated in higher-level or head teachers' hands.

- Teachers' suggestions are not considered; only higher authorities are included in decisions. (Participant 2).
- Female teachers opinions are frequently ignored, all responsibility and authority rest solely with the head teacher. (Participant 1).

Subtheme 2 Instance of Inclusion and Positive Examples:

Some teachers recounted events where female input was actively sought and incorporated into cluster decisions. These examples, however, appear to be localized rather than widespread.

- The ideas of female teachers are genuinely considered and implemented when feedback is provided. (Participant 14).

Link to RQ3: Limited participation diminishes teacher empowerment:

Conversely, when female teachers are included, they report more transparent and effective improvements.

Consequences:

Limited involvement of female teachers in decision-making leads to disempowerment and a lack of transparency within school clusters. Where female participation is encouraged, teachers report clearer communication and more effective improvements.

Theme 5 Communication, Transparency, and Monitoring Mechanisms

This theme addresses the effectiveness of communication stations, the transparency of budget flows, and the consistency of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) within the School Cluster System.

Subtheme 1 Communication Problems and Opacity:

There are frequent complaints regarding poor communication, especially about budget allocations and decision-making processes. Teachers often feel left out of crucial information sharing.

- The heads do not share any information with teachers or other school staff. (Participant 7).
- When a budget is released, female teachers are not informed by the heads of schools. (Participant 7).

Subtheme 2- Formal Monitoring Exists but is Irregular:

While some participants acknowledged the presence of formal monitoring mechanisms, like EMIS visits, regular meetings, and monitoring checklists, others reported that oversight is inconsistent and irregular.

- The Education Management Information System (EMIS) is helpful but there are still gaps. (Participant 9).
- Internal and external audits are necessary to ensure full implementation (Participant 4).

Link to RQ2:

Weak transparency and communication undermine trust in the system and obstruct effective collaborative problem-solving.

Consequences:

Poor communication and lack of transparency about budgets leave teachers uninformed and erode trust within the School Cluster System. Inconsistent monitoring further weakens accountability, hindering collaborative efforts to address challenges effectively.

Theme 6 Impact on Students' Learning and Classroom Practice

This theme examined the effects of the School Cluster System (SCS) on student attendance, access to basic materials, motivation, and teaching practices.

Subtheme 1-Improved Access to Basic Materials and Positive Learning Effects:

Teachers consistently reported that when essential materials such as books, bags, uniforms, and multimedia resources are provided, students benefit noticeably, exhibiting increased motivation and engagement.

- Students who perform well in exams are rewarded, which encourages them to study harder (Participant 1)
- The cluster system has improved the quality of education by providing students with tiffin, uniforms, notebooks, and bags (Participant 3).

Subtheme 2 Persistent Infrastructure and Pedagogical Gap

With the available material support, many schools continue to face significant shortages of classrooms, science labs, electricity, and access to proper pedagogical training.

- There are no science labs, and there is a shortage of teachers, classrooms, and even boundary walls (Participant 3).
- Lack of electricity is a major issue; solar power systems must be provided since class sizes reach 40–50 students (Participant 5).

Link to RQ2 & RQ3:

The SCS positively impacts student learning where materials are supplied; however, ongoing infrastructural deficiencies and limited professional teaching development impede deeper pedagogical improvements.

Consequences:

Provision of basic materials through the School Cluster System enhances student motivation and attendance, resilient positive effects on learning. However, persistent infrastructure deficits and insufficient teacher professional development limit the potential for sustained pedagogical advancement.

Cross-cutting patterns and divergent cases

1. Consensus areas:

Approximately all participants agree SCS has potential to improve education through resource sharing. Common problems: insufficient budgets, limited training for classroom teachers, and weak transparency.

2. Divergence:

A minority of participants (Participant 6, Participant 9, Participant 11, Participant 12, Participant 8) described SCS implementation more positively reporting clearer communication, monitoring, and teacher support. These appear to reflect either better resourced subclusters or participants' diverse expectations.

3. Gendered dimension:

Multiple participants highlighted that female teachers often lack decision-making power despite being closest to classroom needs. Where female teachers participate meaningfully, outcomes and satisfaction improve.

4. Head School Effect:

When head schools performance clearly and contain affluent schools, outcomes are better; when heads store resources or fail to communicate, affluent schools suffer.

Discussion

The findings of this study focused to investigate the School Cluster System (SCS) in Balochistan is implemented with numerous operational, mechanical, and communication challenges that decline its effectiveness. While teachers recognize the idea of clustering as a theoretically beneficial reform for improving school funding and resource sharing, its applied implementation reflects significant authority gaps, biases, and limited teacher empowerment.

Limited Awareness and Diverse Observations of SCS

The results show the female teachers have only limited awareness of how the SCS functions, particularly regarding budget movements, administrative actions, and decision making processes. This limited understanding is mainly a consequence of weak communication systems inside clusters. Teachers receive minute orientation about their roles or the future objectives of the reform. These findings support international evidence indicated the reorganization and cluster-based reforms mostly not success when observe teachers lack access to timely information and ability to build opportunities (Faubert, 2020; Sayed & Singh, 2022). Teachers have observed many clear assistances, but they also point out confusing steps in this process. This shows a huge problem of trying to put changes into practice without clear instructions, which is common in education reforms in places with limited resources (Bruns, Macdonald, & Schneider, 2019).

Thus, the findings highlighted the SCS cannot function effectively without clear communication strategies and teacher-informed implementation processes.

Resource Distribution, Discrimination, Head School Dominance

A major theme in the results is the dominance of head schools, which control budgets, arrange their own needs, and distribute remaining resources to feeder schools. This results in unfair and unequal allocation of materials, infrastructure support, and learning tools.

A major theme in the results is the dominance of head schools focused to manage the budget, fulfil their personal requirements primarily, and distribute remaining resources to feeder schools. Additionally, these resources, school materials, infrastructure support, and learning tools are not shared fairly or equally. Similar patterns have been reported in cluster-based systems in Kenya, Nepal, and Bangladesh, where resource centralization at lead schools challenges the fairness goals of clustering (Pherali & Acharya, 2021; Mugisha, 2020). Current governance studies indicated the financial authority is decentralized without responsibility mechanisms, biases between schools increase relatively than decrease (UNESCO GEM Report, 2023).

The study revealed the SCS goals of justice and school support are compromised by limited power differences and unsatisfactory monitoring.

Professional Development Gaps and Weak Teacher Empowerment

The results show the professional development (PD) opportunities inside the SCS are mainly limited to cluster heads, though classroom teachers especially female teachers rarely receive systematic training. Teachers openly expressed the need for regular, practical, and cluster-based training. This finding is reliable with international evidence the effective teacher professional development is supposed to be continuous, comprehensive, and classroom-focused. However, study from rural Pakistan and other LMICs also confirms that gendered disparities in training access disproportionately disadvantage female teachers (Shah & Iqbal, 2022).

Consequently, the study indicates the without gender-reactive and teacher-placed PD systems, the SCS can not improve teacher ability or classroom practice.

Limited Participation and Restricted Voice of Female Teachers

Female teachers reported rare involvement in school or cluster-level decision-making. Various identified evidences were ignored, and the authorities recreated strangely with head teachers and higher officials. Only a few isolated cases reproduced meaningful female participation.

These findings support recent studies show that gender exclusion continues in school governance structures in South Asia, where women teachers habitually hold lower decision-making power dislike being central to classroom functioning (Sperandio & Kagoda, 2021; Agha & Saeed, 2023). Research resulted the inclusive governance expands transparency, teacher motivation, and school outcomes (Fullan, 2021). Therefore, this study exemplifies the meaningful teacher participation not minimum effort is important for effective implementation of the SCS.

Communication and Monitoring Challenges

Results indicate that communication regarding budget releases, planning, and resource flows is weak and non-transparent. Monitoring mechanisms such as EMIS and audit procedures exist but are used inconsistently. This mirrors findings from EMIS research in Pakistan and other developing systems, where monitoring tools exist in policy but lack effective implementation on the ground (Malik & Bari, 2021; UNICEF, 2020). Weak communication and irregular monitoring reduce trust between teachers and administrators, hindering collaborative problem-solving and informed decision-making. Thus, improving transparency and institutionalizing monitoring practices is critical for strengthening SCS governance.

Limited but Positive Effects on Student Learning

Existence with structural challenges, teachers recognized the SCS improved access to undeveloped learning materials such as bags, books, and uniforms. These necessities improved students' motivation and attendance. However, infrastructure shortages with lack of facilities, boundary walls, laboratories, and necessary classrooms significantly limit greater learning improvements. These findings associated with evidence material support increases student engagement, but sustainable developments in learning need satisfactory infrastructure, teacher training, and educational support (World Bank, 2022).

Consequently, the objective of this word investigated the School Cluster System in Balochistan from the perspective of female teachers in the Tump cluster, District Kech. It finds that teachers understand the basic purpose of resource sharing but lack clear information about roles, budgets, and decisions due to weak communication. They report unsatisfactory resource distribution, limited participation, and weak monitoring, which affect daily work. While the system supports students to some extent, it offers limited training and decision-making opportunities for female teachers, which restricts their professional growth and empowerment.

Conclusion

This study investigated support for implementing the School Cluster System (SCS) in Balochistan, drawing on the perspectives and experiences of female teachers in the Tump cluster. Operating semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, the study further examined (1) teachers' awareness and perceptions of SCS, (2) their survived experience of how the system functions, and (3) the scope to which SCS supports and empowers them professionally.

The findings indicated the female teachers have limited awareness of SCS procedures, especially about budgets, decision-making, and their rights. They value its purpose but report weak transparency and communication. SCS supports professional growth and empowerment, but socio-cultural barriers still limit full participation. Inclusively, it is a useful system that needs better management and gender-inclusive support.

The study concludes that SCS provides limited support for female teachers professional development, as most training is focused on cluster heads. Teachers also have little role in decision-making, which reduces their sense of empowerment. Even though SCS has potential in Balochistan, it is underused due to poor communication, weak monitoring, unfair resource distribution, and limited training opportunities. These all improvements in transparency, accountability, and teacher-focused support are needed to make the system effective.

Gender inequality remains a major issue in our society, female teachers are rarely included in decision-making, which affects both fairness and the effectiveness of SCS. Weak monitoring and poor use of EMIS reduce transparency and trust, allow with biased practices to continue. Although some improvement in student motivation is seen through learning materials, with existence evidence impact is limited due to poor infrastructure, training, and governance. Consequently, SCS needs better communication, transparency, fair resource distribution, teacher training, gender inclusion, and strong monitoring to become more effective and sustainable.

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