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Between Policy Text and Institutional Practice: Recontextualising the Compulsory Quran Translation Course in Pakistani Higher Education Through a Policy Sociology Lens

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Abstract

State intervention in the form of compulsory religious education in higher education creates tension among legislative power, institutional autonomy, and teacher agency. This study focuses on the Compulsory Quran Translation Course and its initiation by Punjab provincial legislation between 2018 and 2023, and provides an account of a university enacting the policy. This study adopted a multiple case study design within 10 departments of a public university and the policy cycle framework. The study used semi-structured interviews, systematic classroom observations, and policy document analysis to gather data. The results reveal three interrelated policy effects. First, the policy effect was predominant, with legislative and bureaucratic establishments largely excluding frontline practitioners from policy text formulation. Second, dissemination became the primary emphasis, diminishing the role of course outlines in practice directions. Third, transmission-based teaching, weak monitoring, and tension between shared moral agreement and unclear pedagogy characterised the practice context. This study posits that these are consequences, not mere signs of poor policy implementation; rather, they can be seen as outcomes of the policy's structural design. These findings are valuable to policy sociology, debates on compulsory curriculum reform, and understanding of policy in higher education in

the Global South.

Keywords: Policy Sociology, Policy Cycle, Recontextualization, Compulsory Religious Education, Higher Education Pakistan, Case Study, Policy Effects

Introduction

Legislating the Sacred: The Policy Terrain

State interventions in higher education curricula occupy contentious ground. Governments have legislated a field long governed by academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and professional judgement by passing laws that regulate not only what universities are required to teach, but also what students believe and do (Kogan, 1975). The Government of Punjab, Pakistan, has made the Compulsory Quran Translation Course mandatory in all government and private universities by 2023. This is precisely such an intervention: a course politically and morally mandated and imposed through legislation rather than through academic deliberation (Rafiq et al., 2025). Theoretical tools that retain rather than reduce complexity are required to understand what such a policy does, not what it is supposed to do.

Policy scholarship has shifted from implementation research that focuses on how intentions are followed through, toward frameworks that explain the negotiated, context-dependent, and reconstituted character of policy in action (Ball, 1990). Policies are not transmitted from the legislature to the classroom. Practitioners interpret, mediate, and remake them and bring to each policy text their professional histories, their values, their institutional constraints, and their competing demands (Bowe et al., 1992). The gap between policy as an authorised text and policy as a lived institutional experience is not accidental and cannot be resolved through improved communication alone. This gap is generative, interpretive, and analytically significant.

Since the early 2000s, Pakistani higher education has faced policy pressure from the demands of massification, quality assurance, and ideological alignment with national identity projects (Bell & Stevenson, 2006). The Higher Education Commission (HEC), instituted in 2002, has played a central role in policy text production by translating provincial legislative mandates into advisory frameworks to which universities are obliged to adhere. One example of policy discourse movement through contexts of influence before reaching practice is the Compulsory Quran Translation Course trajectory, initiated with ACT XVII of 2018 and continued with ACT XIV of 2021, before being formalised in a university application in March 2023 by the HEC. Every translation step introduces recontextualisation, contradiction, and unintended consequences.

Scholarship on compulsory religious education in Muslim-majority states is growing but remains underdeveloped in higher education (Gaus et al., 2019). Studies from Indonesia, Malaysia, and Turkey have documented the recurring tensions between institutional religious interpretations and state-mandated religious content. The situation in Pakistan is unique in its legislative scope: The requirement is tied to degree completion, with students barred from graduating if they fail the course. This structural feature produces near-total formal compliance, alongside highly variable pedagogical practices. analytical approaches that distinguish policy effects from educational outcomes, which implementation research does not adequately explain (Braun et al., 2011).

Gaps in the Literature

Previous research on Pakistani educational policy has favoured national-level document analysis or comparative frameworks that treat policy as flowing linearly from the government to the classroom (Rizvi & Kemmis, 1987). This body of literature has generated useful descriptions of policy intent; however, it substantially underinvestigates what happens when policy texts collide with institutional realities of resource shortage, professional marginalisation, and competing institutional interests. In addition, how practitioners negotiate, resist, or covertly reconstitute policy demands remains largely unexamined in Global South higher education research.

More broadly, the policy sociology literature has documented the limitations of state-control paradigms that treat policy as a technical translation of intention into action (Dale, 1989) between the central government and classroom practice. The contested, creative interpretive work practitioners perform or the role of institutional histories and cultures in determining which policy elements are foregrounded and which are marginalised needs. There must be a sustained empirical focus on the conditions under which policies are received and enacted.

This study considers the process of recontextualising the Compulsory Quran Translation Course policy in one Punjab university and its impacts on the context of influence, text production, and practice described by Bowe et al. (1992), rather than evaluating adherence to stated policy objectives.

This study was guided by the following three questions:

1. How were the contexts of influence and text production structured in relation to the Compulsory Quran Translation Course?
2. How did instructors conceptualise policy recontextualisation, and which policy elements were contested in this process?
3. What micro-political and institutional mediators shaped the relationship between policy text and enacted pedagogy?

This study is relevant to policy sociology because it presents empirical data on the workings of the policy cycle within a Pakistani higher education institution. This demonstrates how authority instruments operate in the absence of information and capacity instruments that are formally compliant but substantively deficient. This paper follows the conceptual framework, methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusions.

Conceptual Framework: Challenging Linear Models of Policy

Educational policy research has long been shaped by what Bowe et al. (1992) critiqued as a command model: policy handed down by the central authority through a sequence of linear implementation steps. Such a conception treats practitioners as delivery mechanisms rather than interpretive agents. It puts teachers, policy management team, and departmental heads in the role of delivery mechanisms, whose function is to execute with precision what the policymakers have decided. The outcome is an analytic tradition preoccupied with implementation fidelity, gap analysis, and the identification of obstacles that prevent a policy from achieving its intended outcome (Rizvi & Kemmis, 1987).

Policy sociology offers an alternative approach. Bowe et al. (1992). This approach posited that policy does not directly determine individual action, but rather involves active interpretation at each location it travels. It is theoretically necessary to remove the

distinction between policy generation and policy recontextualisation. The process of policy generation involves a contest over meaning that occurs within the influence and text production contexts. Policy recontextualization occurs when authorised texts meet material conditions, professional dispositions, and competing demands of practice. These are not linear sequences; rather, they are interrelated contexts that dynamically and continuously influence one another.

The problem of challenging linear models also requires attention to what traditional implementation research has not considered: policies interact with practice and other policies, creating what Bowe et al. (1992) call a policy ensemble. The compulsory Quran Translation Course in Pakistani higher education was not considered in isolation by institutions. It entered an arena already shaped by quality assurance requirements, faculty workload pressure, credit-hour requirements, and resource constraints. This complexity poses a challenge to policy analysis.

The Policy Cycle Framework

Bowe et al. (1992) identified three interconnected contexts where policies are remade. These are not levels of a linear process but arenas of conflict that coexist and interact.

Policy discourses are developed in the context of influence. It involves both civic and non-civic spaces in which interest groups, political players, bureaucratic agencies, and expert bodies struggle to define educational work and issues (Ball, 1990). In this case, the provincial legislature and the Higher Education Commission controlled the context of the influence. These arenas did not involve teachers or department representatives. The course was framed as an ideological and political corrective to perceived youth disengagement from Islamic values, without reference to educational research, teacher knowledge, or institutional capacity. This indicates that the policy was defined as a legislative decree and not a shared decision (Kogan, 1975).

The context of policy text production concerns how authorised texts are written, designed, and distributed. Bowe et al. (1992) distinguish readerly from writerly texts, texts that foreclose interpretation and those that invite active meaning-making, respectively. The documentary corpus in the current study comprised three legislative texts and one HEC advisory. These texts mandated the course, a degree-completion, non-credit course spanning eight semesters. They did not map out pedagogy, the philosophy of assessment or the outcomes of learning. They specified no requirements regarding teacher qualifications, resource provision, or institutional monitoring. This silence created an unstructured space that teachers were required to fill, without support or instruction.

Policies are interpreted, contested, and recreated within the context of practice. Bowe et al. (1992) defined the context of practice as a space, such as educational institutions, departments, and classrooms, where practitioners actively generate meaning rather than passively receive it. The most essential theoretical observation is that what is practically enacted is always an interpretation of the policy text shaped by institutional history, professional values, available resources, and competing demands. In this study, the practice setting included ten departments of the university, and the ten instructors who recontextualised the practice were the course instructors. Here, the conditions of enactment were not determined by the policy's design.

Policy as Text and Discourse

Bowe et al. (1992) made another distinction between policy as text and policy as discourse. The policy-as-text approach treats a policy document as a linguistic object. Policy as discourse, drawing on Foucault, treats policy as a system of statements that frames what can be said, thought, and done in relation to a given educational question. Any policy encounter has two dimensions.

The Compulsory Quran Translation Course policy was applied to both levels simultaneously. It was in the form of text, spread through a course outline that teachers read, understood, and implemented. Discourse was part of a larger process of constructing Pakistani Muslim youth as spiritually deficient and in need of state-directed religious guidance, which implied that ideological work embedded in the policy extended far beyond its text. Codd (1988) suggested that policy documents are not neutral because they create specific problem definitions and solutions, while excluding alternative problem formulations. The blurring of opaque discussions with compulsory and non-credit statuses creates a clear contradiction: *the institution asserts that Quranic learning is necessary, yet simultaneously indicates that it is unimportant*.

Policy texts also operate intertextually (Bowe et al., 1992). The course did not enter university as an independent document. It was embedded within a chain of prior educational laws, HEC quality frameworks, and institutional policies on credit and non-credit courses. Moreover, the text had a secondary influence on how the administrators and teachers interpreted the courses. The interpretive space theoretically available to teachers for active pedagogical decision-making was substantially narrowed by institutional cues, specifically the course's non-credit status and the absence of monitoring.

Micro-Political Processes in Policy Contexts

Ball (1987) argues that educational institutions are not organisationally neutral points through which policy flows, where parties pursue interests, defend their ground, and contest meaning. The process of policy recontextualization is observed in such areas of micropolitics and is influenced by the power relations between administrators, faculty, and students, and by the ordinary repertoires of life through which policy effects are produced (Bowe et al., 1992).

Within the framework of this research, micropolitical processes manifested in how teachers navigated the absence of institutional support. They independently sourced digital materials and developed personal moral rationalisations of the policy in the absence of institutional guidance. Teachers limited their involvement to minimal compliance and saw the lack of supervision as an invitation to channel their professional energies elsewhere. These responses reflect not personal failing but rational adjustments to a policy environment that demanded compliance, rather than quality enactment. Sustainable educational change requires ownership and capacity, not mandates alone (Fullan, 2020). The findings confirm what the micro-political analysis predicts: without ownership and capacity, practitioners follow the path of least institutional resistance.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative multiple-case study design within a public university in Punjab. The case study methodology is appropriate when the phenomenon is not isolated, when contextual depth instead of statistical generalisation needs to be sought, and when the focus is on how and why policy is enacted locally (Tisdell et al., 2025; Yin, 2018). The multiple case design enabled a cross-departmental comparison of how identical policy texts were recontextualized across institutional subcultures with distinct histories, disciplinary norms, and resources (Stake, 2006).

The case was purposively selected as the sole public university in the city. The university was a particularly suitable site for studying policy enactment, resource constraints, and a strong dependence on provincial government directives. The ten departments were selected to introduce variation in disciplinary orientation, faculty profile, and student composition, enabling the identification of cross-case patterns beyond single-departmental circumstances.

Philosophical Paradigm

This study falls within the critical interpretivist tradition. Knowledge of policy effects is constructed by interpreting the participants' accounts (Creswell & Poth, 2023; Muhammad et al., 2024). Ontologically, it treats reality as socially constructed through policy enactment, professional negotiation, and micro-political struggle. This stance specifically opposes positivist evaluation models that treat policy outcomes as measurable deviations from the stated objectives. This study follows the idea of Bowe et al. (1992), who studied what policy does rather than what it was designed to do, aiming to understand its enactment rather than evaluate its performance.

Case Study Sites and Participants

The ten departments mentioned in this study are referred to as Departments A-J. They varied in terms of size, faculty composition, and disciplinary profile. Each of the ten offered a Compulsory Quran Translation course as a non-credit course, administered by instructors who were not in their respective departments' regular duties.

Ten course instructors participated in this study, a composition that mirrored the gender profile of the university's religious education faculty. Their teaching experience ranged from three to 16 years. The participants held qualifications ranging from master's to doctoral degrees. Purposive sampling was used to sample all instructors teaching the course at the time of the study to generate a census sample within the study area, rather than selecting a strategic subset.

Data Collection

Data were gathered in three ways and triangulated to generate convergent and divergent evidence across multiple levels of policy recontextualisation.

All ten instructors were interviewed using semi-structured protocols, producing 10 recorded interviews in total. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, audio-recorded, and lasted an average of 45 minutes. A second round of three interviews with the instructors was conducted six weeks after the first interview to explore whether their interpretations or

practices had shifted since the initial data collection. The questions were structured around understanding the policy, communication experience, resource availability, instructional decision-making, and perceptions of monitoring and accountability. The repeated-interview strategy aligns with Bowe et al.'s (1992) interest in the temporal dimension of policy enactment.

Thirty-six classroom observations were conducted, with six observations per instructor during the fieldwork period. The observation protocol captured the instructional approach, student participation patterns, resource use, time allocation, and alignment of learning activities with policy requirements. All observations were dated to allow temporal tracking. To build contextual understanding of classrooms and their institutional settings, variations in access depth across sites reflected practical constraints.

Document analysis was based on Bowen (2009), including ACT XVII of 2018, ACT XIV of 2021, the HEC advisory of March 2023, departmental course outlines for each semester, internal communications regarding course organization, and two department head meeting minutes in which the course was discussed.

Data Analysis

Transcripts of the interviews and field notes were imported into ATLAS. ti 25 to be encoded systematically to facilitate text retrieval, memo-writing, and data organization. Preliminary coding was inductive and descriptive (Saldaña, 2025). The codes were subsequently organized based on the analytical categories of the policy cycle, namely, context of influence, text production, and practice. Constant comparison, following Strauss (1987), generated four analytical categories: policy exclusion, dissemination adequacy, enacted pedagogy, and monitoring accountability. As the interpretation continued, analytical feedback informed the second round of data collection.

Trustworthiness

Credibility was assessed using various measures. The fieldwork period exceeded 14 weeks. Several data sources, namely interviews, observations, and documents, were triangulated. Member checks were conducted with three participants, all of whom confirmed the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations, allowing temporal shifts in enactment to be traced. The findings have been presented with sufficient detail to describe the departmental context, enabling readers to make transferability judgments relevant to their institutional settings.

Ethical Considerations

The university's administration granted research access. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were informed of their right to withdraw at any time (Miles et al., 2019). Participants were assigned pseudonymous codes. The departments were anonymised. Documents were identified using public identifiers. Participants' contributions are acknowledged; their willingness to speak honestly about difficult institutional conditions was essential to the study's findings.

Findings

The findings are organised thematically, reflecting a cross-case analysis of policy effects

across the three policy cycle contexts. Four themes emerged from the cross-case analysis. The analysis presents the most analytically significant patterns from a richer dataset.

Theme 1: The Closed Context of Influence: Exclusion as Policy Design

The initial and most universal finding in all departments was that frontline practitioners were entirely excluded from all stages of policy formulation. Participants did not experience this as being overlooked but as a structural condition of the program. All ten instructors reported that there had been no consultation at any lower level, except with the HEC.

One teacher who had sixteen years of experience in the profession explained how this exclusion has been applied in reality:

"Higher Education Commission failed to outline the teaching methodology, though it presented the outline of the course. The absence of a thorough policy and viable pedagogical approach to teaching presents a gap that people can interpret differently. We are unaware of the purpose of having the policy in universities and course implementations. We did not receive any policy; only the course outline from the department, prepared by senior faculty members. Essentially, this course aims to emphasise the advantages of participation and engage every student in a discussion regarding their future life goals and their personal approach to attaining them in light of Quranic teachings." (Teacher WA, Department C)

This account carries analytical weight because it precisely captures the gap between policy as text and policy as discourse, as theorised by Bowe et al. (1992). Teacher WA was given a course outline but not a policy, a coherent account of intent and rationale. This difference matters because, as Ball (1990) suggested, practitioners enact only the texts they receive, not the policies that those texts claim to represent.

This pattern was consistent across all departments. Teachers also reported that at the very beginning of each semester, they were given course outlines by their departmental coordinator, and no further discussion of the broader policy context was offered.

The influence of context on practitioner participation was not incidental. This exemplifies a policy model in which legislative authority substitutes professional deliberation. This is a defining characteristic of state-control regimes: policy legitimacy is assumed to derive from governmental authority rather than from deliberative quality. The implications for the practice setting were high and direct.

Theme 2: Policy Text as Absence: Dissemination Without Guidance

The second theme focuses on the role that policy texts play in text production. The text transmitted between the HEC, the university, and the departments was a semester-structured course outline specifying Quranic content for translation and recitation (Makhrij-ul-Haroof). It lacked pedagogical instructions, assessment criteria beyond pass/fail, learning outcomes, and a list of resources and professional development plans.

The consequence was described by one of the participants:

"I do not find the objectives of the policies, but the rationale of their application perfectly understandable." (Teacher SA, Department A)

The other was the institutional route by which even this minimal text was to be disseminated among teachers:

"I do not know who was responsible for receiving and sharing policies with the university, how

it was initiated, or distributed to the concerned authorities. (Teacher BA, Department D)

In this account, the organisation of policy text production is structured as a chain of forwarding, rather than a genuine communication process. The text became more attenuated and decontextualised along the HEC-university-department-instructor hierarchy. Instead of delivering substantive content, it produced a content list that encouraged professional judgment.

According to Bowe et al. (1992), policy texts contain both constraints and space. As a reading text, the course outline limited the content to semester-by-semester specifications. The silence about pedagogy and the lack of training related to the course, however, gave teachers the wrong space to fill. Sidney's (2017) policy-design instrument framework explains this structural absence. Only authority instruments, legislation, and HEC advisory were operative, as predicted by Sidney (2017).

Cross-case analysis showed that this dissemination model was uniform across all ten departments, although the effects varied according to departmental culture. A participant whose department had an established tradition of faculty curriculum discussion said that she independently used commentary texts on the Quran to enhance her pedagogical preparation, whereas other faculty engaged minimally with the course. This difference confirms Stake's (2006) argument that institutional context mediates policy effects, even though the policy texts are the same across the sites.

Theme 3: Moral Consensus, Pedagogical Incoherence: The Contradiction in the Context of Practice

According to the context of practice, the third theme involves capturing the main contradictions in the data. Teachers held strong moral convictions regarding the value of the course. They expressed coherent statements regarding religious and social imperatives; however, a moral consensus existed alongside pronounced pedagogical incoherence. The course was considered morally significant but pedagogically neglected.

One of the teachers described her interpretation of the purpose of the policy as follows:

"Most of the people, particularly the youth, are shifting towards secularism and adopting a secular standpoint owing to their long-term withdrawal from the Holy Quran and its teachings. The main aim of this policy-making process was to reintroduce students to the Quran and its teachings. Accessible educational resources and knowledge can be used to address the students' personality needs." (Teacher IS, Department B)

Eight out of ten instructors had this framing, which differed only in small details. The teachers developed a personal moral justification for the course that was coherent, truthful, and in line with the overall discursive modelling of the policy. However, when observations were made in the classroom, a different picture emerged.

Across all departments, teacher-centred transmission was the most prevalent instructional pattern in 36 observations. All lessons were conducted as the instructor read verses and their various translations using digital applications, with sourcing and management handled independently by each teacher. No instance of organised student talk, group work, or student-led recitation was recorded, except for individual pronunciation corrections. None of the teachers used the whiteboard during any of the observed sessions, although whiteboards were available in all observed rooms. Episodes of student inactivity, including non-

participation and phone use, were recorded across several classrooms.

"The verses were read out by the teacher and translated using the Islam 360 application. She never explained any of the verses in any of her lectures." (Fieldnotes, Teacher BS, Department F)

"During the lecture, students found it boring, sitting in the chair as the teacher was reading verses and translations without any engagement with the students." (Fieldnotes, Teacher SA, Department A&G)

Department B had one exception of analytical importance: one teacher incorporated Tajweed correction, individual recitation, and short reflective discussion. This exception shows that the course outline did not inhibit different enactments. Maneuver space (Bowe et al., 1992) exists as a textual possibility but is constrained by absent pedagogical support, institutional resources, and incentives to mobilise that interpretive space. The explanation of the pattern by the framework of curriculum potential introduced by Ben-Peretz (2009) is clear: the Quranic text provided real pedagogic potential, whereas realising that potential requires enabling conditions.

This moral-pedagogical contradiction in itself is a policy effect: a contradiction, as deep-rooted in the policy design, by the very designation of a course as non-credit. Both signals operated below the threshold of explicit recognition; the institutional signal authorised and encouraged minimal enactment.

Theme 4: Monitoring Absence as Institutional Discourse

The fourth theme focused on the total lack of classroom supervision in all departments. throughout the course's operation. Punctuality was the only performance measure applied.

"There is no person who monitors the course of our classes. The question paper and examination results are the only accountability mechanisms because the Head of Department and senior staff are otherwise engaged." (Teacher AC, Department J, November 2023)

Nobody has ever attended my sessions to observe the teaching method, course delivery, or the teachers' results. Nobody has even bothered to consult teachers on how to improve the course outline and syllabus. This assists the teacher in recognising the upcoming tasks and planning deadlines to allocate for their completion." (Teacher BS, Department F, November 2023)

This lack does not constitute an administrative failure. According to Bowe et al. (1992), monitoring is itself a recontextualisation process: Practitioners receive feedback on the adequacy of their interpretations. The institution communicates that classroom activities are inconsequential to the students. Several participants stated this conclusion explicitly, linking non-credit status to absent supervision and student disengagement in a coherent institutional rationale:

"The course is of least priority to the students because it is non-credit. The teachers must be motivated to work better in their respective classes, and this is not the case." (Teacher ZT, Department I, November 2023)

The cross-case analysis found no difference between the departments in their monitoring practices. This uniformity is analytically significant. varied according to the departmental culture and faculty characteristics. This suggests an institutional policy communicated through inaction rather than directives. The policy cycle model (Bowe et al., 1992) attends precisely to such negative enactment: institutional inaction is analytically as consequential as action.

Discussion

Policy Effects and the Research Questions

The three research questions that guided this study provide significant answers to these findings. The context of influence entirely excludes practitioners. The text production context generated power-laden, yet instructionally weak texts that created a formal policy presence without a teaching presence. The practice context produced enactments characterised by moral commitment, resource scarcity, transmission pedagogy, and structural disengagement. These are structural conditions and not individual choices.

These are not implementation failures; rather, they are outcomes produced by the policy's structural design (Bowe et al., 1992). to distinguish the intended outcomes from the observed outcomes. The findings of this study confirm that this policy most likely created formal compliance and substantive impoverishment due to its design. Fullan (2020) identifies this pattern as a characteristic of forced reform that lacks capacity building, and these findings extend the forced curriculum literature in higher education.

Recontextualisation and the Space for Maneuver

The policy cycle model foregrounds the interpretive practices performed on received texts (Bowe et al., 1992). The space available to instructors was theoretically available but practically limited. The course outline did not define pedagogy; the teachers had the freedom to use active and dialogic instruction, as well as inquiry-based instruction. One instructor did. The remaining nine teachers relied on transmission pedagogy.

The analysis of this pattern has two dimensions. Recontextualisation occurs even at the individual level; even minimum compliance decisions are acts of interpretation. Second, it showed that the facilities that facilitate pedagogical (professional knowledge, resources, institutional encouragement, and responsibility) were lacking. Such an arrangement, according to Heimans (2012), constitutes the policy-practice gap: arising from the absence of bridging conditions for substantive professional interpretation.

It is educative to compare this with Indonesian higher education (Gaus et al., 2019). The curriculum-making process in Indonesian universities was examined through a policy research lens, and it was found that the partial involvement of teachers in the process contributed significantly to the consistency and quality of curriculum implementation. In Pakistan, where teachers were systematically marginalised, there was maximum conformity but minimal engagement with the policy's articulated moral and educational purposes (Rafiq et al., 2025).

Contradiction, Incoherence, and the Policy Ensemble

The most vivid result of this research is the contradiction of the structure in the core of the policy. The course was simultaneously non-credit, mandatory, and not monitored. This indifference among departments stems from their failure to monitor. These three signals operate in interactive relationships between teachers and students to create a mode of enactment that reflects the policy's internal contradictions: formally present but substantially marginal.

Bowe et al. (1992) argued that incoherence, contradictions, and inconsistencies are always

characteristic of th policy ensembles. The Compulsory Quran Translation Course vividly illustrates this. This rationalisation of morality allowed teachers to live with this contradiction: they continued teaching in good faith, but their enactment remained partial. This is the accommodation Ball (1987) identified as strategic compliance, which refers to professional compliance with minimal resistance: complying with the minimum requirements of the authority while diverting professional agency to other institutional demands.

Connections to Policy Sociology

These results are in line with policy sociology theory, further refining it with context-specific refinements. First, the Pakistani higher education context, compared with the UK secondary school context in which the framework was designed (Bowe et al., 1992), was capable of identifying three analytically useful contexts: influence, text production, and practice. Second, they expanded the framework and demonstrated the policy signal as a form of monitoring absence rather than an oversight gap.

These findings resonate with Braun et al. (2011), who established that teacher policy responses are shaped by professional cultures, resource environments, and competing policy demands, rather than by any single policy text. The absence of a professional culture around the course, with no departmental identity, disciplinary community, or professional reputation, led teachers to produce no collective response and to default to individual solutions.

Implications

These findings have direct implications for policy designs. A policy design based on authority tools, legislation, and notification, but not on information or capacity-building tools, produces formal compliance rather than substantive enactment. This pattern has empirical support in policy design theory (Sidney, 2017), but has not been applied to compulsory religious curriculum in higher education in Pakistan.

Theoretically, to account for institutional status designations, such as non-credit classifications that recontextualise formal mandates before they reach the classroom. For practitioners, the findings support a critical understanding of the institutional conditions under which quality teaching is possible and the micro-political dynamics through which those conditions are provided or withheld. The critique of implementation research that Bowe et al. (1992) advanced is justified not only theoretically but also practically: less productive and less analytically rigorous than asking what a policy actually did.

Conclusion

This study traced the enactment of the Compulsory Quran Translation Course across four academic departments at a public university in Punjab, Pakistan. Based on the policy cycle framework of Bowe et al. (1992) and a qualitative multiple-case study design, this study documents the structural effects produced by the policy's design logic. Teachers were excluded from the context of influence and produced power-laden, instructionally deficient texts. The practice context engendered moral commitment despite a lack of pedagogical capacity.

These findings are not confined to this case. They reveal a systematic reliance on legislative authority rather than policy planning, content specification rather than policy rationale, and formal compliance rather than quality education. This trend is not limited to religious education; it is a policy-making paradigm that treats instruments of authority as adequate for educational change. Authority instruments alone are insufficient to effect substantive educational change. For sustainable curriculum reform in higher education, teacher consultation must inform curriculum development, pedagogical frames must organise the process of dissemination, and accountability must be incorporated into the practical implementation.

This analysis may be replicated in private university settings to determine whether the pattern reflects the position within Pakistani higher education policy or the position of a particular university. Student voice data are needed to build a more comprehensive discourse on the educational effects of the policy from the student perspective. Moreover, a longitudinal study is required to align with changes in policy maturation and institutional responses. The ultimate contribution of policy sociology is its insistence that policy is ongoing, controversial, and unfinished, and that knowing what is done by policy, rather than what is meant by it, is a significant and irremovable task of educational inquiry.

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