

Fata merger with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: an analysis of challenges and problems to secondary education

Muhammad Ullah Orakzai

Ph.D. Scholar, Institute of Education and Research, University of Peshawar

Prof Dr. Arshad Ali

Professor at Institute of Education and Research, University of Peshawar

Abstract

Erstwhile FATA lag well behind in all sectors of life in general but particular in education as compare to other parts of the country (Pakistan). The purpose of the study was to evaluate critically the current state of secondary education system in the merged districts and to analyze the challenges and problems besetting secondary education after the merger of FATA into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The objectives of the study were to explore the improvements of secondary education after the merger, the challenges and problems of secondary education in the merged areas. The nature of the study was quantitative and descriptive. Population of the study was the total number of Head Masters and Principals (Male and Female) in the erstwhile FATA comprising 433 in numbers. Sample of the study was the total number of Head Masters and Principals (Male &Female) comprising 167 in numbers of three districts Khyber, Orakzai and Kurram, selected through convenient sampling procedure. Questionnaire was used for data collection. Data was analyzed by using frequency, percentage and Chi-square tests. The study reveals that significant improvements have been observed, including the extension of services by the Education Monitoring Authority, control of teachers absenteeism, improvement of monitoring system, creation of new administrative posts, establishment of Parent Teacher Council,, separation of male and female education offices, reconstruction of damaged/destroyed infrastructure, recruitment of teachers and upgradation of secondary schools have contributed to enhance education quality. However, the study highlights several persisting challenges, i.e. the required budget allocation, proper infrastructure, establishment of separate education offices, reconstruction of all destroyed and damaged infrastructure, establishment of new secondary schools, provision of basic facilities, increasing students enrollment and reducing students dropout ratio, provision of teaching professionals and availability of technical experts. Furthermore, the study elaborates that secondary education is confronting with serious problems such as terrorism, militancy, tribal culture, gender discrimination, lack of community cooperation, poor administration, undue political interference, wrong posting, insufficient allocation of budget, shortage of subject experts and improper criteria for the departmental promotion of secondary school teachers. The study recommends several measures that are ensuring law and order situation, sufficient budget allocation, provision of special grant, prioritizing education in tribal areas, provision of basic educational facilities, subject specialists/ subject teachers, scholarships, financial aid, avoiding political interference, establishment of separate education offices, model educational institutions, new secondary schools and revision of departmental promotion criteria for secondary school teachers. By implementing these recommendations, it is possible to enhance the secondary education system, reduce tribal rigidity and bring the people of merged districts at par with the rest of the country in terms of educational opportunities and outcomes.

Keywords: FATA, Merger, Secondary Education, Challenges and Problems

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1. Introduction:

In Pakistan, the quality of education has a declining trend. It is realized that science education in particular is reaching lowest ebb and needs to be improved urgently. There is acute shortage of teachers, dual medium of instruction at secondary level, poor quality of teachers, cheating in the examinations and overcrowded classrooms. Laboratories are poor and ill equipped and curriculum has little relevance to present day needs (Economic Survey of Pakistan, 2002).

In Pakistan, secondary education lasts for four years (grade 9th-12th). It is catered in government secondary and higher secondary schools; most of these schools have middle classes as well. Secondary education is the final stage for the majority of students. The reason for this is that the majority of students drop out of school after finishing secondary school. Keeping this goal in mind, secondary education must include a solid foundation of science, technical and vocational knowledge so that students who are unable to continue their education have numerous options for pursuing a career. Secondary education also serves as a preparation stage for those who wish to continue their studies at a higher level. In this direction, secondary education shall provide a good base for higher education at the college and the university level. In this stage the students can be effectively guided towards a career as future scientists (Mohanty, 2004).

In our country (Pakistan), secondary education is divided into four grades: 9th and 10th grade at high schools, 11th and 12th grade at higher secondary schools. The secondary level of education is a significant portion of the overall education system. It opens up opportunities for middle-level workers. It also serves as a stepping stone for higher education which is supposed to result in highly qualified professionals in the numerous professions that depend on the caliber of secondary schools. This level of education must be reformed in order to prepare everyone for higher education and to assist them in adjusting meaningfully and productively to their real-world lives (Govt. of Pakistan, 2010).

Erstwhile FATA) of Pakistan consist of seven Districts: Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Orakzai, Kurram, North Waziristan and South Waziristan, as well as six Frontier Regions (FRs): Peshawar, Kohat, Bannu, Laki Marwat Tank, and Dera Ismail Khan. It is a tribal belt known as Newly Merged Districts located in the heart of South Asia, spanning 27,220 square kilometers which is 3.4% of the total territory of Pakistan and sharing a 600-kilometer border with Afghanistan known as the Durand line with a population of 5,001,676 people (Ullah, 2013; .Sulaiman & Bukhari, 2016).

Ex-FATA, presently part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is that tribal region of Pakistan which is in the eye of the storm since the incident of 9/11. The ex-FATA is contiguous with the Western border of Afghanistan along the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. It is a direct heritage of the British-Indian Empire and the FCR laws, through which FATA was ruled. The Frontier Crime Regulations (FCR) was sanctioned by the British Government in 1901. The central regime was practicing Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR) as a set of laws to handle ex-FATA (Noor, Hashmi, & Bukhari, 2018).

FATA region was semi-autonomous previously. These areas are bounded from south and east by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan, while the neighbors of the tribal districts in north and west are Nangarhar, Paktia, Kunar, Paktika and Khost provinces of Afghanistan through Durand line. Total region of FATA is 27,220 Sq.km and total inhabitants according to 2016 estimate are 4,800,883 persons with density of 163 persons per/Km. Exactly the entire population of newly merged districts are Pashto speakers, while the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa settled areas are multi-linguistic. Although, the people of tribal areas have connected with the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, as religiously, culturally, socially and economically (Hussain , 2014; Muzaffar, Khan & Yaseen,. 2019).

This region was the hub of the "Great Game" between the Russia and Britain during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Following the partitioning of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, Pakistan recognized the similar managerial structure of FATA, regulated by British FCR legislation. According to Articles 1 and 2 of the 1973 Constitution, FATA received legal status as a geo-political part of Pakistan (Chughtai, 2013).

The year of 2018 brought many changes in the federal structure of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. On 31st May, 2018 the President of Pakistan signed the 25th amendment of the constitution, after that ex-FATA merged officially into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Before merger, the ex-FATA was under the control of federal government. After the merger, the tribal belt came under the direct supervision of KP province (Lovelace, 2018)

The tribal belt has been left in the deepest troubles by violence and conflicts. The literacy rate of former FATA is around 33.3%, as it is quite far from average of 62% literacy rate of rest of the country, as calculated in 2017-18. Similarly, the literacy rate of adult is 28.4 per cent, which is fairly far from overall literacy rate of Pakistan. In the literacy of erstwhile FATA, there was a clear gender gap, i.e. the male adult literacy rate was 45% while the literacy rate of female was only 7.8%. So it is concluded that, former FATA is still far worse in the field of education than Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and even the rest of the country. (FATA Secretariat and Statistics Bureau Report, 2018).

In the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas, there are three types of education systems: government, informal, and madrassa education. Education is supported by various organizations that provide technical and vocational training in tribal areas. Unfortunately, education is inadequate, poor and unsatisfactory in Federally Administered Tribal Areas. According to reports, up to 600 educational institutions are closed due to security concerns or displacement of people to other parts of Pakistan. Similarly, data obtained from educational institutions for girls is quite pitiful, showing that 537 out of 1927 schools for girls are non-operational. According to the FATA Development Household Survey (2013-14), tribal districts have a literacy rate of 33%, which is significantly lower than the overall literacy rate of 58 percent of the country. Furthermore, it has been discovered that there are only 35 colleges, 23 for boys and 12 for girls, with only 3% of students completing their higher education. It confirms that the education sector in the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas is dismal and needs immediate attention (Mehmood & Mir, 2019).

The education system in former FATA significantly lags well behind the rest of the country in terms of quality and accessibility. In tribal regions, very little attention has given to both male and female education. Women have been kept out of the realm of education which is the basic and constitutional right of every citizen of Pakistan (Sajjida, 2012).

Very short number of institutions are available and most of the teaching staff comes in remote areas of former FATA. It often happens that there will come only one teacher or even half-educated person is hire from the community on the place of missing teacher and have her / his sit in the school. The person just doesn't teach. In the case of an inspection visit by the highest official, the actual teachers are informed. The inspection is rarely done, since they will often talk to the inspectors and give them some of their salaries as a bribe. In addition, people in the village do not have the information and do not care enough to get together and call on teachers to attend school regularly (Jamal, 2016).

There are 5,826 government schools in the Merged Districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in which 5051 are functional and 775 are non-functional. In the functional schools 3099 for boys and 1952 for girls while in the non-functional schools 366 for boys and 409 for girls. Overall enrollment in government schools in the Merged Districts is 609,826. The total number of sanctioned posts of teachers in government schools is 21,536 (14,647 in Boys + 6,889 in Girls schools). Total number of working teachers in government schools is 17,049 (11,873 Male teachers + 5,176 Female teachers) (Annual School Census Report 2020-21 for Newly Merged Districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa).

The condition of secondary education is poor and dismal, with literacy rates as low as 17 percent overall and 3 percent among women in the FATA region. Majority of the schools lack basic facilities and the drop out ratio is very high at secondary level (Mansoor & Naz, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

In Pakistan, the system of education is among the lowest in terms of quality in general but particular in erstwhile FATA. In the erstwhile FATA, every sector of life is worstly affected and one of the main ones is the standard and quality of secondary education. Secondary education encounters a variety of problems, resultantly the condition of secondary education is dismal and do not meet the needs of the society. FATA status was limbo. The tribal people were kept in the dark about their fundamental rights under the notorious FCR law enacted by British government in 1901. The State of Pakistan recognized this situation and established FATA Reforms Committee in 2016. Based on the recommendations of the FATA Reforms Committee, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas were formally merged with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa through an amendment in the constitution of Pakistan in May 2018 (Khan, 2019). The merger of FATA with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was a historic event that was intended to bring the region into the mainstream of Pakistani society. However, the merger has also posed a number of challenges to secondary education in the Newly Merged Areas. After the merger, there appears big gaps in practice and context, both in terms of getting to grips with the work context as well as embodying rules, regulations, practices and procedures of official matters. It is, in this connection that systematic issues and problems arise which lead to problems of work and lack of coherence practices.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the scope of improvement in secondary education after the merger of FATA into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
2. To investigate the challenges besetting secondary education after the merger in the Tribal Merged Districts.
3. To explore the existing problems of secondary education in the Tribal Merged Districts.

Significance of the Study

This research study contributes significantly to the existing knowledge by identifying improvements, challenges and problems in secondary education in the Tribal Merged Districts after the merger. It proposes substantial enhancements and offers potential solutions to address the concerns of the tribal population. The study serves as a valuable resource for education administrators, managers, policymakers and other concerned authorities involved in shaping educational policies and programs. Additionally, it clarifies complex data and expands the existing knowledge base by providing insights into the issues faced in secondary education. Moreover, the study presents recommendations for the development and improvement of secondary education in the Tribal Merged Districts, enabling the identification and utilization of opportunities in this regard.

2. Research Methodology

Research design of the study

Descriptive research design was adopted in the research study with the aim to systematically obtain information more specifically while quantitative survey approach was used to achieve the objectives of the study.

Research Philosophy

Positivism was the research philosophy that guided the collection of numerical data and the demonstration of statistically significant relationships between variables in this sub-design.

Research Approach

The research approach adheres to the deductive method; the collection and analysis of quantitative data validates the hypothesis before the investigation even begins.

Strategy

In this study, a quantitative survey research design was used as the research strategy. It is necessary to deliver a questionnaire utilizing a self-designed, five-point Likert scale type in order to gather data from the study's respondents.

Population of the study

Population of the study was consisting of the total number of Head Masters and Principals (Male & Female) in the whole erstwhile FATA, comprising 433 in numbers.

Sample of the Study

Three districts i.e. Khyber, Orakzai and Kurram were chosen by convenient sampling procedure. The researcher selected 167 number of Head Masters and Principals (M&F) from these three districts.

Research Instrument for Data Collection

Questionnaire was used as an instrument for data collection. The researcher designed a closed survey questionnaire consisting of 33 items with five point likert scale type regarding improvements, challenges and problems of secondary education in the light of objectives of the research study.

Data Collection Procedure

The data was collected by self-designed questionnaire consisting of 33 items with five point likert scale type from Principals and Head Masters (M&F) of the three selected districts, Khyber, Orakzai and Kurram,

3. Results and Discussion

The data collected from the survey questionnaires were put into a computer for analysis by using SPSS-version, 25 software. Descriptive and inferential statistical tools were applied i.e. descriptive statistics yielded the frequencies and percentage whereas inferential statistics helped to apply Chi-Square test on the collected data after the consultation of statistical experts and the tests were interpreted accordingly. The obtained results were presented in tabular form by apply frequency, percentage and Chi-Square tests.

Table 1: Scope of Improvement in Secondary Education after FATA merger

#	Statements	SA f (%)	A f (%)	UD f (%)	DA f (%)	SDA f (%)	Chi-square P-value
1.	The services of Education Monitoring Authority (EMA) have extended to educational institutions.	70 (41.9)	76 (45.5)	11 (6.6)	7 (4.2)	3 (1.8)	158.00 (0.000)
2.	Education Monitoring Authority (EMA) has controlled teachers' absenteeism.	80 (47.9)	67 (40.1)	6 (3.6)	12 (7.2)	2 (1.2)	164.52 (0.000)
3.	Education Monitoring Authority (EMA) has improved the monitoring system.	49 (29.3)	84 (50.3)	13 (7.8)	19 (11.4)	2 (1.2)	132.13 (0.000)
4.	Administrative posts have been created for better administration in District Education Offices (M& F).	53 (31.7)	70 (41.9)	20 (12.0)	16 (9.6)	8 (4.8)	85.36 (0.000)
5.	The system of administration has improved with the creation of managerial posts.	23 (13.8)	88 (52.7)	28 (16.8)	23 (13.8)	5 (3.0)	120.75 (0.000)
6.	Parent-Teacher Council (PTC) has been established and empowered.	60 (35.9)	73 (43.7)	15 (9.0)	16 (9.6)	3 (1.8)	115.00 (0.000)

7. Sufficient amount of budget has been provided to Parent Teacher Council for provision of basic facilities.	42 (25.1)	73 (43.7)	14 (8.4)	32 (19.2)	6 (3.6)	82.97 (0.000)
8. Destroyed / damaged infrastructures (schools) in the war-on-terror have been reconstructed after the merger.	14 (8.4)	42 (25.1)	18 (10.8)	52 (31.1)	41 (24.6)	32.67 (0.000)
9. Teachers have been recruited through Educational Testing & Evaluation Agency (ETEA) on merit.	90 (53.9)	49 (29.3)	12 (7.2)	14 (8.4)	2 (1.2)	157.70 (0.000)
10. Quality of education has improved after the merger.	35 (21.0)	65 (38.9)	20 (12.0)	31 (18.6)	16 (9.6)	44.58 (0.000)

Table 1 shows that 87.4% of the respondents said that the services of Education Monitoring Authority (EMA) have extended to educational institutions. Chi-square value is 158.00 with significant value is 0.000. 88% of the respondents stated that Education Monitoring Authority has controlled teachers’ absenteeism. Chi-square value is 164.52 with significant value is 0.000. 79.6% of the respondents said that Education Monitoring Authority has improved the monitoring system. Chi-square value is 132.13 with significant value is 0.000. 73.6% of the respondents stated that administrative posts have been created for better administration in District Education Offices (M& F) after the merger in the merged districts. Chi-square value is 85.36 with significant value is 0.000. 64.7% of the respondents explored that the system of administration has improved with the creation of managerial posts. Chi-square value is 120.75 with significant value is 0.000. 79.6% of the respondents stated that Parent-Teacher Council (PTC) has been established and empowered in the merged districts. Chi-square value is 115.00 with significant value is 0.000. 68.8% of the respondents said that sufficient amount of budget has been provided to Parent Teacher Council for provision of basic facilities. Chi-square value is 82.97 with significant value is 0.000. 33.5% of the respondents revealed that destroyed and damaged infrastructure (schools) in the war-on-terror have been reconstructed after the merger. Chi-square value is 32.67 with significant value is 0.000. 83.2% of the respondents stated that Teachers have been recruited through Educational Testing & Evaluation Agency (ETEA) on merit. Chi-square value is 157.70 with significant value is 0.000. 59.9% of the respondents said that quality of education has improved after the merger. Chi-square value is 44.58 with significant value is 0.000.

Table 2: Challenges besetting Secondary Education after FATA Merger

S#	Statements	SA f (%)	A f (%)	UD f (%)	DA f (%)	SDA f (%)	Chi-square P-value
1.	Allocation of required budget for education is a challenge.	70 (41.9)	74 (44.3)	9 (5.4)	11 (6.6)	3 (1.8)	149.97 (0.000)
2.	Proper infrastructure is the main challenge.	80 (47.9)	74 (44.3)	7 (4.2)	6 (3.6)	0 (0.0)	119.49 (0.000)
3.	Establishment of separate Offices for Education Officers (M & F).	55	73	16	20	2	105.50

S#	Statements	SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Chi-square P-value
		f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	
		(32.9)	(43.7)	(9.6)	(12.0)	(1.2)	(0.000)
4.	Reconstruction of all destroyed infrastructure.	95 (56.9)	56 (33.5)	5 (3.0)	9 (5.4)	2 (1.2)	200.39 (0.000)
5.	Establishment of new Secondary Schools.	86 (51.5)	68 (40.7)	6 (3.6)	7 (4.2)	0 (0.0)	122.94 (0.000)
6.	Provision of basic facilities to secondary schools.	85 (50.9)	72 (43.1)	5 (3.0)	4 (2.4)	1 (0.6)	205.78 (0.000)
7.	Provision of transport facilities for supervision and monitoring.	56 (33.5)	64 (38.3)	27 (16.2)	14 (8.4)	6 (3.6)	78.29 (0.000)
8.	Inaccessibility to education badly affects the acquisition of secondary education.	68 (40.7)	68 (40.7)	26 (15.6)	5 (3.0)	0 (0.0)	71.29 (0.000)
9.	Increasing students enrollment/ reducing students drop out ratio	60 (35.9)	71 (42.5)	20 (12.0)	16 (9.6)	0 (0.0)	55.68 (0.000)
10	The Provision of trained and qualified teachers.	55 (32.9)	76 (45.5)	17 (10.2)	18 (10.8)	1 (0.6)	114.88 (0.000)
11	The Provision of Science and IT laboratories.	101 (60.5)	58 (34.7)	4 (2.4)	4 (2.4)	0 (0.0)	158.67 (0.000)
12	Availability of technical experts.	91 (54.5)	61 (36.5)	9 (5.4)	5 (3.0)	1 (0.6)	195.54 (0.000)

Table 2 explores that 86.2% of the respondents said that allocation of required budget for secondary education is one of the main challenges for the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Chi-square value is 149.97 with significant value is 0.000. 92.2% of the respondents elaborated that proper infrastructure is the main challenge in the merged districts. Chi-square value is 119.49 with significant value is 0.000. 76.6% of the respondents showed that establishment of separate offices for Education Officers (M & F) is a great challenge in the merged areas. Chi-square value is 105.50 with significant value is 0.000. 90.4% of the respondents revealed that reconstruction of all destroyed/damaged infrastructure is also a challenge for the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Chi-square value is 200.39 with significant value is 0.000. 92.2% of the respondents stated that establishment of new secondary schools is a challenge in the merged districts. Chi-square value is 122.94 with significant value is 0.000. 94% of the respondents indicated that provision of basic facilities to secondary schools of merged districts is a challenge for the government. Chi-square value is 205.78 with significant value is 0.000. 71.8% of the respondents viewed that provision of transport facilities for supervision and monitoring in the merged areas is also a challenge. Chi-square value is 78.29 with significant value is 0.000. 81.4% of the respondents said that inaccessibility to education badly affects the acquisition of secondary education. Chi-square value is 71.29 with significant value is 0.000. 78.4% of the respondents showed that increasing students' enrollment and reducing students drop out ratio is a challenge for the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Chi-square value is 55.68 with significant value is 0.000. 78.4% of the respondents stated that provision of trained and qualified teachers in the merge districts is also a

challenge. Chi-square value is 114.88 with significant value is 0.000. 95.2% of the respondents viewed that provision of Science and IT laboratories to secondary schools of merged districts are one of the main challenges for the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Chi-square value is 158.67 with significant value is 0.000. 91% of the respondents indicated that availability of technical experts is also a challenge for the government. Chi-square value is 195.54 with significant value is 0.000.

Table 3: Existing Problems of Secondary Education in the Merged Districts

S#	Statements	SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Chi-square P-value
		f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	
1.	Terrorism and Militancy are the main problems.	65 (38.9)	62 (37.1)	17 (10.2)	21 (12.6)	2 (1.2)	96.56 (0.000)
2.	Tribal culture badly affects secondary education.	22 (13.2)	53 (31.7)	12 (7.2)	52 (31.1)	28 (16.8)	40.33 (0.000)
3.	Gender discrimination is a cause of concern.	32 (19.2)	77 (46.1)	13 (7.8)	35 (21.0)	10 (6.0)	85.90 (0.000)
4.	Lack of cooperation of the community.	67 (40.1)	74 (44.3)	6 (3.6)	15 (9.0)	5 (3.0)	139.91 (0.000)
5.	Poor administration badly affects secondary education.	82 (49.1)	59 (35.3)	11 (6.6)	14 (8.4)	1 (0.6)	148.06 (0.000)
6.	Undue political interference is the main hindrance in the promotion of education.	74 (44.3)	6 (3.6)	13 (7.8)	16 (9.6)	3 (1.8)	121.35 (0.000)
7.	Wrong posting on administrative posts.	81 (48.5)	69 (41.3)	9 (5.4)	5 (3.0)	2 (1.2)	178.33 (0.000)
8.	Insufficient allocation of budget.	89 (53.3)	64 (38.3)	7 (4.2)	5 (3.0)	2 (1.2)	195.12 (0.000)
9.	Shortage of subject experts	77 (46.1)	63 (37.7)	10 (6.0)	13 (7.8)	4 (2.4)	137.88 (0.000)
10	Lack of professionalism in secondary school teachers	87 (52.1)	67 (40.1)	5 (3.0)	7 (4.2)	1 (0.6)	196.26 (0.000)
11	Improper criteria for departmental promotion of secondary school teachers.	96 (57.5)	55 (32.9)	8 (4.8)	8 (4.8)	0 (0.0)	129.26 (0.000)

Table 3 presents that 76% of the respondents showed that terrorism and militancy are the main problems in the merged districts. Chi-square value is 96.56 with significant value is 0.000. 44.9% of the respondents stated that tribal culture badly affects secondary education in the area. Chi-square value is 40.33 with significant value is 0.000. 65.3% of the respondents viewed that gender discrimination is a cause of concern in the promotion of secondary education. Chi-square value is 85.90 with significant value is 0.000. 84.4% of

the respondents revealed that lack of cooperation of the community badly affects secondary education. Chi-square value is 139.91 with significant value is 0.000. 84.4% of the respondents showed that poor administration badly affects secondary education. Chi-square value is 148.06 with significant value is 0.000. 81.6% of the respondents indicated that undue political interference is the main hindrance in the promotion of secondary education. Chi-square value is 121.35 with significant value is 0.000. 83.8% of the respondents said that wrong posting on administrative posts is the great problem of secondary education. Chi-square value is 178.33 with significant value is 0.000. 91.6% of the respondents pointed out that insufficient allocation of budget is one of the main problems of secondary education in the region. Chi-square value is 195.12 with significant value is 0.000. 83.8% of the respondents stated that shortage of subject experts is a great problem of secondary education in the merged areas. Chi-square value is 137.88 with significant value is 0.000. 92.2% of the respondents explored that lack of professionalism in secondary schools teachers greatly affects secondary education. Chi-square value is 196.26 with significant value is 0.000. 90.4% of the respondents said that improper criteria for departmental promotion of secondary school teachers is one of the main problems of secondary education. Chi-square value is 129.26 with significant value is 0.000.

4. Discussion

Pakistan's education system is not free from the clutches of domestic politics. Since the country's inception, the educational system has been completely politicized. The secondary education system in Pakistan, particularly in the former FATA, is devoid of basic needs and facilities, according to the findings of the current study and the findings of the previous study of (Sheikh, Waqas & Khan, 2018).

The country suffers from a lack of political stability, expanding terrorism, ongoing sectarian violence, social instability and economic degeneration. Due to insufficient funding, the condition of schools in the merged districts is dismal. Furthermore, the main challenges confronting secondary education are the expansion of secondary and higher secondary schools, upgradation of existing secondary schools, provision of scholarships, provision of basic and missing facilities, reconstruction of all damaged and destroyed infrastructure in the war on terror, provision of science and IT laboratories to government high and higher secondary schools, provision of subject teachers/technical experts and cultural taboos are the main challenges besetting secondary education in the merged districts. The study findings same as the study of (Ahmad, Ali, & Khan, 2014).

The problems that need to be addressed include terrorism, militancy, tribalism, gender discrimination, lack of community cooperation, poor administration, excessive political interference, lack of transparency, improper administrative job postings, inadequate budget allocation, poor primary school intake, absence of refresher courses, a lack of subject experts, corruption, poverty, lack of professionalism in secondary school teachers and inappropriate departmental promotion criteria.; the current study findings support the findings of the study of (Saeed, 2007).

Many factors, including a fragile civil society, dictatorial regimes, corrupt bureaucracies and democracy, prevent the education system from improving. Pakistan is one of the richest countries in terms of natural resources, but it has a tragic failure to educate its citizens. Pakistan's budgetary allocation for education is lower than in other countries. Inadequate education funding has a significant impact on educational quality, the study findings are same as the findings of the study of (Sheikh, Waqas & Khan, 2018).

5. Conclusion

The study highlights several significant findings regarding the state of secondary education in the merged districts. It reveals that the government has taken steps to extend the services of the Education Monitoring Authority, control of teachers absenteeism, improvement of monitoring system, creation of new administrative posts, establishment of Parent Teacher Council, provision of appropriate budget, separation of male and female education offices, reconstruction of damaged/destroyed infrastructure, recruitment of teachers, upgradation of secondary schools and standard of education have contributed to enhance education quality. However, the study identifies various challenges that hinder the improvement of education in these areas such as the required budget allocation, proper infrastructure, establishment of separate education offices,

reconstruction of all destroyed and damaged infrastructure, establishment of new secondary schools, provision of basic facilities, increasing students enrollment and reducing students dropout ratio, provision of teaching professionals, provision of science and IT laboratories and availability of technical experts pose obstacles to secondary education in the merged districts. Furthermore, the study highlights several problems such as terrorism, militancy, tribal culture, gender discrimination, lack of community cooperation, poor administration, undue political interference, wrong posting, insufficient allocation of budget, shortage of subject experts, lack of professionalism in secondary school teachers and improper criteria for the departmental promotion of secondary school teachers further contribute to the problems faced in the system. The study emphasizes the urgent need for addressing these challenges and problems by implementing reforms to enhance the quality of secondary education in the merged districts.

6. Recommendations

1. The government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa may ensure law and order situation in the Merged Districts.
2. Special package may be granted for the development and promotion of secondary education in the Merged Districts.
3. The government may give top priority to the education of Tribal Areas.
4. Basic education facilities, subject specialists / subject teachers may be provided to all government schools on priority basis in the Merged Districts.
5. The government may grant scholarships and financial aids to each and every student up to higher secondary level in the Merged Districts.
6. Undue political interference in the education system needs to be completely exterminated.
7. Separate education offices for male and female education officers may be established on priority basis in the merged districts on the analogy of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
8. Model educational institutions i.e. cadet colleges and university branches may be opened for quality education in the region.
9. The government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa may establish new secondary schools and up-grade the existing secondary schools to higher secondary level as per need and demand of the society.
10. The government may revise the criteria for the departmental promotion of secondary school teachers by introducing screening test and interview during selection.

Recommendations for future researchers

1. Researchers may undertake a research on the same topic, including higher education at the college level, in the Merged Districts.
2. Researchers may conduct the study on the same topic including all districts of Merged Areas.

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