

DECENTRALIZATION IN EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN: PERFORMANCE AND PROBLEMS OF THE PRINCIPLES OF HIGHER SECONDARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Education, particularly secondary and higher secondary education is the clinch pin of the educational system. It plays an important role and provides turning point to the students for their next academic career or job opportunities to those who do not continue their future education and join the workforce. In Pakistan different efforts have been made to decentralize education at local level e.g. through Devolution Plan 1999 the responsibility of secondary and higher secondary education was shifted to the district governments. To improve the education system through local involvement a number of initiatives were taken. The role of Principals of secondary and higher secondary schools has been very crucial in the process., Being the head of the institutions they were involved in the activities like academic planning, budgeting, staff evaluation, and resolving staff problems etc. The present study was designed to assess their performance and identify the problems, which they face while working under the new system. The study aimed to: i) assess the performance of the Heads of Higher Secondary and secondary schools under devolution plan and, ii) identify their problems under the new system. The population of the study comprised 1360 heads. A sample of 34 % was drawn. Questionnaires were used to collect the data. The study concluded that the performance of the Heads of Secondary/higher secondary schools was good in Punjab, KPK and Sindh. While in Baluchistan, the performance of heads was comparatively weak. However, in areas, like financial and administrative issues, staffing and training the heads were facing problems in all the provinces. The study recommended devolving complete financial and administrative powers at institutional level particularly in the province of Baluchistan.

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Keywords: Decentralization, Secondary Education, Decentralization of Education

Introduction

Before the partition of the Sub-Continent, various efforts were made to introduce local government system to ensure public participation, e.g. establishment of Municipal Corporations, was one of the steps in this direction. These efforts continued until 1909. The purpose of the local government, a lower level of governance, was to ensure that the governance is brought to the grassroots population to give its members a sense of involvement in the political processes that controls their daily lives. The Royal Commission on the Decentralization of Powers in its report published in 1909 provided village communities with powers for the administration of local affairs. The Acts of 1919 and 1935 were the initial legislations to make local bodies truly representative. During the period from 1935 to 1947, due to political efforts, the impact of local institutions remained marginal. After 1947 a 5-tier system of councils operating at the union council, tehsil, districts, divisional and provincial levels, was introduced in Pakistan, under the Basic Democracies Order of 1959. In the fifties, the American sponsored community development program, "V-AID program" was initiated. This program was focused on village, agricultural and industrial development. Thereafter, the Basic Democrats carried out the task of community development, particularly the development of the rural community at the local level. That system focused on the economic growth and political consciousness among the masses. The system was abolished by the government in 1972 and another type of model i.e. Integrated Rural Development Program (IRDP) was initiated. However, up to the year 1979 no local government operated. The political government of that time continued IRDP on adhoc basis. In the year, 1979 local government institutions were formed by direct election of the councilors. This system was comparatively better than the Basic Democracies. Under this system, the public servants were made subordinate to the chairman of the district council. The local government of 1979 merely provided support for the military government through the elected local councilors and hence lost the interest of the public in the system. Therefore, it could not work properly after 1989. In the year, 1999 when Musharraf took over the government, National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB) was established to propose a decentralized system. A new era of decentralization started under the Devolution of Powers Plan 2000. NRB prepared and presented the devolution plan in May 2000. Under this plan, the powers were

decentralized at the local level. This plan revived Zia's three-tier system of local governance of 1979. Under the present devolution plan, the local government bodies especially the district councils and the tehsil councils are assigned more powers and functions than their counterparts have in the past.

The devolution plan provided top down approach to meet the needs of the local community. The purpose of the plan was to serve the common interests of the people at the local level and safeguard their fundamental rights so that they feel free in discharging their usual activities under the new system. The plan also provides a system of accountability of the public representatives in all the public matters. However, the major flaw in the devolution plan is by passing the provinces. Principally powers should first have been devolved from the centre to the provinces and from there further down to the district's, tehsil's and union council's level. There is a need for proper adjustments and modifications in the working of the system. Under the devolution program, the community further needs to be empowered at the grass root level in planning and management of education, mobilization of the resources and their utilization, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the education system.

Decentralization of Education

There is a global trend of decentralizing education systems. Most of the countries are experimenting with or contemplating some form of decentralization of education. This process transfers decision-making powers from the central government to the local level and to the schools. The extent of transfer however varies, from administrative decentralization to much broader transfer of financial control to the regional or local level. The decentralization in education has taken place in the 1990 in many countries. Comparatively, the decentralization was more rapidly proceeded in Latin America and Eastern Europe, whereas, several countries of Asia have only initiated the decentralization policies (<http://www.answers.com/topic/decentralization-and-education>)

Decentralization process transfers decision-making powers from the central ministries of education to districts governments, local government, communities and schools. While describing educational decentralization Fiske (1996, p. 21), is of the opinion that "educational decentralization is a complex process that deals with changes in the way that school systems go about making policy, generating revenues,

spending funds and training teachers, designing curricula, and managing local schools". There has been a preoccupation with decentralization in the policy discourse about education, particularly among the developing nations. The process of decentralization in education substantially improves the efficiency, transparency, accountability and responsiveness of service provision as compared with the centralized system.

Decentralized education provision promises to be more efficient, reflect local priorities, encourage participation and eventually improves coverage and quality. Decentralization of education system demands harmonization of a complex set of functions, for primary, secondary, tertiary and non-formal education (<http://www.ciesin.columbia.edu/decentralization/English/>)

Many countries of the world particularly developing countries initiated the process of decentralization of education system to transfer power and decision-making authority to the local government. This has empowered the community and its representatives who are the actual stakeholders to make decisions for implementing and improving education system at grass root level. The implementation of educational decentralization reforms can be either rapid or slow. Legislative or constitutional changes immediately transfer responsibilities from national to lower level of government requiring administrative capacity to manage the system well.

Educational Decentralization in Pakistan

The education system of Pakistan has passed through different stages. As per provision of the constitution of Pakistan, education is a provincial subject. Provincial governments are involved in its launching and implementation. However, still the Ministry of Education, at Federal level, has to deal with some of the important functions nationally. These functions include: designing curricula up to class XII, formulating educational policy, coordinating educational activities at provincial level and finally dealing and disbursement of the grant in aid, donations and loans from different donor agencies and countries to the different educational institutions within the country. Each of the provinces has a provincial ministry of education headed by its provincial minister for education and assisted by the provincial secretary of education. The Provincial secretariats are responsible for policy making and looking after other relevant affairs in their respective provinces. In this respect, all the provinces have a uniform system, however, at district level and

