

# IMPACT OF EDUCATIONAL DECENTRALIZATION THROUGH DEVOLUTION POWER PLAN ON THE PERFORMANCE OF THE EDUCATIONAL PERSONNEL IN PAKISTAN

By

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## Abstract

*In 2000, Government of Pakistan had introduced a new system of devolution plan to empower the public representatives at local level. The main aim of this system was to solve the problems of people at grass root level in all affairs of life including education. The idea behind this system was to have a close eye on the performance of personnel working in education department right from teaching to management. At district level Executive District Officers (EDOs), in Education Deptt. were appointed who were decorated with all the powers of the education department which were previously held by Director at division level, and some other provincial level powers were also transferred to them so that they could resolve the problems at grass root level. Through this study I have attempted to find the impact of decentralization on the performance of the education personnel. It was checked whether the system has improved resolving teachers and their heads common problems or otherwise. For this study, data was collected from EDOs, District Education Officers (Secondary Education) (DEOs), Heads of Higher Secondary Schools (Heads) and Secondary Schools and Subject Specialists and Secondary School Teachers (SSs) through different questionnaires. The data was collected from 87 districts of Pakistan. It was found that under the new system the performance of the educational personnel in resolving Heads and SSs problems at district level was improved. However, some problems of the SSs and their heads still need to be resolved by the EDOs in some provinces of Pakistan.*

## Key Words

Devolution, Decentralization, Performance, Educational management.

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## Introduction

Since its very inception, the education system of Pakistan remained centralized at the federal and provincial levels. Pakistan inherited this centralized educational administrative setup from the British colony. The system had been improved to some extent through a number of administrative reforms but revamping of administrative structures did not take place. It has been continuously realized that centralized system of education has been hampering the efficiency and effectiveness of delivery services at the grass root level.

Different educational policies of the Government of Pakistan had acknowledged the desirability of decentralization of responsibility and authority in the education sector at district level and occasionally recommended specific strategies and structure to achieve this goal. It was enshrined that "district should be further divided into areas of 10-15 thousand population with an area/ union committee consisting of three members nominated by the deputy commissioner/ sub divisional officer to which certain powers, such as the transfer of teachers, should be delegated" (Government of Pakistan, 1959, p.131). It was further proposed to create separate sections with considerable autonomy within their spheres of responsibility, which introduced a very preliminary concept of devolution of authority, but it did not receive adequate response in educational administration. This was also realized in 1970. Therefore, the New Education Policy, 1970 mentioned that "administration set up in education is so highly centralized and bureaucratic that it has become totally impersonal, rigid and irrespective to demand of students, teachers and parents" (Government of Pakistan). The policy recommended to decentralize the administration by creating statutory district school authorities with an autonomous character. Moreover, the New Education Policy 1972-80 also recommended changes in the existing structure and provided that "in order to achieve the objectives, the provinces should consider desirability of setting up district school authority and zonal college authorities" (Government of Pakistan, 1972, p.20). In spite of these provisions, the educational decentralization at district/local level could not take place due to political instability and lack of political will. As a continuity of the previous policies, the National Education Policy, 1979 described the educational management and supervision in policy statement with the remarks that "our system of educational management and supervision is a legacy of the past and is not equipped to cope with the increasing and changing demands of education in the country". (Government of Pakistan, p.67)

The Education Policy, 1979 further provided that "educational administration will be further decentralized for effective supervision and

management of education" (Government of Pakistan, 1979, p.72). However, the management of the education could not be improved due to lack of decentralization of the system. The provisions of the Education Policy, 1979 were suspended with the formulation of new National Education Policy, 1992 which emphasized that the process of "decisions making will be decentralized. Educational development plans shall be effectively coordinated and monitored. Management of district level education will be improved by associating the local community" (Government of Pakistan, 1992, p.52). Due to fall of the People Party government at that time, the policy could not be implemented and the education system suffered badly as usual.

This was in the year, 1997 that the government took initiative to formulate new education policy. After thorough working of different committees and educationists, the National Education Policy, 1998-2010 was formulated. The policy focused the need of the district educational set up by mentioning that "the district educational authorities should be responsible for identification of school sites, construction and maintenance of school building, community mobilization, appointment, posting, transfer of school teachers, generating financial resources for literacy and educational development etc" (Government of Pakistan, 1998, p.106). This policy further proposed that the "management and supervision of the education sector will be improved through decentralization, particularly elementary education at district and community level. The District Educational Managers will be given training to improve the administration and teaching".

The Government of Pakistan having realized the gravity of the problem of distribution of powers established the National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB) in the year 1999 and its first task was to plan devolution of power to local level. A devolution model was proposed for public debate and by 14<sup>th</sup> August, 2000, a proposed devolution plan was released. The first and most significant aspect of that government's reform agenda was to devolve powers at the grass root level. It was envisaged that powers would be distributed across four tiers, i.e. center, provinces districts and lower tier. Since most of the powers were then concentrated in the center, powers were to be devolved to the provinces, districts and lower tiers at local level. As continuity to formal educational policies, the Education Sector Reforms (ESR) Action Plan 2001-2004, provided devolution of the educational administration and management from the federal and provincial governments to the district governments. The ESR 2001-04, highlighted that most educational planning and decision making will now take place where action is required. Centralized system and distance planning will be replaced by governance which is people and learner centered" (p.21).

As continuity to the previous provisions of different **educational** policies, the Perspective Development Plan 2001-2011 of Pakistan **provided** following provisions for the effective decentralization in education sector in **Pakistan**:

Effective decentralization in education requires both **macro and micro-level** planning to ensure that education facilities **work** optimally for the benefit of citizens of the district. Whilst the provinces will work out their initial plans for decentralization each district would require technical support for capacity building in a variety of areas to ensure best planning and management systems. Community participation, partnerships, accountability and monitoring of quality cannot become a reality without effective decentralization.

The efforts to decentralize education as a part of the overall policy of devolution (via local government ordinance 2001) offered opportunities for the improvement of educational institutions. This plan was aimed to devolve the powers to the lowest possible level at which it can effectively be discharged. The plan was to ensure capacity building, technical assistance, training, passing on development grants approved by the district assemblies, maintaining records, setting standards, data collection and publications and periodic audits. The positive aspect of the announced devolution plans was the intended subordination of the civil service to elected representatives. The devolution plan was welcomed in general as it was major initiative of the government under which the local community was to be empowered. The district governments acquired significantly greater responsibilities under devolution.

The new district structures were evolved further and were more settled than in any other sector. This was probably because of the fact that prior to devolution, provincial education departments were already a long way down on road to decentralization and appropriate management structure had been established at divisional and district level. The vision statements about devolution of powers differed in its nature in different provinces. A brief of each province of Pakistan is given as under in Table No. 1.1

