

IMPACT OF DEVOLUTION ON EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN IN THE LIGHT OF 18TH AMENDMENT: A REVIEW ARTICLE

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Abstract

This article is reviewed to highlight the consequences of the 18th Amendment in the Educational Sector from multiple perspectives. The purpose of decentralization and 18th Amendment is to improve the quality of education, better learning outcomes through increased efficacy and accountability in the field of education. Advocates of the 18th Amendment believe that this policy highlights the significance of access to information and education to every citizen of Pakistan. Furthermore, these sort of alterations infer essential modifications in the values that pertain to a relationship among pupils, parents to schools, and the affiliation of the community with the central government, and the vital sense and rationale for public education. However, critics pointed out that Policies, objectives and decisions if made at a central level many problems arise especially in terms of accountability and sharing responsibility. Researchers conclude that the impact of devolution has given different effects (positive and negative both) and devolution is practical in the lower level of education (Primary and Secondary) but devolution at Higher Education Levels and its governing bodies like

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Higher Education Commission is not an advisable approach.

Key words: *18th Amendment, Devolution Policy, Decentralization, Impacts on Education, Higher Education Commission*

1. Introduction

The 18th amendment is considered a successful attempt to encounter political instability in Pakistan and to control sweeping powers cumulative by the Presidency under former Military regimes. National Assembly of Pakistan passed this amendment for execution on April 8th, 2010 through the National Assembly of Pakistan, transforming the country from Semi-presidential to a parliamentary republic, and renamed a province from North-West Frontier Province to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Later on, the bill was passed by Senate of Pakistan on April 15th, 2010 and it developed into an act of the parliament through Presidential powers (Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan, 2017).

18th Amendment also focused on the devolution of the education system for the purpose of improvement. It also highlighted significance of access to information and education to every citizen of Pakistan (Authority, 2010). This amendment also ensures that protection of the allocations of the Provinces in all Federal services in addition to autonomous bodies and partnerships established by, or under the control of, the Federal Government and any blunder in the allocation of the shares of the Provinces in the past shall be rectified (18th Amendment, 2010).

Critique believes that for now provinces are not administratively prepared to practice all the authorities however amendment has provided an excess of provincial autonomy. However, this issue can be resolved and their administrative capabilities can be made adequate with their new responsibilities by relocating German specialists from the federal to provincial governments (Syed, 2010). Kemmerer emphasized the importance of social context, political support, adequate planning management and empowerment as the main influencing factors responsible for the success of decentralization.

If devolution is taking place without managing mentioned factors may result in boredom and failure of implementation (M.Khan & Mirza, 2011).

Policies, objectives and decisions if made at a central level many problems arise especially in terms of accountability and sharing responsibility. Whenever there is an absence of clear divisions of authoritative controls between the federal and the provincial government setups, the entire structure appears sealed. So it is suggested that decisions should be taken at the lowest possible level where actual competencies exist (ibid). It is the authors' observation that for successful implementation of decentralization it is necessary to overcome uncertainties of decisions and responsibilities of stakeholders. Furthermore, to overcome the trouble of capacity building for operating the decentralized system, support from the actual executors such as teachers, school supervisors and sub national government are always required. For a smooth running of the system, it is necessary to sort out problems related to communication gaps that hamper even the transfer of information (ibid). Capacity building and a clear demonstration of roles of local implementing agents like principal, teacher and student are necessary for successful implementation (ibid). One of the main issues is to create a system dealing with education assets from scratch, which is to ensure transparency and provision of incentives for improving access and quality. (Wrinkler & HatField, 2002). Another issue is to create a system with opportunities for feedback into policy and practice (ibid).

2. Education Decentralization - 18th Amendment Perspective

Decentralization or Devolution is the transfer of powers from the Education Ministry usually positioned in the capital territory, either to provincial governments or to the regional offices of the Ministry of Education, such as municipalities or districts. This process requires a lot of changes such as changes in policies, producing finances, an expenditure of assets, training educators, designing programs and syllabuses, and managing local schools. The principal purpose of decentralization in education is an improvement in the quality of education, better learning outcomes through increased efficacy and accountability in this field. It has been the conviction for decentralization may result in improvement of provision of services and effectiveness in resource utilization. The implementation also requires the development of

control and guidance, teacher training, parental encouragement, accessibility to facilities, students' and teachers' enthusiasm. Devolution distributes the school system to the smaller units, and the very power and the authority are kept in the authoritative control of central administration and board of education (M.Khan & Mirza, 2011).

3. Importance of Devolution in Educational System in Pakistan

Some of the supporters of devolution believe that this is the only way, results in desirable modification of parents, students, and teachers' attitudes towards the school. Furthermore, this sort of alterations imply fundamental shifts in the values that pertain to relationship of pupils and parents to schools, the relationship of the community with the central government, and the vital sense and rationale for public education (M.Khan & Mirza, 2011). Devolution in Pakistan is designed to overcome problems such as low literacy rate, highly unequal access varying with income level, between urban and rural populations, and between males and females (Wrinkler & HatField, 2002). One of the reasons to introduce decentralization is to improve accountability of the education system and public-private schools. (Wrinkler & HatField, 2002). In Pakistan, most parents believe that the quality of education is better in private schools/universities and for this reason very poor parents try for their children's admission to private institutions, despite limited finances. In order to overcome problems related to poor access to quality education decentralization is suggested. Despite several educational policies and plans still declined since 1995, after increasing between 1991 and 1995, in terms of enrollment status is observed. So, one of the reasons to improve the status, devolution is under progress towards execution (ibid).

4. The Devolution of Education in Past Governments

Devolution or Decentralization of Education in Pakistan has been practiced in the past and Federal Government has supported it several times in the past. But it is expected that the current education devolution will be a successful initiative to delegate a number of accountabilities from federal or central government to provincial governments. Devolution in the past was practiced in different terms. Some are highlighted below:

4.1. Fiscal decentralization

Provincial government received about 82% (2000 census) of their revenues from a pool of collective revenues before devolution. After devolution provincial governments started transferring revenues to the district level and sub-district level governments.

4.2. Federal Role

Teacher's pay scale and credentials, curriculum, assessment criteria even after devolution was under the responsibilities of the Federal Government.

4.3. Provincial Role

The provincial government primary responsibility includes pre-service and in-service teacher training programs arrangement with the district governments.

4.4. District Role

District government's major role was to ensure the pay structure and manage teachers at district levels. The source of income was from the Federal government but it was the district responsibility to decide expenditures for education versus other public services. Construction of new schools, an inspection of schools, and yearly teachers' assessments along with headmasters responsibilities were given to district government (Wrinkler & Hatfield, 2002).

5. Decentralization Impact on Education

In Pakistan, previous data has revealed a low literacy rate among adults where only 42% of adults age fifteen above are illiterate. Moreover, considerable dissimilarity within rural and urban, male and female inhabitants are observed. These facts symbolize both past and present. Though, after reforming and planning different strategies to improve the literacy rate still, 50 percent of seventeen years old children from poor families never been to school and the prime reason behind this is the variation inaccessibility to the school of education. An urban child has almost double the chances to attend primary school than a rural child, as a result, a rural child is not reaching university education or higher education level. Similarly, boys (aged 6-10 years) are 31 % more likely to attend primary school than a girl child,

resulting in less enrollment of females in higher education. These inequalities continue to increase with the level of education (Wrinkler & Hatfield, 2002). Therefore, one of the main reasons for decentralization is to overcome these inequalities and differences.

Decentralization practiced in the past has been summarized by Mahesar and Rehman in their article published in 2008. Some of the highlighted effects are mentioned below:

5.1. Positive Effects

Some of the positive outcomes in primary education included an increase in enrollment of students in primary schools, where School Management Committees played a positive role in improving enrollment. Improvement in infrastructure was obvious as all schools under survey increased capacity by constructing one or two more classes. Similarly, access to basic facilities such as availability of drinking water and provision of electricity was improved. Enrichment in the school environment is evident from students' interest to go to school and from parents' high level of satisfaction. The number of working days increased as compared to the past. The involvement of the Community has dejected the element of ghost schools. Authoritative controls provided to the District Officer (SEMIS) has been resulted in better decision making expected as reasonably scientific with efficiently organized. However, there remain areas for improvements requiring policymakers to attend to.

5.2. Negative Effects

Some of the harms resulted via decentralization were observed that more improvement in ruling party-affiliated areas was seen which was against the objective of equal distribution of education. Similarly, political influence in transfers and postings of the teachers has resulted in either over deployment or deficiency of teachers in different schools. Though enrollment was improved increasing demand of teachers was not facilitated as per requirement. Thus the total number of working teachers reduced as compared to working teachers before decentralization. Capacity building of the School Management Committees was also not addressed at the institutional level. It is true that to some extent decentralization showed improvement in the performance of primary schools but, the indecisive attitude of higher

management in allowing the entrusted administration to work as per the mandate assigned to them was obvious (Mahesar & Rehman, 2008).

Under devolution, financial resources were generated from 3 levels of the district such as ad hoc federal education grants, government own-source revenues, and provincial non-earmarked block grants. This system never guaranteed equity and satisfactory funding for primary education as a result many children lacked access to school (Wrinkler & Hatfield, 2002). And, obviously, it decreased higher education enrollment too.

Devolution in the sector of education throughout the world has shown diverse results (though most showed positive results like especially in students' accomplishment). A study conducted by Mohammad Khan Ayaz in 2012 showed some of the impacts of decentralization in secondary education. He calculated students' achievement in secondary education from various districts in the pre and post decentralization era. His results showed: Devolution in education has no noteworthy effect on students' accomplishment. Even in some districts decline in overall results was observed. Regionalization in education showed an increase in the number of students appearing and passing the Secondary School Examination, somewhat indicating an increment in enrollment of students. After devolution districts produced their own capital in addition to the assets transferred by federal and provincial governments, which was utilized in improving infrastructure and provision of facilities. Punjab Local government Ordinance 2001 declared that college education would be devolved to district governments but it was not implemented (Khan, 2012).

6. Impact of Devolution on HEC Tasks, Attestation; Scholarships

News about key functions of HEC would be under the supervision of federal ministries. A cabinet meeting held where the decision was made to transfer Higher Education Commission functions to the Capital's Cabinet Division, Ministry of Inter-Provincial Coordination and Ministry of Foreign Affairs revealed by NEWS. But the departments being assigned this task having no such rich educational matters dealing experience, whereas HEC is dealing with highly active components of professionalism and experience. It was advised that dealings relating to the correspondence and verification of

degrees, the standard of doctorate, etc. will be allocated with the Cabinet Division. The authors of this study are of the view that indeed cabinet division has got high tech and professionals but as far as HEC assigned specialized works are concerned, it is the domain of HEC to deal with. Foreign scholarships would be administered by the Ministry of Inter-Provincial Coordination. The degree verification process of lawmakers and public servants would too be handled by the cabinet division. As a result, a foreign scholarship program for nearly 5,000 scholars in 28 countries would have been moved to the Ministry of Inter-Provincial Coordination. Former chairman of the HEC once uttered devolution as immoral legislators have intentions to destroy HEC and have evil eyes on Rs. 40 billion. So devolution of HEC is still a question mark in terms of improving quality and accessibility to education. Nearly 5,000 Indigenous Scholarship programs would have been transferred to the provinces and for administration and controlling finances, new desks would be created. So loopholes for corruption will possibly be produced through this policy. The devolution of HEC is also demotivating for Ph.D. scholars returning to Pakistan as scholars will now have no entity to coordinate upon arrival for placement in different institutions which is still one of the important responsibilities of HEC. Critique believes that many programs started by HEC like The Pakistan Education and Research Network (PERN) providing high-speed 10 GB to universities. The Digital Library Program, training of teachers for improving pedagogical training, funds from USAID etc. could also come to an end. Therefore, scholars traveling abroad to present research papers would not get opportunities to go to conferences. HEC is an independent body that is responsible to report to the Prime Minister directly. The independence of HEC has allowed this autonomous body to encounter pressure associated with degree verification and did not verify degrees that are not meeting the strict standards of verification. Without autonomy, the new commission will neither have local nor international credibility. The new commission would also have the authority to recognize new universities being formed all over the country that do not meet the existing criteria for a university. So again there is a possibility of the formation of Universities not meeting the standards will get an opportunity to open their campuses, which will eventually decline the standard of higher education. HEC has strong affiliations with the Asia Pacific Quality Network

and the Network of Quality Assurance Agencies of the World. Pakistani Degrees have worth at global level due to high standards of HEC attestation and a strong check over Universities as well as students to possibly avoid fake cases and in this cause HEC has been progressive so far. Therefore, the formation of a new commission from the direct control of the Prime Minister to ministries may open loopholes, and now might be there a possibility of fake degrees scandal again be highlighted. Due to USAID's concern over the decentralization of HEC, it had withheld 250 Million US dollar project and another International donor World Bank had 300 Million USD might be terminated (The News, 2014). Khawaja stated that the Higher Education commission's role in the post-18th amendment period remains uncertain even after 10 years have been passed when the government-issued the notification.

7. Conclusion and Suggestions

Various studies conducted to highlight the impact of devolution has given different effects (positive and negative both). But devolution is practical in the lower levels of education (Primary and Secondary) but devolution of HEC and Higher Education is not a practical approach, as previous and past examples, scandals had created question marks on quality, validity, and reliability of education standards as well as results. Although the decision has been taken vide order No.4-11/2019-min-1 dated 14-04-2020 of Cabinet Division Islamabad whereby HEC is nominated it is Federal Ministry of Education and Professional Training (Memorandum, 2020), the time will tell the decision is wise or otherwise. However, even for primary and secondary education systems to be decentralized better results can be obtained by new amendments in the system has to be piloted till satisfactory and desired results obtained. Regular monitoring from the higher authorities is mandatory for the smooth running of programs. Disinterest amongst the various shareholders can only be encountered when the change is being monitored constantly. Regular training of teachers is necessary to show continued improvement in the system. Fair policy for recruitment, incentives, and transfers can bring a positive change among the teachers and shareholders motivation in terms of fulfilling of responsibilities. Similarly, better monitoring and evaluation outline to supervise the operations needs to be framed (Mahesar & Rehman, 2008). Ambiguities related to roles and responsibilities under decentralization

should be resolved in detailed terms of reference with the help of a document prepared by the Education Ministry. It is also necessary to involve teachers in devolution dialogues for the smooth running of the system and for achieving the prime objective of decentralization. There lies a need to restructure the public education bureaucracy, at district as well as provincial levels. Restructuring related to financial incentives, setting standards, providing technical assistance, and providing information with policies and procedures be designed to make devolution successful. A strong and clear policy related to budgeting, finances; human resource capacity is requisite. Opportunities to involve citizens in governance and improvement in the system may be useful. Budgeting for construction of new institutes, improving facilities, and regular training of teachers and other staff member should be sufficiently provided for implementation of successful programs. Similarly, adequate finances should be provided to ensure provincial governments meet the required standard of education. It can be achieved by the Brazilian or US model of financing where minimum budget allocation per person is preset. Special attention to poor, girls, ethnic or tribal groups should be given in terms of access to quality education. Motivation to send children to school can be improved in the form of stipends or scholarships to poor families. To motivate ethnic or tribal groups, training of bilingual teachers and the creation of a bilingual curriculum can be a good attempt to bring about a positive change. Parents usually find it difficult to get information about school outcomes therefore access to information and parents' involvement in voting educational councils can be an efficient way to improve the quality of education. More emphasis should be made on monitoring community participation, decision-making practices, the flow of funds for interpreting both unusually good and unusually bad performance (Wrinkler & HatField, 2002).

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