

Evaluating Cluster-Based Budget Utilization in the Government Schools of Balochistan: A Case Study of District Quetta with Focus on Fiscal Year 2024-2025

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ABSTRACT

In Balochistan the government schools' budget is devolved and allocated based on students' enrollment at the gross-root levels. The high and higher secondary schools administer the budget and distribute it among the middle and primary schools in the close vicinity, as fixed in the clustering System. The system is identified in term as education cluster budget. It Ensures transparency in the utilization of the budget. The education officers in all districts are made responsible for evaluating the efficacy and transparent utilization of this budget. The process is called an internal audit. The present study was carried out to evaluate the utilization of the cluster budget and identify the flaws in utilizing this budget. For this purpose, the evaluation research method was adopted to scrutinize and asses the fair consumption of allocated budget. The data was gathered from the principals and head teachers of the high and higher secondary schools in the district Quetta. The district has 138 high and higher secondary schools; however, due to time constraints this study was limited to collecting data from 57 schools. The findings outlined unsatisfactory conclusions in identifying governance, academic and procedural flaws. The schools' heads were found involved in corrupt practices while showing fake bills, misuse of budget, weak documentation and no or weak delivery in many cases. The study categorized the results into three parts: satisfactory, non-satisfactory, and worst or corrupt, based on different indicators. Contextually, 10 schools were found to be satisfactory, 33 schools were in the category of non-satisfactory, and 14 schools were declared worst or corrupt and completely failed in fulfilling the required targets.

Keywords: Cluster-based budget, Education, Schools, Balochistan

INTRODUCTION

The present era is the era of quality changes, as each organization struggles to prepare products and offer quality services (Beckford, 1998; Stoner et al., 2001). Though the idea and the concept of quality management and products was first practiced in business, however, it penetrated increasingly into education. In this context UNESCO emphasized significance of quality in education, and it was directed that it should be reflected in the education policies. Contextually, in 2002, the European Council designed EU education and training systems to promote a quality benchmark for the rest of the world by 2010. The forum argued that the European countries pay full support and attention to quality components in the local and national educational policies (Michel, 2003). Regarding this, the European Parliament recommended that its member countries introduce a clear and transparent quality education assessment system to promote internal as well as external audit in the year 2001. The forum indicated the internal audit in the schools as a quality improvement and continuous process of involving all divisions and teaching staff to look at the different aspects of school performance, highlight strengths and weaknesses of the school, and evolve

quality-based improvement plans to improve the performance and services. In this way, the program is continued and gaining importance in the member states, where they have evolved strategies to implement and cope with a number of issues (Rupšienė & Targamadzė, 2006).

The foundation and financial stability, as well operational effectiveness of an organization is characterized by thorough scrutiny and evaluation executed by the authorized staff. The process is termed as internal auditing, which signifies crucial management control mechanism and meeting the set rules and targets. Okoli (2005) in this context, outlined that internal auditing promotes consistent vigilance and assesses the efficacy of managerial protocols. Besides financial issues, the internal auditing also encompass physical infrastructure of the institution. The school plant audit works as strategic need, critical evaluation of the existing facilities in order to maintain, renovate and modernize the school's system. This approach was illuminated by Knezevich (2005) by arguing that the schools need not only structural integrity but also the need of safety, hygiene and availability of essential resources. In this domain it is contended that ensuring infrastructural facilities give strength to organizational endeavors, which ultimately reflected in achieving reliable data and well-informed decision makings and resource allocation (Felix, 2024).

Empirical evidences contend that there is a positive correlation between the provision of resources and quality education. It is further noted that the resources managed education system effectivity is the key to challenge hurdles in the path of education booming success (UNESCO, 2011). Moreover, the targets of education can be achieved through utilizing multiple resources as inputs. Among these resources the provision of finance is the key component among the required inputs (Eyasu & Berhanu, 2019; Melaku, 2000). However, there is the need of understanding of financial management that how to utilize the budget. But on the contrary when there is no understanding, the financial illiteracy occurs which leads to lack of understanding of the stakeholders about the basic knowledge of financial management in their schools (Sebidi, 2019). It is evident from the study conducted in a public school of South Africa, where it found that the deficient skills and misunderstanding of legal requirements, the unavailability of financial policies in schools and ineffective monitoring and lack of transparency led to education worsen ends (Rangongo, Mohlakwana & Beckmann, 2016). Moreover, failure of the school governance team and the administrator is caused mostly due to lack of mutual consensus, the undefined TORs of School Governing Body (SGB) and lack of clear objectives (Mestry, 2023). So, in this context the role of auditor and his effectiveness in more crucial, otherwise a number of gaps can occur in the public schools at the township level and in the rural regions (Aina, 2017). In this regard it is advised that the stakeholders should comprehend the basic knowledge of financial management (Mestry, 2018; Sebidi, Aina & Kgwete, 2023).

Nevertheless, governments provide authority to education for the purpose to manage it. As it is a part of efforts made by the governments to improve the quality of education (Bandur et al., 2022; Cirocki & Anam, 2024; Indra et al., 2022; Sanjani et al., 2024). This decentralization move is aimed to transfer the authority from top to bottom, where the authority will be practiced by regional governments and schools, especially in the context of education policies and budget (Greany, 2024; Sabir et al., 2021; Zuhdi et al., 2024). Contextually, the school financial matters get crucial status which influencing the implementation of teaching as well as learning activities. The finance at the school not only enhancing production components but also a strategic potential which is greatly triggering to the success of education (Cheng, 2022; Sanjani, 2024; Wahyudin & Zohriah, 2023). Moreover, the ingredients of educational activities like procurement of facilities and infrastructure, learning perspectives and teachers' packages disturbing the budget planning. The existing literature claim that for effective and financial management it is the prerequisite for the sustainability and success of education in schools, characterized by careful planning, reasonable fund allocation and continuous surveillance and evaluation (Arsal, Sidiq & Jalaludin 2024; Hardiansyah, 2022). This notion identifies that efficient and mature management and administration in the both field as operation

and finance lead to achieving educational targets and improving the school standard (Arsal, Sidiq & Jalaludin, 2024).

Study Objectives

This study investigates the following objectives

1. To highlight the utilization of cluster-based budget allocation to the government schools of district Quetta, Balochistan
2. To explore the flaws occurring in the utilization of budget and mismanagement regarding the budget utilization.

Research Question

This research study is focusing on the utilization of the cluster-based budget in the government high and the higher secondary schools of district Quetta and answering the following specific research questions.

1. How the cluster-based budget utilized in the government schools?
2. What are the irregularities and mismanagement practices in the utilization of cluster budget in the schools?

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Familiarizing students and teachers with the school internal audit process a study was carried out by Adesina (2004) to communicate that for understanding inventory of classrooms, labs, workshops and other activities of schools it is necessary that the staff and students should be trained properly to organize specialized orientation sessions. Furthermore, Ajayi and Taiwor (2001) proposed division of labor in terms of allocating different tasks to different individuals or groups to maintain school dynamics and cleanliness tasks. In this regard they recommend supervisor to be appointed to establish maintaining workable schedules for regular inspections. The supervisor is to manage various funds and explore students' labor and donations. Additionally, Abellon et al., (2020) advocate for the school heads required assistance in spending their budgets as the education department provide them guidelines for budget allocation and utilization. Accordingly, one of the prominent reasons for this assistance is to involve teachers to enhance their comprehension about the necessary materials and services for effective financial utilization. Resultantly this strategy yielded tremendous outcomes for the students in terms of providing inclusive learning, which has nevertheless opened more job opportunities for the students (Rico, 2022).

The competence of auditors is always considered crucial for the successful completion of the program. As the qualification, experience and the training attitude of auditor significantly effacing his performance. A competent auditor can better identify the flaws that come forth with the feasible solutions and fostering the overall standard of auditing (Kizilkaya, Tabone, & Ellul, 2023). The result-oriented internal audit process always requires continuous support from the school administration. The support ranges from access to information, necessary resources and the implementation of felt changes, which is indeed proving critical factors for the success of internal audit function (Abdelrahim & Al-Malkawi, 2022). In this scenario some school administrators are of the view that the existing staff whether trained or untrained are capable to handle this task, however, research studies negate this narrative and argue that dedicated school plant auditors can lead to better outcomes and ensure continuous attention to facilitating the managers, who are most often engaged in other activities of schools and neglect this important goal (Adesina, 2005).

Ziebell (1991) in his study stresses upon the scrutiny of the school budget and argue that this auditing process minimizing opportunities for financial mismanagement and keep careful watch on the actual performance of school administration. Thus, in this context there should be financial control system to streamline the given resources and promote to quality results (Ayot & Briggs, 1992). Moreover, Paisey (1992) extended that the survival of an organization lies in the strict and principled financial audit. The administrator should adopt strategies and rules instrumental in countering fraud and anticipate overspending. He or she should have the understanding of continuing and accurate knowledge of overall financial situation. Mestry (2006) in this regard conducted a study in South Africa where it was found that the budget in schools were poorly administered. The bank statements were roughly compiled, the signatories of the school funds were clearly objectionable, the finance policies and control mechanism remained absent, the cheques and cash payments were found quite pathetic and they were made in the absence of payment authority and the supporting documents found absent, and the procurement procedures were questionable regrettably.

The financial record of schools is no doubt very important. The government audit department should keep this record secure (Waihenya, 2000). Rosalind and Downes (2004) stress that internal audit is not guarantee of the fraud to prevent, nonetheless, regular external audit is mandatory for the fair utilization of budget whether it is through education department authority or private auditors but the auditing authority should not be employee in the said school. In addition to this a study carried out by Kahavisa (2003) also produced that there was no proper internal audit system in schools and the finding found that there were irregularities in the audit system and the school funds were mismanaged. School is the collective property of the people. In this way it important that all stakeholders should jointly be involved in preparing budget and sharing their experiences in operating program (Campbell, 1996). However, Hallack and Poission (2001) concluded that in Brazil most of the school staff was not interested in budgeting and moreover they were found out of understanding of budgetary data. In the study they further resulted that in England which generally famous for the teachers being busier were found for having insufficient technical knowledge about the budget allocated for the school management. Furthermore, an outstanding majority of teachers were uninterested in the technical knowledge of finance provided, even though they had enough literature for this cause to teach (Mobegi, Ondigi & Simatwa, 2012).

The finance management system is not an easy task to be done without any training activity. It creates challenges across a number of schools owing to no comprehensive trainings among many managers (Barr & McClellan, 2018). A considerable number of school heads and members from the school governing bodies are deficient in required technical education and skills, leading to the gap and creating threat to the struggles made for the devising effective solutions to the various problems (Mestry, 2017). Similarly, Baro et al., (2020) seconded the assertion in his study in Nigeria where he concluded that the multitude of schools encountered with substantial challenges in terms of mismanagement, the incompetence of managers, the absence of capable leadership and insufficient talent; the highly prevalence of corruption has bowed the underserved communities to the determined level, kept additional burden on the already devastated folks, caused to shrink the public services, reduce government revenues and condense quest for education (Okpon, Eyiene & Ekpenyong, 2024).

Balochistan is the poorest province of Pakistan, as the UNDP recent report argue that among the most deprived 20 districts of Pakistan are 17 from Balochistan (UNDP, 2025). The literacy ratio as reported is 43.58% which is far lowest than the national literacy rate counted as 58.92 %. The gender disparity and literacy is more alarming than this. In this connection the Balochistan Education Sector Plan (BESP) 2013 to 2018 rectifying this statement and extending that there is weakest access to indicators, and stress upon the urgent intervention to cope with these challenges. There is a dire need that the federal government

should focus Balochistan in terms of educational emergency; the province has indeed received very attention in the past (Coşkun, 2023).

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Evaluation of the financial matters is playing significant role in smoothing the pathway of any organization. It provides a check and balance in streamlining the efficiency of a system. In this context, the financial study in schools for evaluating and assessing the fair utilization of cluster budget is instrumental in making the academic and structural system of the schools. Consequently, this study was executed in Quetta district, where evaluation research method was applied for conducting this study. Evaluation research is a procedure or method aimed at assessing or appraising a program, activity, or system to provide information for decision making (Neuman, 2014). The evaluation research, as a part of applied research calculate the implementation, effectiveness, and impact of a policy or program to determine how the intervention works better. Following this study, 57 high and higher secondary schools out of 138 schools were visited, and the data were collected from the principals and head teachers of the schools in their schools. The data were gathered during July- October 2025. The research team went through school records, utilization of budget, and assessed materials and other non-material activities of the schools, and finally prepared a report on the basis of the given data. The report was later on categorized into different parts to highlight the overall efficiency of schools in terms of their proper delivery, management, documentation, procedural mechanism, bill maintenance, etc.

Results and Findings

This comprehensive study evaluated 57 schools out of 138 high and higher secondary schools in District Quetta for the fiscal year 2024–2025. The data identified systemic governance failures, significant procedural violations, weak documentation, partial or zero delivery of procured materials, and widespread misuse of funds. The findings further outlined structural issues in the cluster-based budget utilization system.

The report categorizes schools into three performance tiers: satisfactory (A), non-satisfactory (B), and severe irregularities (C).

Summary of the Evaluation Study of Schools (57 Schools)

The Research team classified schools in three categories based on service delivery, documentation quality, procurement transparency, and physical verification

Category A – Satisfactory

During the study, only ten combined boys' and girls' schools out of 57 schools were found satisfactory in terms of materials delivery, maintaining reasonable documentation, and witnessed minimal irregularities.

These ten schools have relatively better transparency and partial compliance; however, still require procedural strengthening.

Category B – Non-Satisfactory

In this category, thirty-three both boys' and girls' schools were noted as deficient for showing partial materials delivery, weak paperwork, and procedural violations.

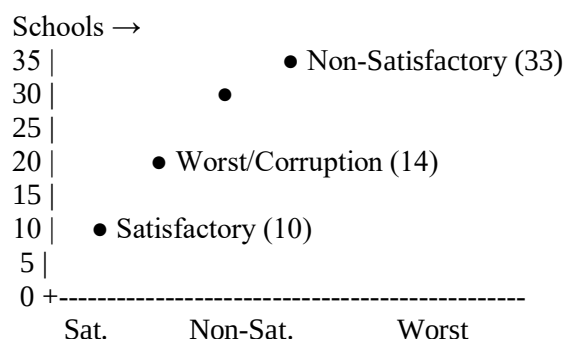
Category C – Worst Performing

The data moreover identified fourteen schools out of 57 combined Boys and girls high and higher secondary schools worst in terms of showing performance in the delivery of goods, depicted forged bills, zero service delivery, and severe irregularities.

Table 1: Key Findings and Analysis- (Results Summary of 57 Schools)

Category	Description	Schools	%
A – Satisfactory	Full delivery, acceptable documentation	10	18%
B – Non-Satisfactory	Partial delivery, weak documentation, procedural faults	33	58%
C – Worst / Corruption	No delivery, fake bills, proven misuse	14	24%
Total		57	100%

General Overview of Performance (n=57 Audited Schools)



Detailed Analysis of Major Budget Misuse Areas

Table 2: The Study Revealed a Severe Pattern of Misuse Focused on Easily Manipulated Heads

Budget Head	Finding	Outcome
Science Equipment (029)	Widespread ghost procurement, inflated rates, and supply of low-quality, non-functional equipment. 20 schools showed fake/ghost procurement bills	Funds embezzled; zero educational benefit derived.
National Fairs/Exhibitions (A03918)	Funds are frequently drawn against this head with no physical event, documentation, or verifiable activity, and used as a common cover for unauthorized cash extraction	Direct fraud/cash withdrawal under a non-verifiable head.
Repair of Buildings (A133)	Funds drawn for repairs/maintenance with zero physical work done.	Funds misused; critical infrastructure remains dilapidated.

Table 3: Graphical Representation of Structural Failures

Science Equipment	⊖ HIGH RISK	Ghost procurement, fake bills
National Fairs	△ MEDIUM RISK	No events held, cash extraction
Building Repairs	△ MEDIUM RISK	Zero physical work, fake invoices

A majority of the cluster funds did not result in proper service delivery.

ADMINISTRATIVE MISCONDUCT & FINANCIAL GOVERNANCE FAILURES OF DISTRICT QUETTA

Head Teachers' Financial Knowledge Failure

Only 4 out of 57 school heads possessed even a basic understanding of financial rules, cashbook maintenance, UCs, procurement procedures, or AG-related processes.

Impact

- Vulnerable to manipulation by private vendors
- No internal control or oversight
- DDO duties not understood
- High probability of procedural violations

Visualization

Heads Knowing Financial Rules ----- 04

Clueless Heads ----- 53

Failure to Engage School Clerks / Cashiers

Only 7 schools engaged their official clerks/cashiers — the legally responsible officers for billing, record-keeping, quotation processing, and cheque follow-up.

Impact

- Clerks sidelined; untrained private firms take over
- No segregation of duties
- Entire budgeting process compromised
- Fraud becomes easier to execute

Visualization

Clerks Engaged Properly ----- 07

Clerks Excluded ----- 50

Domination of Private Firms in Budgeting, Billing & Documentation

More than 90% of schools allowed private firms to control billing, quotations, cashbooks, voucher preparation, UCs, filing, and even the collection of cheques from the AG Office.

Impact

- Public funds effectively controlled by private vendors
- Inflated bills, ghost payments, fabricated documentation
- Heads become dependent on external agents
- No institutional oversight

Visualization

Private Firms Involved ----- 51+

Schools Not Using Firms ----- <6

Delegation of Financial Authority to Husbands (Female Heads)

Three female headmistresses illegally handed over full authority of school funds, billing, procurement, cheque handling, and documentation to their husbands.

Impact

- Violation of DDO authority
- Zero accountability
- External individuals controlling school resources
- High misuse risk

Visualization

Delegation to Husbands ----- 03

Self-Managed Schools ----- 54

Specific Case: Malik (Area Notable) Misusing School Funds

Malik (A notable of the area) personally used school financial resources, with 100% misuse, 0% delivery, and fabricated supporting documents.

Impact

- Confirmed embezzlement
- Total loss of funds
- Criminal breach of trust
- Major damage to cluster system credibility

Visualization

Direct Misuse (Malik) ----- 01

Other Heads ----- 56

Administrative & Financial Misconduct Dashboard

Overview Panel

Administrative Misconduct Dashboard – 57 Schools

Heads Knowing Financial Rules ----- 04

Clerks Engaged in Budgeting ----- 07

Private Firms Controlling Processes -----51+

Delegation to Husbands (Female Heads) -----03

Direct Misuse of Funds (Malik) ----- 01

Threats / Obstruction to Audit ----- 02

Executive Dashboard (Presentation Block)

Financial knowledge gap 53/57 heads ☐ critical

Clerk involvement failure 50/57 schools ☐ critical

Private firm control 51/57 schools ☐ extreme

Spouse interference 3/57 schools ☐ high

Direct embezzlement 1/57 school ☐ extreme

Threats to audit team

2/57 schools ☐ high

DISCUSSIONS

Cluster-based budget allocation is in fact a good practice, where the fund is devolved to gross-root level, and the schools' administration utilize this budget where there is needed. However, this study highlights alarming conclusions for depicting deplorable statistics in terms of budget utilization through evaluation report. The study gathered data from 57 schools out of 138 schools of district Quetta. The data underscore systemic governance flaws, grave procedural violations, unsatisfactory and missing documentation, zero or partial delivery of procured materials, and severe misuse of allocated budget. The report contends that out of 57 schools only 10 schools were found satisfactory for utilization their budget in better way, nevertheless these schools also needed improvement in budget management. Furthermore, 33 schools were found unsatisfactory for providing partial delivery, weak documentation and procedural faults. Moreover, 14 schools were found worst and corrupt, vividly involved in fund embezzlement, provided fake bills, no delivery and proven misuse of the budget. The data in the same way regrettably communicate further that only 4 out of 57 school heads knew even the basic understanding of financial rules, cashbook maintenance, UCs, procurement procedures or AG-related process. Likewise, only 7 schools had engaged their school clerks/cashiers in the audit activity. As this staff is legally responsible for billing, record-keeping, quotation processing and cheque follow-up. Similarly, 90% of schools had allowed private firms to manage billing, quotations, cashbooks, voucher preparation, UCs, filing and even the collection of cheques from the AG office. Deplorably three female head teachers had illegally handed over full authority to their husbands for the financial management of the schools. Accordingly, the study found that notables (Maliks) of the area were found involved in utilizing school financial resources, and 100% of budget goes in their pockets, while showing fabricated documents; and additionally it was found that some head teachers showed non-cooperative behavior and even a school head teacher threatened the research team for asking the required documents and record.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

While evaluating government schools in terms of cluster-based budget utilization in Quetta it is found that the overall efficiency and output is highly unsatisfactory in different categories. However, these categories or indicators need to be improved. For this purpose, it is suggested that there should be Parent Teachers School Management Committee (PTSMC) meetings on regular basis, keep cashbook, financial record complete and secure. Further, there is the need of mandatory vendor verification, 0% of private firm interference, material delivery, maintaining science laboratories, minor repair, 100% heads and clerks' certification before appointment, and keeping audit intact and clear.

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