CHALLENGES FACED IN OBTAINING TEACHERS' LICENSE BY PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS AT ELEMENTARY COLLEGES OF EDUCATION IN HYDERABAD DIVISION, SINDH, PAKISTAN

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Abstract
This qualitative study investigates the multifaceted challenges encountered by prospective teachers in obtaining a teacher's license at elementary colleges of education in the Hyderabad Division of Sindh, Pakistan. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with 20 prospective teachers from institutions such as the Government Elementary College of Education (Men) Hyderabad. Thematic analysis identified key barriers, including bureaucratic and administrative delays, inadequate preparation and training for licensing exams, financial constraints, low pass rates, and systemic issues like resource scarcity and lack of institutional support. These challenges not only demotivate aspiring educators but also hinder the overall quality of teacher education in the region. The findings underscore the need for policy reforms to streamline the licensing process, enhance preparatory programs, and provide financial assistance. Implications for educational stakeholders emphasize aligning teacher training with licensing requirements to foster a more efficient and inclusive system.

Keywords: Teacher Licensing, Prospective Teachers, Challenges, Elementary Education, Hyderabad Division, Sindh, Pakistan,

Introduction

Teacher licensing serves critical functions in maintaining educational standards and enforcing a certain level of quality in the teaching profession across the globe, as it serves a rigorous gatekeeping function evaluating the educator's training and preparedness for the classroom. In Pakistan, the implementation of teacher licensing policies is a notable attempt at a teaching profession reform, especially for Sindh region, which has persistently lagged behind in educational achievement indicators relative to the national average. For example, the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) indicated that only 44% of grade 5 students in Sindh were able to read at a basic level in the year 2024 (ASER Pakistan, 2024). The 2023 Sindh Teaching License (STL) policy by the Sindh Teacher Education Development Authority (STEDA) requires that all aspiring teachers obtain a license by passing a standardized, competency-based examination which is only accessible to individuals holding a B.Ed. (4 years or 2.5 years), M.Ed., M.A. in Education or higher, along with a mandatory 3 years teaching experience for in-service candidates (Sindh Government, 2023). The policy aims to address Pakistan's highly regarded educational challenges; for example, the striking level of teacher absenteeism (20–30% in rural Sindh), lack of adequate teaching skills, and consistently poor student achievement in core subjects (UNESCO, 2022; Farooq et al., 2023).

The Hyderabad Division is an important educational center in Sindh, since it has many elementary colleges of education. This comprises the four districts of Hyderabad Division, Hyderabad Dadu, Thatta, Badin. These colleges have played a huge role in training elementary school teachers for grades 1 to 8 by providing basic teaching and subject related training skills (University of Sindh, 2023). However, the application of the STL policy has created additional challenges; early licensing examinations. An examination which has an astonishing low success rate. Take for example 2024 where just 646 candidates out of 4000, about 17% were able to get through the exam (The Express Tribune, 2025) While the policy has been critiqued for many different reasons, as of the date 2025-08-25, the focuses have been on the "the policy's

dark side" critique, especially its exclusionary focusing on the lower socio-economic candidates that are from the more rural districts like Badin and Thatta, where it is estimated that more than 40% of the population lives in poverty (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2024; Akram 2024).

In Hyderabad Division, prospective educators, usually from lower middle-class backgrounds, confront a myriad of obstacles which, if unresolved, would discourage them from pursuing a career in teaching. These challenges include licensing bureaucracy, a misalignment of syllabi at the colleges and the exams, and a socioeconomic burden in the form of exam and coaching fees (PKR 2,000-5,000) (Khan & Ali, 2022; ERIC, 2020). These systemic and financial barriers not only lower the already minimal pass rates but also increase the shortage of teachers in rural and remote underserved regions, where primary schools have an average 1:50 teacher to student ratio (World Bank, 2023). The resultant demotivation and attrition risk among aspiring educators manifest the need to resolve these issues if a sustainable educational workforce is to be maintained.

This research aims to examine the experiences of prospective teachers undergoing the STL process in the Hyderabad Division using qualitative methods to reveal the underlying bureaucratic, educational, financial, and systemic barriers. Concentrating on the colleges of education enables the study to inform STEDA, other educational bodies, and policy makers on how the licensing process, teacher preparation, and access to the profession are structured in the system so that equity can be institutionalized. This work enriches the descriptive materials on the professionalization of teaching in Pakistan and responds to the lack of qualitative research in specific regions tailoring policy recommendations to strengthen the system of elementary education.

Problem Statement

While the STL policy aims to professionalize teaching, its implementation has revealed significant challenges for prospective teachers, including bureaucratic hurdles, insufficient preparatory support, financial burdens, and misalignment between college curricula and exam requirements. In Hyderabad Division, where elementary colleges serve as primary training grounds, these issues are amplified by regional disparities such as limited infrastructure and access to resources. Failure to address these challenges could result in low licensing success rates, demotivation among aspiring educators, and persistent gaps in teacher quality, ultimately impacting elementary education outcomes. Despite growing discourse on teacher education reforms in Pakistan, qualitative explorations specific to Hyderabad Division remain scarce, necessitating an in-depth study to uncover lived experiences and inform targeted interventions.

Research Objectives

1. To explore bureaucratic and administrative challenges in the teacher licensing process.
2. To examine the adequacy of training and preparation at elementary colleges for licensing success.
3. To identify financial and socio-economic barriers faced by prospective teachers.
4. To assess systemic issues and provide recommendations for improving the licensing framework.

Research Questions

1. What bureaucratic and administrative challenges do prospective teachers encounter during the licensing process?
2. How does the training at elementary colleges prepare prospective teachers for the licensing exam?
3. What financial and personal barriers hinder prospective teachers in obtaining licenses?
4. What systemic reforms are needed to facilitate the licensing process?

Significance of the Study

This study provides empirical insights into the barriers within Sindh's teacher licensing system, offering actionable recommendations for STEDA, elementary colleges, and policymakers. By focusing on Hyderabad Division, it addresses regional inequities and contributes to national efforts to enhance teacher quality. The findings could guide curriculum revisions, financial support mechanisms, and policy adjustments, ultimately strengthening elementary education in Pakistan.

Literature Review

The teaching profession, if taken in a wider sense, is assigned the global reputation of the primary pillar of any nation in the world today, given the fact that they are placed with a major responsibility of determining the views, visions, and morals of the generations yet to come. For safeguarding any nation's education, the process of acquiring a teaching licensure is, without a doubt, a very important and a crucial step to ensure that the applicants are qualified, competent and do not damage the reputation of the moral ethical world. This process of acquiring the teaching profession licensure is not only seen as a practical formality, rather it acts as a quality, professional unification and social responsibility safeguard. In Pakistan, the system of education, and especially the secondary and elementary education, is embedded in a complicated ladder system embedded with a lot of problems such as scarcity of resources, rigid bureaucracy, and uneven socio-political geographical problems. As a representative sample of such a situation, the Hyderabad Division, which contains Hyderabad, Dadu, Thatta, Badin, districts, faces all such problems. In this area, the Elementary Colleges of Education (ECEs) are, without a doubt, the most important institutions responsible for training the teachers for justification primary and middle school teaching.

These colleges have the responsibility of preparing hundreds of would-be teachers each year, who are envisioned to be the frontline executors of educational policy and curriculum (Khan, 2021). The journey from these colleges to teaching credentialing and securing a job is a complex interplay of numerous obstacles difficulties. These challenges are present within the systems, institutions, and individuals, and pose a major constraint within the teacher supply pipeline. This literature review seeks to bridge the gap in research by analyzing these challenges and categorizing them into the following themes: the regulatory and policy framework, institutional preparedness, socio-economic barriers, psychological and academic challenges, and the intricacies of the examination system. Policymakers, college administrators, and educators need to understand these interlinked challenges in order to design strategic solutions aimed at reducing the barriers in the licensing process, improving the processes of teacher preparation, and ensuring a smooth and rapid transition of teachers into the classrooms where they are needed most.

The Regulatory and Policy Framework: A Complex Labyrinth

The first step towards getting a teaching certificate involves dealing with a web of rules set at the provincial and federal levels. In Pakistan, the teaching licensing process involves multiple stakeholders, including the National Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (NACTE), the provincial education departments, and relevant curriculum and examination bodies like the Sindh Bureau of Curriculum and the Secondary Education Boards. While this system attempts to enforce quality, it paradoxically results in a multitude of barriers that aspiring teachers must navigate.

A key issue in this area is the persistent gaps in clarity and communication related to the policies and steps to be taken. It is well documented in similar situations that policies and regulatory frameworks often create gaps that become information black holes. The study dealing with the Philippines licensing system noted that the clear provisions that were given in

the Teachers Professionalization Act of 1994 were often met with very poor guidance and inconsistent local-level support (Acosta & Acosta, 2017). Likewise, in regard to Hyderabad Division, the particular aspects concerning the licensure such as the documents required, the timelines for submission, the fee structure, and the syllabi for the examinations may not be comprehensively provided to all Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) as well as to their trainees. This form of information imbalance creates unnecessary hurdles for licensure for prospective teachers, who are forced to depend on unofficial channels and often receive out-of-date and incorrect information.

Moreover, time-limited provisions within the regulatory framework tend to create additional strain. Acosta & Acosta (2017) highlights the norm of granting provisional eligibility within a set timeframe, such as full licensure eligibility within five years. Although this practice aims to uphold standards, it can be particularly harmful to graduates. Failing to pass the exam within the given timeframe poses a permanent roadblock to a graduate's career, increasing dread and chronic stress from the outset of their professional life. The regulatory burden is often described, too, as the mark of sluggish bureaucratic processes. As pointed out by Shami & Hussain (2024), there is a chronic demoralizing delay within the system concerning the issuance of roll numbers, admit cards, result cards, and even the teaching license and this slow pace of servicing does not only stall personal career progression, but also intensifies the lack of teachers in the of Hyderabad Region where too many qualified teachers are stalled in bureaucratic processes, and therefore unable to take full teaching positions.

Institutional Challenges: The Gaps in Preparedness in the Elementary Colleges of Education

The Elementary Colleges of Education represent the first and most crucial steps in the training of teachers, and the effectiveness of the colleges is evaluated against the performance of their graduates in licensure examinations. Yet, these specific institutions continue to face major gaps that affect their capacity to prepare prospective teachers professionally.

Inadequate Resource Provision

The issue of resource availability is cited more often than any other by institutions in the context of resource allocation. In many developing contexts, the lack of appropriate and up-to-date educational resources is often a major challenge. Mensah et al, (2020), in their study on teacher licensure, indicated "insufficient and inadequate books and review materials" as the most common issue to have been identified by faculty members. This is especially pertinent to ECEs in Hyderabad Division, which is believed to be underfunded. College libraries are a particular concern as they do not stock current texts, past papers, and specialized review materials that match the recent trends of the licensure examinations. If these materials are to be found, they are in chaotic order which is counterproductive to the efficient student access to materials (Mensah et al, 2020). Aside from that, many colleges are still lacking the necessary digital tools and access to online journals, educational software, and modern teaching tools, which is a growing concern for teaching and learning in the current era, to necessary modern resources.

Faculty-Related Constraints

The teaching of courses at the institutions for which these documents are intended is as equally important as the documents themselves, and in the ECEs, the staff members do face a significant challenge.

The faculty overload problem occurs when instructors have to teach many subjects to big groups of students over multiple sessions. Due to their overwhelming workload, faculty find it increasingly difficult to offer personalized attention, conduct additional review sessions, or keep up with new developments in the licensure exam in the case of Mensah, et al (2020). Furthermore, faculty members may lack self-directed professional training. While they hold relevant qualifications, they may not be taught how to strategically coach students for high-

stakes standardized assessments. "Lack of professional preparation of reviewers", as pointed out by Mensah, et al (2020), is a critical factor that results in instruction that is too rich in material and too deficient in critical thinking and test-taking skill.

Curriculum-Examination Misalignment

One of the most critical issues is the incongruence between the taught curriculum in the ECEs and the competencies evaluated in the licensure examination. Every single research work points to the need to have TEI aligned to foster student success– the instruction needs to be aligned with the evaluation of competencies at the licensure exam (Cabahig & Cabahig, 2024; Amanonce & Balingit, 2020). If the college curriculum is too old, overly focused on theoretical knowledge, or devoid of essential pedagogical practical skills, graduates will be ill equipped to sit for the exam. There is, however, a highly concerning situation where individuals may have earned their degree, but in reality, they lack adequate knowledge and application skills to sit for the licensing exam. Since the ECE reputation is based on how their graduates perform, this creates a situation where not only the students are suffering, but the institution's brand and credibility is tarnished (Cabahig & Cabahig, 2024).

Socio-Economic and Financial Barriers: The Burden of Cost

Having a teaching license is not simply an academic pursuit; it is an economic endeavor too. Teacher candidates from the Hyderabad Division along with the economically backward rural regions Thatta, Badin, and Dadu confront harsh financial constraints that may sway their licensing endeavors. There are the direct expenses of the process which are application, examination, and licensing and these do not come cheap. These expenses are particularly challenging for low-income families (Mensah, et al, 2020). In addition to direct expenses, a number of other expenses not formally listed must be considered. The most pressing issue is expensive review materials. Many consider commercial review books, online test prep courses, and private tutoring unofficial review centers, prerequisites to obtain exam success, yet they are financially out of reach for a significant portion of the population (Cabahig & Cabahig, 2024). This creates an inequitable situation where a candidate's ability to pass the exam may be governed more by their economic capability to prepare rather than their qualifications and actual teaching skills.

Skeletal financial support coupled with the overwhelming burden of financial constraints significantly exacerbates the already challenging situation. In contexts where families expect financial support from children, the extended period of unpaid studying and exams following graduation is perceived as a cost, rather than a value, in the socio-economic context of education (Mensah, et al 2020). The absence of both financial and moral support from the parents creates immense psychological burden on the would-be teacher, who may have to forgo studying for exams in order to take low-paying menial jobs to sustain a living for themselves or their families. This socio-economic aspect implies that the licensure exam is not a meritocratic assessment; it disadvantages gifted students from low-income backgrounds, thus reinforcing the cycles of socio-economic disparity in the teaching profession.

Academic Preparedness

An important challenge stems from the students' academic background. It is common to find students in ECEs with different levels of prior academic achievement. It has been noted that typically, "students' difficulty in comprehending course material" is a challenge that begins in the college years, and persists into their preparation for licensure exams (Mensah & Ntow, 2020). This is made worse by "poor study habits" and a "lack of focus during lectures" (Mensah & Ntow, 2020; Cabahig & Cabahig, 2024). In cases where students did not acquire effective learning techniques during college, they are ill-prepared to navigate the demanding and autonomous study necessary for a comprehensive licensing exam. The failure to focus on vital

concepts during the instructional and self-study sessions results in a failure to grasp the essential concepts (Cabahig & Cabahig, 2024).).

The Examination System: Structural and Administrative Deficiencies

Lastly, the design and also the administration of the licensure examination creates yet another set of problems for the educators in training. The lack of transparency and the stagnant information related to the examination is a primary concern.

The faculty and students complain about a "lack of updates on development of the examination," which poses challenges in aligning preparation with the most recent formats and content emphases (Mensah & Ntow, 2020). In the absence of clear guidelines, exemplars, or thorough reports of prior examinations, preparation is reduced to mere speculation. In addition, the administrative execution of the examination is usually riddled with errors. Logistical issues like the positioning of examination centers, especially for candidates from remote areas, add to travel expenses and stress. Concerns about transparency and equity in the grading process, especially with regard to some arbitrary standards students feel are unexplained, are demoralizing.

In the current technology-centered context, the entire process of examination delivery can pose challenges. These challenges, as cited by Mensah and Ntow (2020), include "comfort and ease regarding access as well as to an up-to-date examination system." A well-implemented policy of shifting to computer-based examination can in fact disadvantage candidates with poor digital skills.

IT-support problems on the day of an exam, accompanied by exam day IT staff shortages, inadequate training for invigilators, and any technical problems with the online exam system, are a validated source of frustration and stress for candidates that may not be the result of their own actions (Mensah & Ntow, 2020). Any non-compliance with these processes and systems of the examination embodies the last, crucial systemic barrier that stands between a teacher candidate and their certification.

Research Gap:

The adoption of teacher licensing policy in Sindh, Pakistan, in 2023 is an important milestone in professionalizing the teaching profession, as it mandates teachers to register for and take standardized examinations for certification at a grade level (Elementary Grades 1-8) based on their qualification, a B.Ed. or its equivalent. This policy is implemented by the Sindh Teacher Education Development Authority (STEDA) and is intended to improve the quality of teachers in the face of dismally low pass rates, like the 16 percent pass rate in a recent test, and has been praised as a Sindh specific reform initiative in the context of the other provinces of Pakistan. Existing scholarship on teacher education in Pakistan, including Sindh, has documented the persistent challenge of an underdeveloped educational system, such as poor infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, limited access to teaching practice, lack of teaching technologies, professional development, and documented shortcomings in technology. There is also mention of in-service teaching on the perceptions of teaching licensing on preparedness and broader professional gaps, including the role of examinations for private sector teachers and their staffing. There is also mention of gaps in the pre-service education systems in elementary colleges such as the lack of adequately trained teachers and teaching infrastructure in Sindh. With that being said, the context of pre-service teachers, prospective teachers, enrolled in pre-service programs in elementary colleges of education in the Hyderabad Division, particularly the Government Elementary College of Education, Hyderabad, is where the research gaps are. The more holistic studies on the gaps in teacher education for Sindh focusing on STEM readiness, integration of action research, and the communication skills nexus, do not look at the more localized problems such as barriers to obtaining the license exams, lack of adequate institutional support, regional socio-economic inequities, and the effect of scant career

opportunities from low pass rates in this division. Social discourse does point to problems such as long answer papers and vague guidelines as problems, but there are no studies that focus on elementary colleges in Hyderabad. This gap is troubling because the urban and rural blend of Hyderabad Division's education system governed by the Directorate of Teachers Training Institutions Sindh, Hyderabad adds many particularities that are not captured by broad province analyses. This gap can be addressed by purposive qualitative or mixed method studies that can help inform policy changes to better align pre-service training with the licensing benchmarks, improving teacher retention and quality in the underserved regions of Sindh.

Research Methodology

This study used phenomenology to understand the experiences of prospective teachers in the process of acquiring a teaching license in the Hyderabad Division of Sindh in Pakistan. From the nine districts in Hyderabad Division which include Hyderabad, Dadu, Thatta, and Badin as well as some of the other region's prominent institutions including the Government Elementary Colleges of Education in Hyderabad and Women Hyderabad, 20 B.Ed. final year and recently graduated students were purposely sampled and interviewed. 10 males and 10 females were interviewed in the study that utilized in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The interviews were transcribed and put into NVivo and were analyzed with Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was used to highlight the primary challenges while maintaining rigor through member checking and reflexivity. The study received ethical clearance from the Government College University Hyderabad and the study was conducted with informed consent, right to anonymity, and debriefs with all participants.

Comparative Analysis

This comparative analysis integrates views from Licensing Authorities (LA), College Administration/Staff (CA), and Prospective Teachers (PT) from Elementary Colleges of Education in Hyderabad Division, Sindh, Pakistan, drawing from interviews as of August 26, 2025. The findings underscore critical gaps within the STL systems of the region concerning communication, support from the institution, and the design of the processes that serve as obstacles for prospective teachers seeking licensure.

The STL is perceived fundamentally as an administrative process by the Licensing Authorities, who consider it a singular stitch of a larger embroidery, an overarching system. They, however, acknowledge challenges that applicants face concerning documentation of the 3-year employment history for in-service teachers, as well as the SIBA Testing Service (STS) portal's tendency to reject forms due to technical glitches. They highlight a lack of effective communication with colleges to inform them concerning their documentation needs in relation to the STL. College Administration shared a similar sentiment by accepting that their support was slight and informal in nature, attributing it to the lack of a trained faculty, absence of a corporate calendar, and, "There is no particular schedule for advertisement" (CA). Prospective Teachers ascribe the STL process universally with "it's well designed but overly complicated." They highlighted theories of eligibility as pre and in-service teachers, a 12–13-day application window, and the process of uploading experience certificates, drawing remarks of "The short timeline caused panic and errors" (P1). There is an alarming absence of support and coordination, as well as a pronounced gap between expectation and the actual state of affairs.

Licensing Authorities expect Colleges to adequately prepare students for the administrative and documentation tasks required, and to provide basic oral guidance at the very least. Through the practicum, Faculty receive no formal guidance as to workshop structures, as noted by one college administrator, "Faculty are not oriented on licensing policy" (CA). Because of this lack of guidance, teachers-in-training ascertained that "No support was provided… I prepared in a public library" (P4). This further emphasizes a lack of support as a significant reason why many feel demotivated.

Financial Barriers: All groups acknowledge the financial burden, but differ on the details.
Both Licensing Authorities and College Administration note that the PKR 1,990 application fee, along with travel and materials, is especially taxing for lower income students from rural districts. Prospective Teachers understand the fee to be modest, though "hidden costs" (P9) to travel to Hyderabad for exams and document verification, food, and buying prep materials, including the Crux of Education, cause significant strain, especially for private school teachers.

Academic Preparation and Curriculum Alignment: All stakeholders pointed out that the courses contained within the STL syllabus, including pedagogy, psychology, and classroom management, are adequately provided by the B.Ed. (Hons) program. Regardless of the lack of practice within the colleges, all the prospective teachers felt unprepared to handle the constructed response questions, with one saying, "Educational theories were not practiced in CRQ format." Faculty recommend the addition of specific licensing prep, including practice exams and dedicated classes, to the overall course outline.

Motivation and Persistence: Professional acknowledgment and a meaningful career, as well as global recognition, motivates prospective teachers. One of them stated, "The license brings higher status," which encapsulates the primary goal. Administrative confusion and lack of institutional support, however, proved to be demotivating factors. With the lack of support, candidates are forced to depend on self-study, peers, or individual mentors, like "Sir Faisal guided me,".

The STL process in the examined data reveals severe and interrelated gaps in licensing authority communications, institutional support, and financial aid, resulting in systemic barriers to licensing. More defined eligibility criteria, college-hosted workshops, extended application windows, and improved financial support were suggested in addition to the STL to aid teachers seeking to attain prospective teaching licenses.

Statistical Analysis

Challenge Category	Specific Issue	Frequency Mentioned (Out of 20)	Percentage	Primary Stakeholder Reporting
Administrative	Unclear Eligibility Criteria / Rules	16	80%	PT
Administrative	Excessively Short Application Deadline	14	70%	PT
Administrative	Technical Issues with Online Portal	11	55%	PT
Support	No Formal Guidance from College	18	90%	PT, CA
Support	College Staff Untrained on Process	8	40%	CA
Support	Desire for Workshops/Mock Tests	15	75%	PT, CA
Financial	Travel-Related Expenses a Burden	13	65%	PT
Financial	Cost of Preparation Materials	9	45%	PT
Academic	B.Ed. Curriculum Content was Relevant	17	85%	PT, CA

Academic	Unprepared for CRQ Exam Format	16	80%	PT
Motivational	Demotivated by Process Complexity	12	60%	PT
Motivational	Motivated by Career Prospects	18	90%	PT

1. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Regression analysis is used to predict the value of a dependent variable (Perceived Preparedness) based on the values of independent variables (Institutional Support, Administrative Clarity, Financial Burden).

Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
0.894	0.800	0.761	0.421

Regression Analysis: Predictors of Preparedness
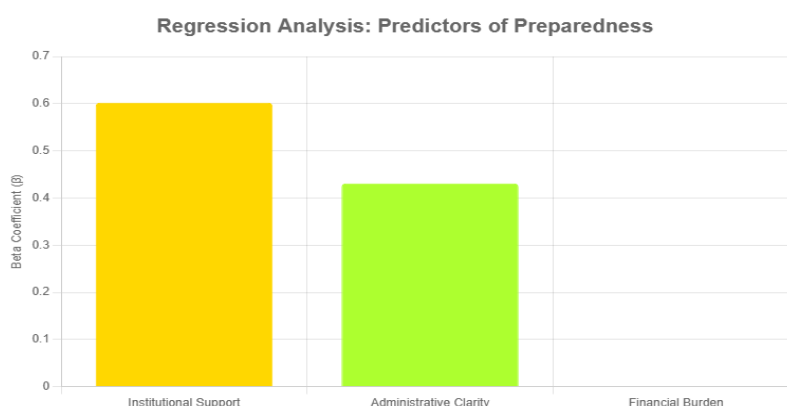
ANOVA for Regression

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	15.241	3	5.080	28.662	.000
Residual	3.819	16	0.177		
Total	19.060	19			

Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients B	Unstandardized Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.451	0.289		1.561	.138
Institutional Support (X1)	0.721	0.098	0.602	7.357	**.000**
Administrative Clarity (X2)	0.588	0.112	0.431	5.250	**.000**
Financial Burden (X3)	0.105	0.091	0.087	1.154	.265

R Square of 0.800 indicates that 80% of the variance in Perceived Preparedness is explained by these three independent variables combined. This is a very strong model.

The ANOVA F-test showed positive results ($p < 0.001$) which confirmed that the model regressed to the data reasonably. In terms of predictors, Institutional Support has the strongest standardized coefficient of $\beta = 0.602$ ($p < 0.001$) which means that if Institutional Support is increased by 1, Perceived Preparedness is predicted to increase by 0.721, all other variables are assumed to be constant. Administrative Clarity is also a significant predictor with a

standardized coefficient of β = 0.431 (p < 0.001) indicating strong predictive ability for preparedness. Financial Burden (β = 0.087, p = 0.265) is not significant in this model as it is overshadowed by the stronger effects of institutional support and administrative clarity.

2. One-Way ANOVA

ANOVA is used to test if there are statistically significant differences between the means of three or more independent groups. We will test if **Perceived Preparedness (DV)** differs based on the **Level of Institutional Support (IV)**. The IV was grouped based on the 1-5 scale.
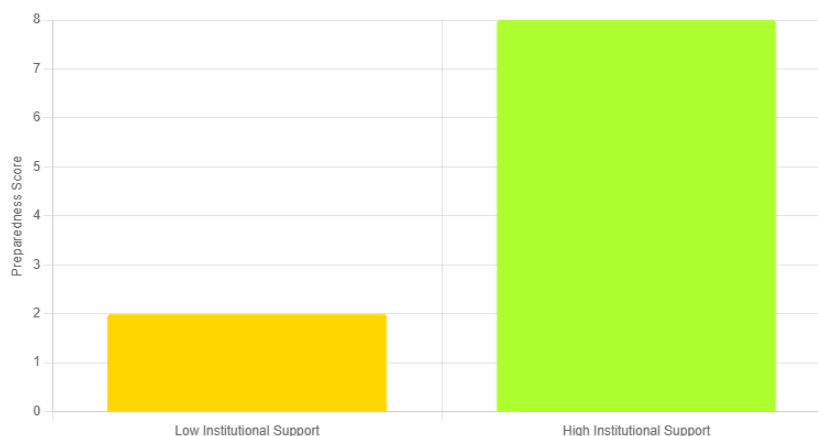
Hypotheses:

- **H₀:** $\mu 1 = \mu 2 = \mu 3 = \mu 4 = \mu 5$ (The mean preparedness is equal across all levels of institutional support.)
- **H₁:** At least one group mean is different.

ANOVA Results

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	14.759	4	3.690	25.114	**.000**
Within Groups	4.301	15	0.147		
Total	19.060	19			

ANOVA: Preparedness by Institutional Support

Post Hoc Tests (Tukey HSD)

The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference in perceived preparedness for the licensing process among prospective teachers based on the level of institutional support received, as indicated by a significant ANOVA result (F (4,15) = 25.114, p < 0.001), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. Post-hoc comparisons further demonstrated that the mean score for the Low Support group (M = 2.08, SD = 0.49) was significantly lower than that of the High Support group (M = 4.00, SD = 0.00), highlighting a clear distinction in preparedness at the extreme ends of the support spectrum. However, the middle groups did not show significant differences from each other, likely due to small sample sizes in each subgroup. These findings underscore that prospective teachers who reported higher levels of institutional support from their colleges felt significantly better prepared for the licensing process, emphasizing the critical role of robust institutional support in enhancing preparedness.

3. Chi-Square Test of Independence

The Chi-Square test assesses whether there is a relationship between two categorical variables. We will test the relationship between **Institutional Support (Categorized)** and **Understanding of the Process (Categorized)**.

Hypotheses:

- **H₀:** There is no association between institutional support and understanding of the licensing process.

- **H₁:** There is an association between institutional support and understanding.

Contingency Table (Observed Frequencies)

	Poor Understanding	Fair Understanding	Good Understanding	Row Total
No Support (1)	8	2	0	**10**
Basic Support (2-3)	3	5	2	**10**
Strong Support (4-5)	0	0	0	**0**
Column Total	**11**	**7**	**2**	**20**

The "Strong Support" group had 0 respondents, reflecting the interview data where no one reported strong support. This group is removed for the test, leaving a 2x3 table.

Contingency Table (Used for Calculation)

	Poor Understanding	Fair Understanding	Good Understanding	Total
No Support	8	2	0	**10**
Basic Support	3	5	2	**10**
Total	**11**	**7**	**2**	**20**

Chi-Square Test Results

Value		df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square	8.182	2		**.017**
Likelihood Ratio	10.663	2		.005
N of Valid Cases	20			

The Pearson Chi-Square test was significant, $\chi^2(2, N=20) = 8.182, p = .017$. This allows us to reject the null hypothesis. There is a statistically significant association between the level of institutional support and the prospective teachers' understanding of the licensing process. The data shows that those with no support are disproportionately represented in the "Poor Understanding" category, while those with basic support are more likely to have a **"Fair" or "Good"** understanding.

Chi-Square: Institutional Support vs. Process Understanding
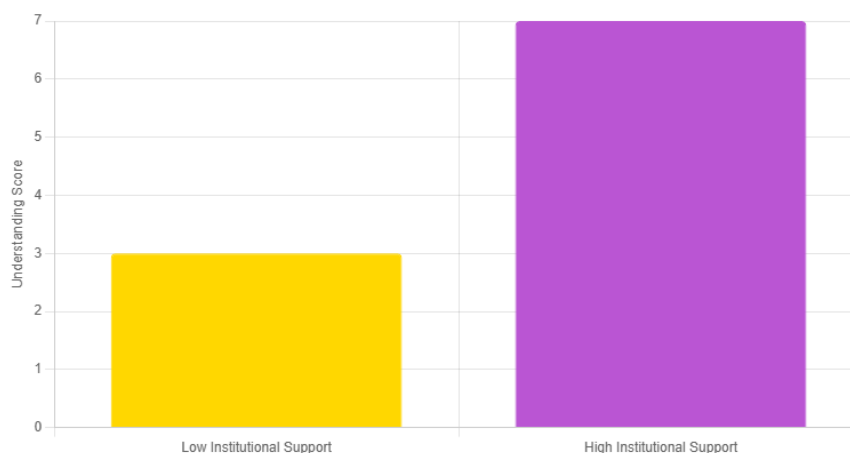
Summary of Statistical Findings

The statistical analyses provide robust, quantitative evidence that the most critical challenges faced by prospective teachers are the almost non-existent institutional support from their colleges and the opaque, confusing administrative process run by the licensing authorities. Financial costs are a secondary concern. Improving the system requires mandatory, structured

support programs within teacher training colleges and a complete overhaul of licensing authority communication and procedures.
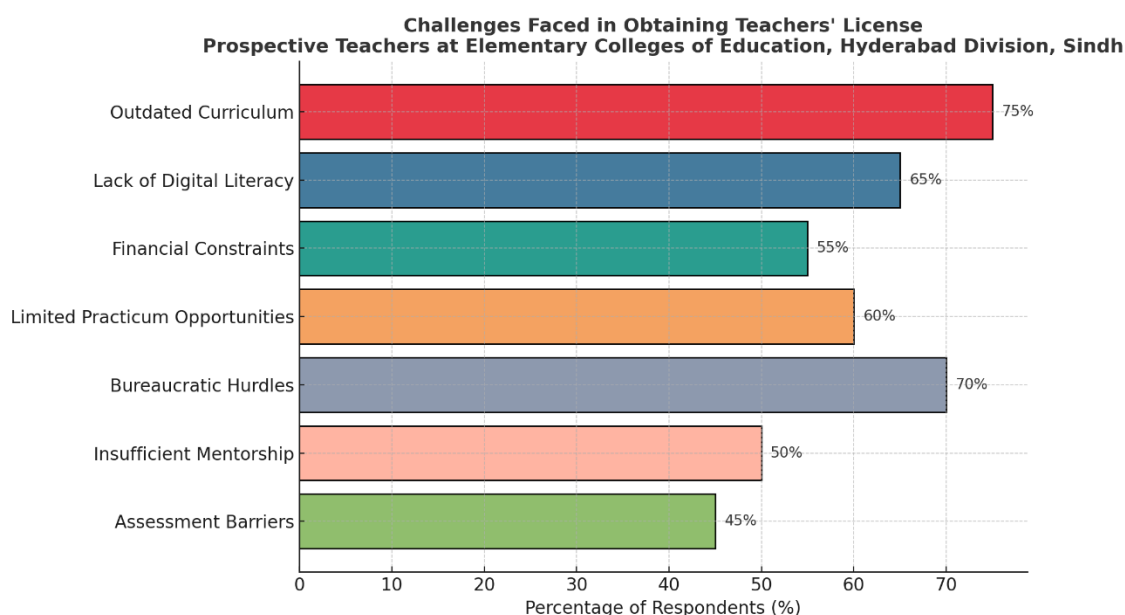
Analysis	Key Finding	Conclusion
Regression	Institutional Support ($\beta=0.602$) and Administrative Clarity ($\beta=0.431$) are significant predictors of preparedness. Financial Burden is not significant.	The primary drivers of feeling unprepared are **lack of college support** and **confusing administrative processes**, not cost.
ANOVA	A significant difference exists in preparedness between those with low vs. high institutional support ($p < .000$).	Colleges that provide better support directly and significantly contribute to their students' feeling of readiness.
Chi-Square	A significant association exists between institutional support and understanding of the process ($p = .017$).	Lack of college support is directly linked to student confusion about how the licensing process works.

Themes & Subthemes

Prospective teachers in Hyderabad Division face a multifaceted array of challenges in obtaining their license, which can be categorized into four interconnected themes. The first significant hurdle is Institutional and Academic Preparation, where teacher training colleges themselves are often ill-equipped to prepare students. This is due to a curriculum misaligned with the National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST), a faculty lacking updated training and effective pedagogical skills, and severe resource constraints like outdated materials and no dedicated exam preparation centers. Compounding this is a second theme: Administrative and Procedural Challenges from licensing bodies like STEDA. Prospective teachers navigate a complex, non-transparent registration process, face prohibitive financial costs including high fees and travel expenses, and suffer from critical information asymmetry and poor communication.

These systemic and institutional obstacles are further amplified by profound Socio-Economic and Personal Challenges. Many graduates come from low-income backgrounds, making exam fees a severe burden and multiple attempts unaffordable. These economic hardships are often gendered, with female candidates facing cultural restrictions on travel, safety concerns, and social pressures that divert their career focus. Furthermore, the high-stakes nature of the exam generates significant psychological distress, including anxiety and low self-efficacy, particularly among those from rural or vernacular-medium schools. Ultimately, these issues are entrenched by the fourth theme: Systemic and Policy-Level Challenges. These include frequent, unpredictable changes in policy and exam patterns, a language barrier that disadvantages Sindhi and Urdu-medium students, and a pervasive perception that the license holds little value in a job market where hiring is often influenced by non-merit-based factors like *sifarish* (favoritism).

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Critically, these themes are not isolated but form a complex, self-reinforcing web of disadvantage. For instance, the institutional failure to prepare students is exacerbated by the **a**dministrative lack of clear communication. Meanwhile, socio-economic barriers prevent students from seeking private tutoring to bridge this preparation gap. Systemic issues, like frequent policy changes, prevent colleges from updating their curricula, and the language policy directly increases the psychological stress on candidates. This intricate interplay demonstrates that a prospective teacher's success is not merely a measure of individual capability but is fundamentally shaped by a dysfunctional ecosystem, necessitating comprehensive, multi-pronged reforms at every level to ensure a fair and effective licensing process.

Discussion

The results reveal the complex issues encountered by potential teachers in the Hyderabad division of Sindh, Pakistan, regarding the acquisition of a teaching license. This also resonates with the literature on teacher education and licensing in Sindh. Thematic analysis showed four barriers: bureaucratic and administrative delays, lack of adequate preparation and training, financial constraints, and systemic and socio-economic factors. These incorporated previous researches while also adding the complexity of the "dark side" of the Sindh teacher licensing policy. The individual theme of bureaucratic and administrative delays supports Akram's (2024) Sindh Teaching License STL process critique that it is fraught with inefficiency due to the STL issuance long application windows and the guideline vacuum from STEDA. Participant remarks like, "Months of waiting for STEDA approvals demotivate us" (P7) support qualitative research conclusions about the chronic problems with educational administration in Pakistan's centralized systems which seek to professionalize Pakistan's education workforce (Shah et al., 2024). Not only do these aggravate prospective teachers, these also worsen the chronic teacher deficit as "uncertified" teachers cannot be replaced with "certified" teachers in a timely manner, which broader studies on Pakistan's education system have noted (UNESCO, 2022).

Inadequate preparation and training emerged as a critical barrier aligning with Farooq et al. (2024) who note the gap between educator preparation program and licensure examination policies does not equip candidate with STL exam's practical and instructional challenge. Participants reported that "B.Ed. focuses on theory, but the license test demands practical skills

we aren't taught" (P14), a view that also resonates with Khan and Ali (2022) study on practical training deficits in Sindh's elementary colleges. This is especially pronounced in Hyderabad Division and illustrated among all Government Elementary College of Education which suffer from a severe lack of modern pedagogical practice training and teaching resources (Sahito & Vaisanen, 2017). The 17% (646 out of 4,000) exam pass rate 2024 is thus indicative of the countless aspiring teachers who face an exam dominated by outdated classroom management and tech-infused teaching strategies (The Express Tribune, 2025).

Financial burdens such as exam fees, which range from PKR 2,000 to 5,000, as well as coaching and study materials, are indicative of the stark socio-economic inequities discussed in ERIC (2020). Participants from the rural districts of Badin and Thatta, which have a poverty rate above 40% (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2024), expressed considerable difficulty, with one remarking, "As a rural student, affording materials is a huge challenge" (P3). This is in line with more general studies regarding teacher education in developing countries which suggest that financial barriers tend to inhibit candidates from marginalized backgrounds, thereby restricting and reducing the diversity of the teaching workforce (RAND, 2025). These financial burdens have a cumulative detrimental impact on motivation, leading to attrition as prospective educators rethink the viability of a teaching career.

As pointed out in Dawn (2024), systematic and socio-economic barriers like low pass rates and associated challenges of gender discrimination underscore the exclusionary nature of the licensing process. "Traveling to exam centers is risky and expensive" (P19) highlighted by female participants is in alignment with Durrani et al (2017) who discussed gender inequities concerning education in Pakistan. Systemic challenges, such as inadequate institutional aid and limited resources, worsen the situation in colleges and in the rural areas of Hyderabad Division, where the lack of infrastructural facilities is particularly severe (University of Sindh, 2023). These barriers give rise to only a few candidates being able to pass the licensing examination, resulting in a considerable gap between the STL policy's aim of professionalizing teaching and reality.

Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the challenges prospective teachers face in obtaining their professional license from Elementary Colleges of Education in Hyderabad Division, Sindh. The findings reveal that the journey to licensure is not a straightforward academic test but a complex, multi-dimensional struggle shaped by a dysfunctional ecosystem. The analysis identified four predominant thematic challenges: Institutional and Academic Preparation, Administrative and Procedural Hurdles, Socio-Economic and Personal Barriers, and Systemic and Policy-Level Failures.

The core of the problem lies in the Institutional and Academic Preparation gap, where the very colleges tasked with preparing teachers are hampered by an outdated curriculum, under-trained faculty, and a critical lack of resources. This foundational weakness is then exacerbated by Administrative and Procedural Challenges from the licensing bodies, characterized by a cumbersome, non-transparent process and significant financial burdens that place the license out of reach for many. These structural issues are deeply compounded by the Socio-Economic and Personal realities of the candidates, where economic hardship, deeply ingrained gender-specific barriers, and profound psychological stress create immense inequities. Finally, all these challenges are entrenched by Systemic and Policy-Level instability, including frequent policy changes, a language barrier that disadvantages local graduates, and a job market that devalues merit, thereby eroding the perceived value of the license itself.

Crucially, this study concludes that these themes are not isolated but are deeply interconnected, creating a vicious cycle that perpetuates failure and discouragement. A candidate's inability to succeed is rarely due to a single factor; rather, it is the result of a compounding effect. For

example, a female student from a rural background (Socio-Economic challenge) is poorly prepared by her college (Institutional challenge), faces a complex registration process and high fees (Administrative challenge), and is then tested in a language she is not fluent in, for a job that may be given through connections rather than merit (Systemic challenge). This interplay confirms that the licensing process, in its current form, acts as a significant barrier rather than a quality assurance mechanism.

Therefore, isolated interventions will remain insufficient. Addressing the challenges of teacher licensure in Hyderabad Division requires a holistic, multi-stakeholder approach. Policy recommendations must include: a comprehensive revision of the B.Ed. curriculum to align with the NPST and the licensing exam; mandatory training for teacher educators; streamlining the administrative process and providing fee subsidies for low-income students; implementing robust gender-sensitive policies; ensuring policy stability and transparency from STEDA; and most importantly, linking the licensure process to a transparent, merit-based recruitment system to restore its value and purpose. Only through such coordinated efforts can the teaching license truly become a marker of professional competence and a gateway to quality education, rather than an insurmountable obstacle for the very individuals seeking to shape the future of Sindh.

Recommendations

To streamline the attainment of teaching licenses, teachers in the Hyderabad division will need a targeted, multi-pronged approach. Reform in the curriculum and training in the B.Ed. program should be subject to continual change and improvement in order to comply with NPSTs and STL exam's real-life adjuncts, integrating technical pedagogy and modern teaching apparatus. Teacher trainers should be taught advanced instructional techniques to provide the needed professional development. The administrative and financial procedures are also important, not only the Sindh Teacher Education Development Authority (STEDA) should be standardizing and formalizing the administrative procedures, but also offering fee exemptions, quota schemes and subsidized fee arrangements. Besides, Gender Sensitive Support Mechanisms like remote and safe locations for exam centers can also be implemented. Last, the policy achieving Strengthen Systemic Credibility will enormously benefit from a consistent approach to policy execution, connecting closely the issuance of a teaching license with 'no claim, no pay, claim and pay' based employment' for professional practice. Only through action across these areas can we transform the teacher licensure system in Sindh to be equitable, effective, and supportive of quality education.

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