

EDUCATION REFORM IN PUNJAB A DECENTRALISED GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK FOR GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

Abstract

Improving the quality of public sector education and increasing its coverage is a complex challenge in Pakistan mainly because of the very large number of schools, inherently diverse requirements of various levels and types of education, low levels of investment and weak accountability mechanisms. The governance challenge comprises two important questions: 1) how to increase investment; and 2) how to make teachers and education managers more accountable. This paper examines the existing framework for governance of public sector education in Punjab to understand its consistent failure in providing quality education. It is argued that education is hardly a priority area for district managers and that a unionised cadre makes it virtually impossible to hold service providers accountable for a demonstrated poor quality of education. The paper makes a case for the establishment of District Education Authorities with the specific mandate of improving outreach and quality of education within their area of responsibility. Within a district, the paper proposes the gradual introduction of a decentralised governance framework in which most decisions – including fund utilisation and teacher assignment – are taken by elected School Councils and information on a range of fiscal and performance indicators is widely available. It is argued that accountability of education providers by direct beneficiaries is the only effective form of accountability that can lead to service improvement.

Introduction

Despite significant enlargement of the school network in recent decades,¹ Punjab continues to lag behind national and global targets in providing quality education to its children. 32% children of school-going age are currently out of school and 41% of the total population cannot read or write (Punjab Bureau of Statistics 2011). There is little chance of achieving universal primary education by 2015 – the target set under Millennium Development Goals. At the current rate of progress, Punjab is estimated to take until 2041 to provide its children their constitutionally guaranteed right of primary education² (Pakistan Education Task Force 2010). Poor quality of education is also a serious concern. A number of recent studies (e.g. Academy of Educational Planning and Management 2008; Andrabi et al. 2008; SAFED 2012) have noted that an average student in Grade 3 struggles to perform simple tasks that students in Grade 1 are supposed to have mastered. Clearly, the province faces significant deficits in student enrolment as well as learning outcomes. Therefore, the Herculean challenge for the province is two-fold: 1) bringing the remaining 32% of its children to (public or private) schools; and 2) addressing the learning deficiency of enrolled children.

Meeting this challenge will require a coherent and comprehensive strategy addressing two sets of issues. The first includes issues like medium of instruction, curriculum, text books, assessment, capacity building and regulation of private schools. The second includes performance management, incentives, dispute resolution, monitoring and evaluation, resource allocation and utilisation – i.e. issues that can be placed under the rubric of governance. Both sets of issues are of fundamental importance, but this paper focuses exclusively on improving governance of government schools in the province, which, it is argued, can only be achieved through making education managers and providers accountable to the ultimate beneficiaries, viz. communities whose children are enrolled in government schools.

This paper proposes a new 3-tier governance framework to improve school education in the public sector. The 3-tier governance framework comprises the provincial government, an Education Authority at the district level and a School Council (SC) at the local level. The provincial government performs the policy function and provides oversight, whereas District Education Authorities (DEAs) broadly representing district stakeholders manage school education systems in their respective areas. Actual running of schools is left to SCs, which exercise full control over school resources including its human resource. This is a highly decentralised structure, which uses proactive disclosure on school-level learning outcomes as a key component of the accountability framework. Further, the proposed framework provides for effective accountability of service providers by their clients. It seeks to turn on its head the power relation between education providers and parents of children enrolled in government schools.

The following sections fully develop this argument. Section 2 defines the crisis faced by public sector primary and secondary education. Improving learning outcomes is identified as a key strategic objective. It is argued that learning outcomes are difficult to improve without increasing investment and without improving teacher effort, which in turn is linked to the accountability framework in which the teacher functions. Section 3 critically examines the governance frameworks so far tried in the province. It is argued that neither the 1979 nor the 2001 local government framework was specifically designed to meet the complex challenge of education provision. Further, the relative power difference between education providers and households that still sent their children to government schools translated into a nominal role for clients in the governance framework. Consequently, both frameworks failed by and large in making education provision a priority at the local level and in making education providers deliver what they were paid for. The current role of School Management Committees is critically examined to understand why these have been non-functional in several cases and ineffective in almost all cases as far as holding teachers accountable is concerned. It is argued that design flaws in the current dispensation, rather than any inherent lack of interest or capacity in SCs (as often claimed in literature e.g. Banerji et al. 2007) are primarily responsible for their non-functionality and/or ineffectiveness. It is proposed to deepen their engagement in management of schools with the clear expectation that the increased oversight will improve learning outcomes. Section 4 lays down the

justification for setting up Education Authorities for each district. It is argued that education is too important to be packaged with other services at the district level and that an institutional hub is warranted to steer education provision in the district. The functions proposed to be performed by each tier in the 3-tier structure are explained in detail. Section 5 concludes the paper.

Defining the Challenge

The past two decades saw substantial emphasis on increasing enrolment in government schools in the province. The Universal Primary Education Program and the *Parha Likha* Punjab are two recent examples, whereby the Punjab Government allocated resources for this purpose and set yearly targets for district education managers. Teachers were also required to proactively approach local communities to ensure that most of the out-of-school children enrolled in a nearby school. Consequently, the net enrolment rate increased to about 68% of children in the 6-12 years age group (Ministry of Finance 2011).

Gradually, however, quality of education also became a key concern and advanced indicators, such as the completion rate, learning outcomes and citizen satisfaction started to figure prominently in the discourse on primary education in the province. National surveys like the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) and the Learning and Educational Achievement in Pakistan Schools (LEAPS) directly emanated from this interest and, in turn, contributed to put spotlight on quality of education. They helped establish the inappropriateness of assuming that increased enrolment was the same as increased education.

The ASER report (SAFED 2012), for example, noted how poorly children were learning in government schools. During the survey, students were asked to construct simple sentences in Urdu and English and to solve simple mathematical problems, such as subtraction and multiplication. The report noted that the majority of children could not answer simple questions in Urdu and/or English. Only 68% children in grade I were able to read or write simple words, 49% children in grade II could read simple sentences and 58% children in grade III could read simple stories in Urdu (ibid: 209). Expectedly, the situation was worse with English words and sentences, which only 53% and 46% children could read in grades II and III respectively (ibid: 209). Only 41% children in grade II could do simple subtraction and only 43% in grade III could do simple division (ibid: 210).

Similar findings echoed in the LEAPS report (Andrabi et al. 2008), which noted that only one out of every three children in grade III could construct a sentence using the word 'school' in Urdu (ibid: 24). Less than 30% could answer the most basic questions after reading a short paragraph and only 12% could correctly convert simple words from singular to plural (ibid: 24). The survey concluded that in Urdu most students in grade III were performing just at the standard meant for grade I. Students' performance in English was observed to be worse. About 14% students in grade III could not write the letter 'D' when they heard it spoken and 80% students

could not correctly spell the word 'girl'. Only 11% could construct a grammatically correct sentence using the word 'school' (ibid: 22). The same was the case for mathematics. 11% and 35% students in grade III could not do single digit addition and subtraction respectively. Slightly more difficult questions involving double digit subtraction were answered correctly by only 32% of children tested (ibid: 21). This was far below the curriculum standard, which expected students in grades I and II to be able to add and subtract up to 3-digit numbers.

Insufficient Teaching Effort and Infrastructure Deficit

Such poor learning outcomes are partly due to insufficient teaching effort. Several reports (e.g. Aly 2007; Andrabi et al. 2008; SAFED 2012) have documented that absenteeism in government school teachers is higher than in private school teachers. SAFED (2012: 211) found 85% teachers present in government schools on the day of the survey, as against 90% in private schools. The LEAPS report notes that government teachers are better paid, are more qualified and are more experienced than private school teachers, yet the latter outperform the former when it comes to learning outcomes, which are demonstrably better in private schools. Andrabi et al. (2008) (and several others in a global context (e.g. Pritchett and Pande 2006)) have argued that this is primarily due to different teaching effort, which in turn can be attributed to different accountability frameworks in which teachers in public and private sectors operate. They argue that teachers in the public sector operate in a loose accountability framework, where they are subject to oversight only by their bureaucratic and/or political bosses (ibid: also see Chaudhry et al. 2006). Given the unionisation of teaching cadres and the active socio-political role played by the teacher at the local level, it is virtually impossible to hold government teachers accountable for their consistent failure in achieving learning outcomes produced by their peers in the private sector in similar settings at a much lower cost.

The student-teacher ratio is also high especially in rural areas. The national average is 27:1 (ibid), but the ratio is suspected to be higher in rural districts, as teachers tend to cluster in urban centres. For example, Warraich (2008) found the number of students per teacher in girls and boys primary schools of district Lodhran as 35 and 68 respectively, for middle schools 38 and 63 respectively, and for high schools 70 and 40 respectively. Further, the average ratio does not account for teachers who are absent or are on a non-teaching government duty. The actual number of teachers available to teach on a typical day may be substantially less than the average.

Teacher absenteeism and poor teaching effort, however, are only part of the problem; an acute infrastructure deficit must also take some of the blame for poor quality teaching in government schools in the province. More than 25% schools do not have a toilet at all, and for the rest the average comes to about 74 children per toilet (Andrabi et al. 2008: 42).³ Since janitorial staff is not posted in most schools, toilets – when they exist – are not cleaned regularly (or worse still are cleaned by children). 40% schools do not have desks, so students sit on floor or mats. One third schools do not have electricity and 56% do not have fans (ibid: 45).

Consequently, students (and teachers) have to do without fans in temperatures that exceed 45 degree Celsius in summers in most places in Punjab. 33% schools do not have a boundary wall and only 16% have a library. Computer labs have been recently set up in high schools, but most labs are non-functional due to absence of computer teachers or for operational reasons.

The Enabling Role of Good Infrastructure

The usual response to a discussion that highlights the facility deficit in government schools is cynical. A critic will argue that: 1) a focus on school facilities is unwarranted, as several innovative pilots in developing countries have improved learning outcomes without any substantial investment in infrastructure; 2) the real issue is to improve expenditure efficiency, as a significant portion of public funds currently allocated for public sector education is pilfered or wasted; and 3) the government does not have enough funds, so local communities and non-governmental organisations should contribute resources in cash or kind to improve and maintain infrastructure and to provide additional teachers. These are different shades of the same argument, which emanates from a deep-rooted policy bias against allocating resources for the education of the poor and the voiceless. While the need to improve expenditure efficiency, to try innovative approaches that make the best use of available resources and to enhance local financing of school improvement programs is fully appreciated, let it be stated loudly and unequivocally that the Punjab Government must allocate substantial additional resources to improve facilities in public sector schools in the province. The reasons for this emphasis follow.

First, good school infrastructure and adequate number of high-quality teachers have a definite enabling role in providing quality education. Most teaching activities require necessary facilities to be available. For example, lesson planning is considered an important component of teaching, but a teacher can plan her lessons only if she has sufficient time during school hours to do so. In the present dispensation, which does not provide a dedicated teacher per class, and where teachers have to frequently perform non-teaching assignments,⁴ most teachers end up trying to teach multiple grades under the same roof. With improved technique and coaching, teaching can be improved to attain better learning outcomes, but the improvement will remain marginal. If the objective is to rise to the level of low-cost private schools operating in the vicinity, it can be achieved by technique changes and better monitoring. But if the objective is to rise above this level, at least one qualified teacher per class will be required. Similarly, a teacher needs a dedicated room with a blackboard and some storage space, which she can use to discharge her teaching responsibilities. A crowded room excludes the possibility of activity-based teaching. A teacher also needs a play area to use sports as a key component of curriculum delivery. Further, if students are going to be ultimately evaluated, *inter alia*, on their ability to read various types of texts, either parents or the (provincial/district) government must make a variety of books available to students in sufficient numbers so that they can practice their reading skills. Reading from just one book encourages rote learning. If Information Communication Technology

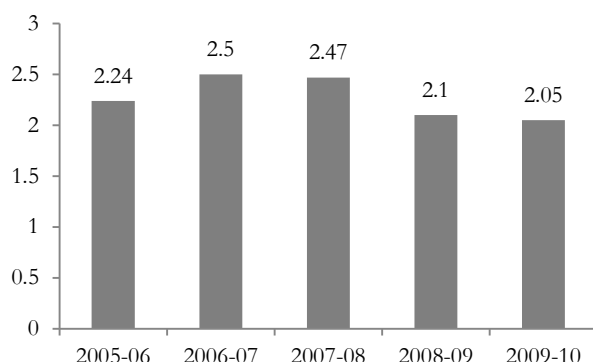
(ICT) is to be integrated into our curriculum, at least a few functional computers will have to be provided to every schools (and a space to house them) so that students are familiar with basic operations from an early age. The availability of these (and similar other facilities) is absolutely essential for *normal* functioning of a government school. Trying to do without these basic facilities is like trying to teach driving without having access to a car.⁵

Second, good school infrastructure and facilities contribute to making schools a fun place, so that students come to the school willingly. In the current paradigm, children go to school because their parents want them to. Parents' perceived notions of what is good for their children dictates what, how and where they should be learning, if at all. In a different paradigm, schools will be attractive enough for children so that they, rather than their parents, want to attend school regularly. Of course, making schools a fun place is not a simple function of providing missing infrastructure and additional facilities; it, more than anything else, requires an attitudinal change in teachers and an equally radical paradigm shift in curriculum and how learning outcomes are assessed. But surely children are more likely to enjoy being in a school that has classrooms, clean toilets, drinking water, electricity, fans, lights, black/white boards, furniture, play areas and story books than in a school without these. Teachers are also more likely to look forward to their day in a school with facilities than in a school without them.

For these reasons it is considered absolutely essential that school infrastructure is improved and that government schools are provided with basic facilities. At the same time, the inter-connectedness of improving infrastructure and enhancing teaching effort needs to be emphasised. Mere construction of new schools and providing them the necessary wherewithal is not going to improve learning outcomes on its own. The Government will need dedicated teachers in sufficient numbers to use these facilities to the benefit of children enrolled therein. Conversely, improving teachers' accountability will at best reduce their absenteeism and improve teaching effort. But a teacher will work only with what she has and deliver only what she knows. In the first place, she needs to have adequate understanding of what is required of her and, in the second, the necessary capacity to deliver. Hence, increasing public sector investment and improving accountability framework are complementary activities.

Making a Case for Increased Investment

Data presented below show that Pakistan's expenditure on education as a proportion of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has been declining during the past few years and is substantially less than other countries in the region. In 2009-10, Pakistan's allocation for education was 2.1% of GDP (was 2.8% in 1987-88) (Ministry of Finance 2010) and 9.9% of total government expenditure (UIS 2010). Only 11 other countries spend 2% of their GDP or less on education (ICG 2005). The Pakistan Education Task Force (2010) estimated that Pakistan must spend at least 4% of its GDP on education to achieve educational Millennium Development Goals.

Figures 1: Public Expenditure as %age of GDP**Figures 2: Public Sector Spending on Education**

Country	% of GDP
Bangladesh	2.6
India	3.3
Indonesia	3.5
Iran	5.2
Malaysia	4.7
Nepal	3.2
Thailand	4.5
Vietnam	5.3
Pakistan	2.1

Source: Ministry of Finance 2010

The total public sector budgetary allocation for education in Punjab – including for federal educational institutions located in the province as well as for tertiary and vocational institutes – was Rs. 160,209 million in 2009-10 (Table 1 below). As per UNESCO (2010) estimates, approximately 78% of this allocation goes to school education, which brings total school allocation in Punjab down to Rs. 124,963 (US\$ 1,382) million. According to census estimates, the number of children in the 5-14 years cohort is approximately 25.8 million. The total public sector spending per child, therefore, comes to a meagre Rs. 4,843 (US\$ 54) per annum, which by any standard is dismally low if the objective is to provide quality education to poor and lower middle class families whose children still enrol in a nearby government school.

Table 1: Public Sector Budgetary Allocation for Education 2009-10 (million)

	Rs.	US\$ ⁶
Federal Government	76,237	843
Approximate share of Punjab (@ 50%)	38119	422
Punjab Government	49,573	548
District Governments	72,517	802
Total	160,209	1,772

Source: Ministry of Finance 2010

The budgetary allocations must be increased. The size of the increase will be a function of the benchmarks that the Punjab Government defines for its primary, middle and high schools separately. A Citizens' Charter in education will define clearly and in plain language the minimum service delivery standards that a government school must meet irrespective of its location or enrolment. These standards will pertain to the number and condition of rooms, toilets, drinking water, electricity, fans and other such basic facilities; number of teachers and number of school days; availability of textbooks; and availability of teaching and learning aides. Given the low baseline, these standards should not be ambitious to begin with. It is

recommended that the Government adopts a phased set of targets, which will allow it to gradually increase its budgetary allocation for education.

Operationalisation of such standards and a serious effort to meet the benchmarks for about 60,000 government schools in the province will require serious financial commitment from the Punjab Government. But this will not be beyond its means, as the Government has repeatedly demonstrated its ability to organise resources for priority items. It spent substantial resources on quite a few not-so-well-thought-through education-related initiatives during the last 2-3 years. One example is the establishment of Danish Schools as state of the art institutions for providing quality education to households in less-developed districts. The Government initiated the establishment of 16 such schools in 2010 with an approximate expenditure of Rs. 1,000 million (US\$ 11 million) per school as the cost of establishment and Rs. 21 million (US\$ 0.23 million) as the annual operating expense per school. Six such schools have already been established and the rest are in various stages of development. Another example is the distribution of laptops in 2012-13 at an approximate cost of Rs. 5,000 million (US\$ 55 million). These laptops were distributed as a gift from the Chief Minister to students of selected colleges and universities in Punjab. Both these schemes were financed from the education budget of the province.

It is not the purpose here to critique these schemes; rather, they are used as evidence of availability of resources should the provincial government decide to make improving schools a priority. If the money allocated to the Danish Schools Project and to the Free Laptop Project is distributed equally over the 60,000 or so government schools in the province, it comes out to be Rs. 350,000 per school. Not a large amount *per se*, but it can provide decent toilets and drinking water facilities in *all* government schools in the province. It must, however, be emphasised that the case being made out here is not for a reprioritisation *within* the current allocation; instead, it is a case for substantially *increased* investment in addition to such reprioritisation.

Increasing investment in public sector education is, however, only one part of the puzzle. By itself, it will not improve education quality. Mourshed et al (2011: 15) have shown that countries with similar per student spending produce vastly different learning outcomes in their schools and *vice versa*. For example, Kuwait, Israel, Portugal, Australia, England and Singapore were all spending PPP US\$ 5,000 – 6,000 per student but Kuwait scored 402 on PISA⁷, Singapore stood at 533 and the rest were in between. The policy implication of this important observation is that equal – or even greater – emphasis must be laid on improving governance. This is the second part of the puzzle.

Governance Structure and its Failures

Prior to the promulgation of the Punjab Local Government Ordinance of 1979, the Government directly managed education provision in the province through the Education Department. The Department was led by its Secretary, who was assisted

by a team of Additional Secretaries, Deputy Secretaries, Under Secretaries, Section Officers and secretarial staff. The Education Department had an elaborate hierarchy at district and sub-district levels to carry out policy directions from the provincial government and to provide oversight to working of schools in the district. Each district also had District Boards comprising key government officials and local notables nominated by the Government, which performed limited supervisory roles in the district. There existed an elaborate system of school inspections, which were carried out regularly by various officials within their respective areas of jurisdiction. Since the number of schools was small, it was possible for the district managers, i.e. the District Education Officers to keep them reasonably abreast of happenings within the district. There was hardly any local participation in managing schools or providing oversight at district and sub-district levels.

The Local Government Ordinance of 1979 created separate elected local government institutions for urban and rural areas. An urban unit elected a Town Committee, a Municipal Committee or a Municipal Corporation depending upon its size. The rural areas of each district elected a District Council. Both urban and rural institutions of local governance were led by elected chairpersons. One of their key functions was to actively manage primary schools placed under their jurisdiction. Not all primary schools in the district were placed under elected Municipal Committees/Corporations and District Councils. The Education Department managed schools under its jurisdiction through its district and sub-district officials. This group of officials – District Education Officers, Assistant Education Officers, Inspectors of Schools, etc. – were civil servants and regular employees of the Punjab Government. They were accountable to their supervisors in the Department, which operated under overall oversight of the provincial government.

This provided a weak accountability framework. During 1979 – 2001, Punjab was governed by various military dictators for about eight years and had an elected provincial government for about 14 years. During the military rule, education managers felt responsible only to their military bosses, but even when the province was governed by an elected Chief Minister responsible to the Punjab Assembly, the Education Department and its district officials operated autonomously. People's representatives – Members of the Provincial Assembly (MPAs) – could seldom hold education managers accountable for declining quality of education for three reasons. First, the number of schools in a typical Punjab Assembly electoral constituency was too large for an MPA to keep track of. She had to rely exclusively on the information and feedback provided by local notables, who could filter the information to suit their biases and interests. Second, although the MPA enjoyed substantial informal influence over local education managers, her formal channel of communication with the Education officials was a long one. She had to request the Chief Minister or the Minister, who would then instruct the Secretary of the Department, who would then speak to the officials concerned to get the job done. The message was usually watered down in the process. Third, there was more pressure on an MPA from her constituents to build roads and to lay sewerage lines than to improve school education. Therefore, the only education activity that a typical MPA ever got engaged

in was building new schools, recruiting teaching and non-teaching staff, and their subsequent transfer and posting. All these were vote winning activities, but putting these new recruits to work in the new schools was another matter.

Education Governance under the Punjab Local Government Ordinance (PLGO) 2001

The PLGO 2001 was a major step forward, as it devolved the entire ensemble of public schools to the district level. The Education Department took on a policy and supervisory role. Under the new system, the district education managers were still responsible to the Secretary of the Department, but through the District Coordination Officer (DCO) and the District Nazim – the elected head of the district. This considerably diluted provincial government’s capacity to influence day to day management of schools in the province.

Each district receives annual grant from the provincial government as per the formula agreed under the Provincial Finance Commission (PFC) award. This is the main source of funding for the district governments, as they have rather small local resource generation (CASA 2005). District governments generally have wide discretion over how PFC funds are spent subject to overall policy conditions prescribed by the Punjab Government. For example, no new position of any rank can be created by the district government without the approval of the provincial government. In addition, a district government may also receive tied grants from the federal and/or the provincial government. The PLGO authorizes District Councils to levy education taxes and fees to support the education facilities established or maintained by the district government. To date, none of the District Councils has levied any such tax.

In addition to allocating funds to districts, the provincial government continues to play an important role in posting of senior managers and in setting the broad framework in which performance is appraised, assessment is carried out and sanctions are placed on poorly performing teachers. It also provides policy advice and support through its various organisations. Beyond this, the PLGO 2001 envisages a limited provincial role in everyday management of schools and in policy implementation. Budget and personnel, other than the several senior most tiers, are at the disposal of the district government. Most postings, transfers, recruitments, promotions and planning decisions are taken by the district government.

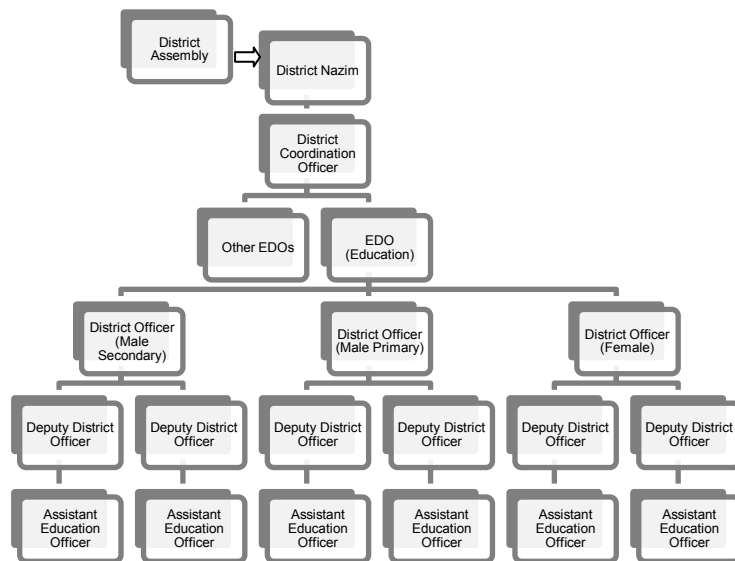
The District Education Hierarchy

At the district level, the education managers are responsible to the elected District Nazim, who is the executive head of the district under the PLGO 2001.⁸ The Nazim is responsible to the District Assembly, which comprises elected heads of union councils⁹ in the district. The Assembly passes the budget and is, *ipso facto*, responsible for financial allocation to education from the district budget. The Assembly also approves district education policy and oversees its implementation

through its Standing Committee on Education. The chief bureaucrat in the district is the DCO, who provides oversight and guidance to officials of all provincial departments in the district. This position is somewhat similar to the office of the Chief Secretary at the provincial level. DCOs are chosen from the federal or provincial executive generalist cadre and are appointed by the provincial government. In each district, there are eleven Executive District Officers (EDOs) – each overseeing a group of departments.

EDO Education is responsible for school education in the district. She assists the DCO – and through her the District Assembly and the District Nazim – in discharge of their education-related functions. She can issue standing orders to give specific policy directions to officials for carrying out their functions. She is responsible for preparing and implementing the Education Policy and to maintain education standards in government schools. She is also responsible for coordination among various education offices in the district, for compiling data on various aspects of education, for regularly inspecting schools to ensure that teachers are present and that schools are maintained properly, for carrying out special campaigns, for organising sports activities in schools and for inspecting private schools in the district.

Figure 3: District Education Hierarchy



The EDO is supported by District Officers Education (DOEs), Deputy District Officers Education (DDOEs) and Assistant Education Officers (AEOs) in the district. Each district has three DOEs, as there are separate DOEs for secondary schools and for male/female elementary schools. DOEs perform wide-ranging duties and appear to be the most exhaustively deployed officials in the district. They are required to personally visit each school within the district at least once every year. They are also required to regularly meet all Head Teachers in the district not only to keep themselves abreast of developments in schools, but also to motivate

and guide Head Teachers in discharge of their responsibilities. The DOEs are responsible for registering and monitoring private schools, cross checking bills for financial payments, preparing budget estimates, preparing district development programs, maintaining school buildings in appropriate condition, ensuring that school syllabus is covered fully and in time, and responding to Assembly questions. As can be seen, this is a long list of varied functions and given the large number of schools in each district,¹⁰ the DOEs find it increasing difficult to discharge their responsibilities in any meaningful manner.

The next official in the hierarchy is the DDOE, who represents the Education Department at the Tehsil¹¹ level. They assist the DOEs in discharge of their functions and implement a more intensive inspection regime. Each DDOE is required to inspect all middle schools at least thrice every year and at least 25% primary schools once every year. They evaluate performance of Head Teachers in their area of jurisdiction, sanction their bills and exercise overall superintendence over their work. As such they comprise the functional tier at the district level. They also carry out literacy campaigns.

DDOEs are assisted by AEOs, who are the field officials in the district education hierarchy. AEOs work one each for a Markaz and are responsible for monitoring of schools to check teachers' attendance, student enrolment and condition of school buildings. Each AEO is required to carry out at least two summary inspections and at least one detailed inspection of all elementary schools in the Markaz. They do not have any executive powers *per se*, but can report delinquency to their respective DOEs, who have vast administrative powers – at least on paper – over teaching and non-teaching staff in the district.

Monitoring and Incentives Framework

EDOs, DOEs, DDOEs and AEOs are drawn from the education cadre and are mostly senior teachers and head teachers from government schools. Although, their salary is determined by their Basic Pay Scale (BPS),¹² postings as education managers are coveted mainly because of the administrative powers, the perks attached to such postings and the capacity to offer favours, which are reciprocated with favours in their own turn. There is also the possibility to seek rents. Consequently, it is not uncommon for teachers to use their personal and professional networks to seek posting as an education manager. This strengthens their position on the one hand and places them under specific obligation on the other hand to protect duly and unduly other members of the network. It compromises their capacity to objectively evaluate the performance of their erstwhile colleagues. It also adversely affects their ability to exercise administrative authority. For fear of losing these coveted postings, often the education managers shy away from exercising their authority to censure and sanction education officials in their area of responsibility.

Posting and transfer decisions rest with the district government for all but a few education officials in the district. EDO Education and DCO are authorised to make

these decisions for officials in BPS 1-10 and 11-18 respectively. Transfer/posting of officials above BPS 18 rests with the Education Department. Since the salary of public servants is determined by their BPS and since it is next to impossible to terminate the services of a delinquent official (discussed shortly), transfer to a less attractive location is often the only sanction that an unhappy education manager can impose upon a staff member. Transfer to an out of the way or far flung location can cause serious inconvenience, especially to female staff members. Hence, it is not uncommon for them to deploy their social networks to avoid such an eventuality.

To safeguard district education managers against pressure from powerful quarters within the district (mainly politicians, but also from fellow bureaucrats, judges, military officers, etc.), the Punjab Government regularly imposes a ban on transfer of education officials from one place to another. While such ban is in force, only the Chief Minister can relax the ban and allow a transfer. This effectively centralises power further in the hands of the Chief Minister and is *ipso facto* a regressive step.

Promotions come almost automatically and regularly. Formally, the performance of each official is annually appraised by her supervisor and recorded in a confidential Performance Evaluation Report (PER). Promotion Boards at the district or provincial level consider these PERs and based on available vacancies make decisions regarding promotion of officials. In practice, however, PERs do not carry much significance mainly because the supervisors rarely record their true assessment of officials in these reports. In any case, in the absence of regularly and reliably collected data on mutually agreed upon indicators, it is difficult to objectively perform a task as difficult as performance assessment. Therefore, promotion has become largely a function of seniority. After regular intervals, officials are promoted from one BPS to another. After a couple of such unearned promotions, there is hardly an incentive for an official to work hard and improve performance in any meaningful manner. Given that postings are also ensured through effective deployment of personal and professional networks, it is hardly surprising that most officials spend considerably more time building and strengthening networks than on their professional duties or even on professional growth.

Disciplinary action against misconduct is taken under the Punjab Employees Efficiency, Discipline and Accountability (PEEDA) Act of 2006. PEEDA is Punjab Government's general instrument to ensure discipline and efficiency; as such it does not contain any education specific provision. The Act defines misconduct and specifies the procedure to be adopted in initiating, conducting and deciding disciplinary proceedings against officials. The Act also stipulates the punishment that can be awarded against various types of delinquent action. Through various notifications, the Government has specified authorities to exercise powers under the Act. In most cases, the authority to initiate and conclude proceedings lies within the district. The DDOE and DOE have been designated as the authority to take action against primary and middle school teachers. The DCO/EDO can recall most cases and revise decisions taken by managers at lower tiers. The Secretary Education Department is the designated authority for action against head teachers, subject

specialists and education managers in BPS 17 and above. *Prima facie*, this appears a robust system to ensure accountability in the education delivery system.

In reality, however, the powers vested on various officials under the PEEDA Act of 2006 are seldom exercised. Data on disciplinary proceedings initiated against various officials and action taken under PEEDA (or its predecessor legislation) are not readily available. Anecdotal evidence suggests that such cases are rare. Since there is hardly any flaw/lacuna in the legal framework *per se*, the inaction must be attributed to the unwillingness or the incapacity of education managers to act effectively within their areas of responsibility.

Part of the problem is the weak monitoring and evaluation framework in the district. Although, the hierarchical structure of education managers seems to provide a rigorous inspection and monitoring regime in the district, in practice the monitoring and evaluation capacity of district education managers has eroded over the years due to poor logistics and a weak incentives regime. Either the required number of inspections is not carried out or is carried out casually. Similarly, reports from these inspections are seldom a true picture of the state of affairs in the inspected school. Ostensibly for this reason, the Punjab Government established in 2002-03 an elaborate external monitoring system consisting of Monitoring and Evaluation Assistants (MEAs), mostly ex-army personnel. MEAs are supervised by a District Monitoring Officer, who is usually an officer from the provincial executive cadre. She reports directly to the DCO and indirectly to the provincial Education Department. MEAs are required to visit each school once a month and to record information on teacher and staff attendance, textbook availability, school enrolment, student attendance and the general upkeep of the school in standardised format for convenient collation at district and provincial levels. MEAs are assigned a different set of schools every three months so that they do not cook figures in collusion with the school staff. The Education Department uses these inspection data to rank districts on a set of indicators.

Conceptually, this system of external monitoring was meant to generate objective data to inform policy and to increase district managers' capacity to effectively act to incentivise and sanction high-performers and delinquents in their team respectively. In practice, however, it became an opportunity to provide jobs to retired military personnel. It was this *latent* function – as against the *manifest* function of generating information – that led to speedy deployment of MEAs across the province without much opposition from the teaching community, which had historically resisted efforts of external monitoring. Once appointed, MEAs quickly discovered that their nuisance value could be readily translated into small favours and rents from the school staff. It was only a matter of time that one also started hearing anecdotal accounts of sexual harassment of female teachers. Further, MEAs had little understanding of the functioning of modern education systems, so their data collection betrayed superficiality. Their activity revolved around the tangible indicators, such as attendance, rather than the assessment of learning outcomes – supposedly the ultimate objective of all teaching activity. There is also a more fundamental problem with this scheme of things. The MEAs report to the DCO et al. and the expectation is that the

latter will take action informed by the data generated from field visits. But there is nothing in this scheme of things to reduce in any manner whatsoever *disconnect* between the level where delinquency has taken place and the level where action is taken. How realistic, then, is this expectation remains a moot point.

Another strategy that the Punjab Government has tried is to appoint teachers on fixed-term location-specific contracts. A typical contract is entered into for five years and is for posting at a specific location. It can be renewed for as many terms as the parties prefer until the teacher reaches the retirement age. The contract can be terminated at any time and its renewal is (in principle) based on satisfactory performance of the teacher concerned on a set of indicators, such as enrolment, attendance and students' examination results. Annual salary increments are also granted on satisfactory performance. In theory, the policy of contract appointment was expected to: 1) strengthen the hands of the education managers in effectively acting against delinquents; 2) ease out pressure for transfer/posting to preferred locations, such as schools located in peri-urban and urban areas; and 3) increase teaching effort leading to improved enrolment, reduced absence and improved performance. In practice, however, none of this happened and the contract policy proved as ineffective in achieving its objectives as previous measures. Contract employees created enough pressure forcing the provincial government to regularise their appointment and convert them into civil servants with all the perks and protections that come along.

Deconstructing the Power Relations in School Councils

Establishment of school-level committees has been yet another concept that the Punjab Government experimented with during the last two decades to improve education provision in government schools. The idea was to involve local communities – more specifically – parents in managing schools and the expectation was that it would reduce teacher absenteeism. Under the Social Action Program in 1990s, School Management Committees and School Repair Committees were constituted for primary and middle schools across the province to ensure community participation in utilization of funds under the Program. In the year 2000, these Committees were renamed as School Councils (SCs) and their mandate was also enhanced to include checking teacher attendance, etc. The (World Bank supported) Punjab Education Sector Reform Program placed special emphasis on reactivating School Councils during the last decade. According to the data provided by the Project Monitoring and Implementation Unit of the Program, there are currently 44,137 School Councils in Punjab.

SCs are constituted by education managers for individual schools and comprise the head teacher (who acts as the Chairperson), one or two teachers from the school and a few local notables, some of which must be parents. A Council once notified continues to perform as such unless dissolved through a notification. Its mandate is to ‘... ensure teachers presence, increase enrolment, motivate parents to send their children to school, conduct co-curricular activities, take measures to safeguard teachers/students rights, provide support in the distribution of textbooks and

stipend in the school, take measures to protect school building, hold SC meetings at least once a month, prepare School Development Plan, use SC funds and maintain certain records (Anonymous 2007).’ This is a comprehensive mandate and places substantial responsibility on the Councils. Does it also provide reasonable authority and resource to discharge this responsibility is a different question altogether.

The performance of SCs in delivering on their mandate in Punjab is an under-researched area and enough data do not exist to objectively evaluate their performance. However, there exist several studies (e.g. GTZ 2010; HRCP 2005; Khan 2007; Safdar 2007; World Bank 2007) that have commented upon the performance of SCs as part of a larger debate on education provision in Pakistan. By and large, establishing SCs has been considered a step in the right direction, but one that does not go far enough. It is generally believed that SCs have been unsuccessful in delivering on their mandate. This has been ascribed to: 1) lack of interest from parents and local communities in effectively managing their schools; and 2) their lack of capacity. It is argued that playing a key role in school management requires a long-term time commitment, which few in the local community are able to make. Further, school activity is carried out during the day when most parents are busy in their respective offices, shops or fields. It is also argued that often local communities do not possess the necessary accounting and managerial skills to efficiently utilise school budgets and to effectively evaluate teachers’ performance.

While it appears a valid observation that SCs have by and large been unsuccessful in playing a significant role in reducing teachers’ absenteeism, in increasing their teaching effort and in increasing enrolment, it is hard to agree that this has anything to do at all with the lack of knowledge, commitment and/or capacity of local communities. Several commentators (e.g. Andrabi et al. 2008) have noted that households, especially mothers, have a reasonably good idea of how their children are faring in the school and how the school is doing. Households’ interest and commitment are also amply demonstrated by their readiness to invest substantial proportions of their monthly household budgets to the education of their children.¹³ The phenomenal growth of low-cost primary schools in rural and urban Punjab during the last decade is a testimony to that. Similarly, it is hard to believe that a more complex skill set is required to manage a small school than is required to run a small business or farm – activities that households undertake on a daily basis. It is also noteworthy that these very local communities provided the entrepreneurs that have successfully set up private schools across the length and breadth of the province.

Therefore, it is fair to conclude that local communities in rural and urban areas: 1) have a reasonably good understanding of the performance of various schools in the neighbourhood; 2) have an active interest in improvement in school education; and 3) have adequate capacity to play an important role in school management. How, then, to explain the consistent failure of SCs across the province in delivering on their mandate?

A deconstruction of the power relations between the teacher and the local community can help unravel this mystery. The teacher is the service provider in this case and the local community the client, as their children study in government schools. In the

current dispensation, the service provider is visibly more powerful than the client – a fact both parties fully appreciate. This relative power imbalance is recreated and reinforced in everyday interaction where the latter defers to the former in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. The teacher is more educated and has an income more stable than that of an average parent. She is part of the government hierarchy and *ipso facto* has privileged access to state protection and resources. She is also frequently called upon to carry out various surveys and draw up lists (such as prospective beneficiaries of financial assistance) by the government, which places her at the giving end of the relationship. She is more mobile, as she often frequents district and sub-district headquarters for official duties. Most importantly, a teacher is part of several professional networks, which she can draw upon on need basis. Since education has been declared an essential service by the Punjab Government, officials are legally forbidden to form unions; still teachers' associations of all hues are ubiquitous. These associations are membership-based organisations and are vertically integrated at district and provincial levels. They support their members in any manner whatsoever. Almost all associations have linkages with political parties – yet another avenue to wield influence on policy. As Latour (1987; 2005) has shown, the capacity of individual actors to form multiple networks and deploy these networks effectively to pursue their individual gains allows them to influence policy and implementation outcomes in their favour.¹⁴ Teaching and non-teaching staff in the Punjab Education Department has consistently demonstrated this capacity over the years.

In comparison, households are scattered, disorganised and internally divided on the basis of caste, creed and social placement. They have precarious means of subsistence, often susceptible to the vagaries of weather or to market vicissitudes. Their access to government departments is inhibited by their low literacy level and their relatively limited understanding of bureaucratic procedures. Often their access to government services is mediated through local notables, with whom teachers may already have a preferred relationship.

Effectively, this translates into a lopsided power relation within the SC. Rather than the client superintending the service provider, it is the latter who 'identifies' the former to sit on the Council. Since district education managers have little direct interaction with local communities, they often end up requesting teachers to recommend a few 'suitable' local persons for the Council. It is only natural for teachers to *nominate* community members who are least likely to *interfere* in school affairs in any meaningful manner. All Council members are not parents;¹⁵ so some members may not have a direct stake in school improvement. The Council is led by the Head Teachers, who convenes Council meetings, maintains minutes and accounts and interacts with higher authorities on behalf of the Council. Practically, it is the Head Teacher and other official members of the SC who call the shots and the presence of community members on the Council is merely ceremonial. A community member of the Council has no real control on human, physical or fiscal resources in a school. No wonder, then, that these Councils have by and large failed in providing accountability in government schools. For them to become effective levers of control on school affairs, first of all the power relations between the service provider and the client must be turned on its head.

Towards a Decentralised Governance Framework

From the above, it is clear that education managers do not operate in a competitive environment in which their promotion, salary increment and posting are linked to achieving targets set by their clients, viz. households (through their elected representatives). Education providers, particularly at the grassroots level, wield considerably more power than their clients and have a demonstrated capacity to deploy their personal and professional networks to shield them against efforts to hold them accountable. Sufficient legal authority exists at the district level to hold education providers accountable, yet education managers are either unwilling or unable to effectively exercise such authority for improvement in the quality of education. Education managers also have sufficient means to collect information to inform their action. They have an army of MEAs – in addition to the numerous AEOs, DDOEs and DOEs – to inspect schools on their behalf and regularly collect data on selected indicators. Yet, managers have consistently failed in holding education providers accountable for not delivering on their mandate. This failure emanates from the disconnect that exists between the level where authority is exercised and the level where adverse consequences are experienced.

This disconnect is at the heart of the governance problem. The delinquency takes place mostly at the school level – be it a teacher who teaches badly or a school that does not have a functional toilet – and it is the local communities, especially parents, who are the direct sufferers. But these parents have no control on the resources that the state provides ostensibly to be used in their service. This control is exercised in their name by education managers – EDOs, DOEs, DDOEs and AEOs – who are not only far removed from the scene of delinquency but also are members of the same networks as education providers. The choice before the education manager in each such situation is between discharging her responsibility and obliging a family member, a friend, a local influential or a professional network. Not feeling the pinch directly, she is more likely to take a lenient view and let procedural formalities come to the rescue of a delinquent than to do her job and risk losing support in personal and professional networks. Further, the access of education providers to education managers is direct, whereas the access of parents is mediated by local notables. This access is compromised by the relatively weak power position of households *vis a vis* education providers. The relative power imbalance between service providers and clients must be corrected to enhance latter's capacity to hold the former accountable. The long arm of accountability – to borrow a phrase from Pritchett and Pande (2006) – must be shortened.

The following pages contain a proposal for a decentralised governance framework that seeks to make education providers directly accountable to parents at the school level as well as at district and sub-district levels. Following are key features of the proposal:

- strengthen the Punjab Education Assessment System to regularly commission collection of school-level data on learning outcomes
- establish DEAs as statutory bodies to act as dedicated institutional hubs at the district level

- transfer most school management functions (including budget utilisation and teacher assignment) to elected School Councils
- give large middle and high schools the option to become autonomous under a parent-dominated Board of Governors
- give local communities greater role in education management at various levels

Three fundamental principles underpin the proposed framework. First, given the rather limited potential for local resource generation, bulk of the additional investment to increase the number of seats in government schools, to improve infrastructure, to hire additional teachers and to improve teachers' capacity will have to be made available by the provincial government. Second, accountability by end-users being the most effective form of accountability, it is absolutely essential to turn the power relations between education providers and households upside down and make the former directly answerable to the latter. Third, publicly available and widely disseminated information on school-level budgets and learning outcomes will empower local communities to make informed management decisions.

In a decentralised governance framework, the Punjab Government will retain only the policy and high level regulatory functions in respect of government schools and devolve all other functions to district and school levels (see Table 2 below for distribution of functions). The Punjab Education Assessment System will be strengthened so that it has the capacity to collect, compile and disseminate school-wise data on facilities, budgets and learning outcomes.

Table 2: Suggested Distribution of Functions

Provincial Government	District Education Authority	School Council
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • formulation of policy and setting of benchmarks • determination of curriculum and syllabus for various grades • conduct of examinations • conduct of periodic assessment of schools on learning outcomes • development and publication of textbooks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • receive funds from the provincial government and maintain accounts • manage human resource of the Education Department in the district • provide baseline budget to schools • allocate criteria-based budget to schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • receive and utilise baseline and criteria-based budget • raise additional funds • select teachers from the DEA pool and assign them to the school • pay salaries of school staff • maintain accounts

Provincial Government	District Education Authority	School Council
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teachers training • audit • proactive disclosure of school-wise financial, administrative and academic information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enlist qualified teachers in a pool from which individual SCs can select teachers to assign to their respective schools • organise and coordinate professional training of teachers and managers • hold elections to SCs • disseminate data on school performance • conduct school audits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide oversight in school functioning • make all school-level decisions

It is inadvisable that the Government tries to perform these duties through its regular staff; these can be more efficiently and reliably performed by the private sector. A key activity will be to develop and administer standardised tests to assess students' performance in various subjects. These data will be widely disseminated. The purpose is to help parents in making informed schooling choices, as well as to promote a culture of transparency and accountability. Proactive disclosure of school-wise data on infrastructure and facilities (e.g. furniture), budgetary allocations, enrolment, teacher profiles, examination results, performance on learning outcomes, etc. will win accolades for the high performing schools and put the laggards under spotlight. The next step will be the development of an index on which schools in each district can be ranked. The same index can also be used to rank districts.

District Education Authorities – Justification and Structure

Establishment of DEAs as dedicated institutional hubs for education governance at the district level has been on the agenda for quite some time now. For the first time, the need for establishing DEAs was officially acknowledged in the 1969-70 New Education Policy of the Government of Pakistan (Aly 2007), which proposed the DEAs to be autonomous organisations with specific responsibility to manage primary and secondary schools in their area of jurisdiction. Establishment of DEAs was also mentioned as a specific policy action in the National Education Policy of 1998 (ibid). The 2001 local government system ignored this policy advice and rather relied on District Governments for governing educational institutions. PLGO placed school and college education firmly under the new District Governments in the expectation that electorate's demand for quality education will translate into enhanced resource allocation for the education sector and for improved management of schools and colleges. Unfortunately, this did not happen.

One of the notable failures of the new LG system was not to assign priority to education in resource allocation, in policy formulation and in providing oversight. Several commentaries on the 2001 local government system (e.g. Ajmal and Bari 2005; ICG 2004; Mohmand and Cheema 2007; Shahrukh Rafi Khan 2007) have

noted that much of the development effort during 2002-09 was concentrated in infrastructure projects, rather than social sectors. Hence, while one can see construction/improvement of roads and bridges almost everywhere in the province during the decade, investment in education (and other social sectors, such as health) remained comparatively small (Institute of Public Policy 2009). It is suspected that the growing tendency of the relatively better off people in rural and urban areas of Punjab to look to the private sector as the preferred education provider for their children created the objective conditions that produced such lopsided resource allocation. The political and social elite among the local communities having opted out of the system, there was not enough pressure on elected officials at grassroots or district levels from their electoral constituencies to allocate additional resources for government schools and/or to improve governance therein.

Further, the 2001 local governance framework's vision of effective accountability of teachers and education managers by elected officials at the district level was inherently flawed, as education providers were by and large more powerful and better networked than the communities they were providing services to. Consequently, they were able to put greater pressure on elected district officials (the Nazim and the Council) than was possible for school communities.

The establishment of DEAs comprising institutional representation from key stakeholders and transfer of school management functions to elected SCs promises a solution to both these problems. The fundamental assumption here is that education being too important a service to be clubbed together with other social services at the district level requires a dedicated institutional hub in the district. It is important to allocate specific resources to DEAs for effectively carrying out their functions to save education from competing with other district level services in resource allocation.

The DEA will function within the overall framework of the PLGO 2001. It is important that DEAs comprise people who have a direct stake in improvement of public sector education at the grassroots level. One way to ensure this is to develop a mechanism which allows parents of current children to play a leading role in policy formulation and implementation in the DEA. Automatic inclusion in the DEA of SC chairpersons of top performing schools can be a mechanism for the same. Inclusion of district-level elected and non-elected officials (e.g. Nazim, DCO and EDO) will ensure the support of the District Government. The DEA will have its own secretariat and staff to carry out meetings and other basic activities. Other than this, the DEA will use the existing education staff in the district to carry out its supervisory functions. Services of education managers and providers (i.e. the EDO et al. and their staff; teaching and non-teaching staff in various schools) will be transferred to the DEA under terms and conditions that presently govern their services. It should be emphasised that the whole point of establishing DEAs across the province is to provide for client-led oversight of education providers *without* incurring additional costs and enlarging district bureaucracy.

In the new dispensation, the provincial government will transfer funds directly to the respective DEA under the inter-district fund distribution formula agreed in the Punjab Finance Commission. DEAs will use these funds to pay staff salaries, procure materials, improve infrastructure, build staff capacity, run awareness campaigns, conduct surveys, etc. District Governments will also allocate additional resources from their regular budget for construction of new schools and other purposes that they seek to support. Each DEA will provide a baseline budget to each government school in the district. This baseline will be set separately for primary, middle and high schools each year, but the same budget will be provided to all schools in the category. Beyond this baseline, each school will compete for resources on criteria set by the DEA. Although it is really for the individual DEAs to decide the criteria for allocation of additional funds, some suggested indicators are enrolment, location, performance, etc. Both baseline and additional budget will be transferred to the SC account, which shall be responsible for their efficient utilisation. These funds will be utilised in accordance with applicable financial rules. Accounts will be maintained and audited every year as per the usual government practice.

The existing teaching and non-teaching staff in the district will be at the disposal of the respective DEA. In addition, each DEA will enlist applicants who meet the recruitment criteria for teaching and non-teaching staff as set by the Punjab Government. It will be possible for one candidate to enlist in more districts than one. The DEA will maintain a register containing necessary information on each eligible applicant. This and the existing teaching and non-teaching staff will comprise the pool from which individual SCs will select teachers for assignment to their schools.¹⁶ There will be no minimum or maximum limits prescribed for the total strength of the pool, but the DEAs will make efforts to have at least 20% more people (new plus existing) in the pool than there are total available vacancies in the district.¹⁷ Enlistment with the DEA does not confer any right to appointment or emolument whatsoever; a staff member will be paid directly by the SC for the period that she has been assigned a teaching or non-teaching responsibility in the school. There will be no payment to the new staff for the period spent in the DEA pool. The existing staff, however, will be paid by the DEA for the period they are not on an assignment with an SC.

It should be clarified that this system of assignment-based payments applies *only* to new recruits. No matter how much one would wish to extend the system to the entire work force to make them more responsive to local SCs, this may not be practical, as teachers are civil servants and their emoluments are protected in the existing legal framework. They also have the demonstrated capacity to resist (through violence, if need be) any effort to rationalise their privileges. Therefore, the assignment-based payment system should be restricted for the time being to new recruits, rather than extend it across the board immediately.

School Councils – the Lynchpin of the Decentralised Structure

The governance function at the school level will be performed by elected Councils. The Electoral College for a Council will comprise of all parents (and grandparents) whose children are studying in the school. After every three years, the DEA will organise elections in which parents will elect six from amongst them to sit on the SC for a fixed term of three years. Being parent of a child currently studying in the school is a pre-condition and any SC member whose child is no longer studying in the respective school for any reason whatsoever will lose her membership automatically. The Council will be responsible for the management of the school and will be assisted by the Head Teacher and other teaching and non-teaching staff in discharge of its responsibilities. In discharge of these functions, the SC will be guided by the policy directions issued by the respective DEA and the Punjab Government from time to time.

Within the allocated budget (baseline plus criteria based), SCs will have considerable autonomy to spend according to their priorities. So while an SC may decide to spend its money on improving infrastructure, another may decide to recruit more teachers. If it so decides, a duly constituted SC may requisition from the district pool as many teachers and non-teaching staff as its budget allows and assign them to work in the school through a contract detailing terms of their assignment with the school.¹⁸ These will be additional to the regular teaching and non-teaching staff posted in a school. These contract employees will be paid from the school budget and will continue to perform their functions in the school for as long as they and the SC are willing to do so. The salary of a contract employee will be negotiated between her and the SC, but will not be less than the minimum wage¹⁹ prescribed by the provincial government from time to time.²⁰ It is important that the contract employees are selected by an SC *only* from the district pool, for otherwise the SC may succumb to the tendency of recruiting their own kith and kin from the neighbourhood regardless of their eligibility and/or school needs. If the SC does not have the resources to pay a contract employee or does not want her services for any reason whatsoever, it will relieve her of the assignment and the latter will return to the district pool. The cycle will start again when the candidate is assigned by another SC to perform duties in their school. As for the existing staff members, an SC may requisition their services if it so desires and may relieve them of their responsibilities in a school if it is dissatisfied with their performance. In the latter case, the DEA will place them in the district pool, where they will remain until requisitioned again by an SC.

Currently there are about 40,000 teachers' vacancies in Punjab. This number will increase substantially if the additional requirements to emerge from the benchmarking exercise of the Punjab Government are factored in. This means, each district will have a substantial number of new teachers paid only for the duration they have an assignment with an SC. As the existing cadre of regular civil servants dwindles through natural attrition, the number of Council-assigned teachers will increase gradually.

The new SCs will be fundamentally different from their predecessors in several ways. First, these will comprise of *only* parents. Second, SC members have a representative capacity and are responsible to their electoral college, viz. all parents whose children study in the school. Third, the SCs will select teachers, rather than the other way round. Fourth, these Councils will have substantial resources at their disposal and sufficient autonomy to use them according to local needs. In other words, the new Council will be a confident group of people, who have a direct stake in school improvement and who have intimate knowledge of whatever happens in the school. *Ipsa facto* in dealing with delinquency on part of an official, their approach will be fundamentally different from that of an education manager, who is usually far removed from the scene geographically and socially. She may look the other way to retain her position in a professional or personal network. The SC members, on the other hand, are confronted with a more complex challenge. Their choices are: suffering the consequences of the delinquency and losing favour within important networks. Each such occasion will test their ability to balance their personal interests with the educational interests of their children. It will be expecting too much from members of the Council to always prefer the latter over the former, but the likelihood of this being the case is substantially larger than if the decision were to be made by a can't-care-less education manager.

This decentralised framework should be extended to *all* primary schools in the first place, and should be extended to middle and high schools only gradually. This will not only help in learning lessons from practical implementation but will also allow time to negotiate any possible opposition from teachers' associations. As for middle and high schools, they should be given the option to become autonomous under Boards of Governors, which will comprise of representative of parents and the District Government. Getting autonomy can be incentivised through increased budgetary allocation from the district government.

A key question here is how teachers' associations will respond to these proposals. In all likelihood they will oppose these proposals because some of their privileges are adversely affected. Education providers (and most managers) are already part of the district cadre, so being placed under the citizen-led DEA should not be a problem. But the proposed arrangement puts elected SCs in the driving seat at the school level and gives them absolute authority over resource allocation and human resource management. Further, an SC may surrender the services of an unwanted staff member to the DEA. Losing power and control at the school level will be swallowed with difficulty. Therefore, a gradual implementation of the proposal has been suggested, starting from primary schools (where only a proportion of the total staff in the district is posted).²¹

Conclusion

This paper has discussed that Punjab faces a Herculean challenge in the education sector. The challenge involves increasing the proportion of children in schools from 68% to close to 100% and addressing the learning deficiencies of children enrolled

in government schools. The situation warrants a coherent and comprehensive strategy addressing the issue in all its complexity. At the heart of the issue lie the challenges of increasing investment in government schools and making education providers accountable to their clients, i.e. households whose children are still enrolled in a nearby government school. These challenges are inter-related. It is absolutely important for the public sector to substantially increase its investment in provision of education to improve school facilities and provide extra teachers. Good infrastructure and facilities have an enabling role in providing quality education and a certain level of basic facilities is required to achieve the learning outcomes that are the ultimate objective of schooling. Similarly, it is important to have dedicated teachers who attend the school regularly and teach responsibly with a good understanding of their responsibilities and functions. Government teachers have consistently produced unsatisfactory learning outcomes primarily reflecting poor teaching effort, which in turn can be attributed to the weak accountability framework in which they operate. Teachers are subject to oversight only by their bureaucratic and/or political bosses. Given the unionisation of teaching cadres and the active socio-political role played by the teacher at the local level, it is virtually impossible to hold government teachers accountable for their consistent failure in achieving learning outcomes produced by their peers in the private sector in similar settings at a much lower cost. The challenge, therefore, is to improve the accountability framework for teachers and education managers in the public sector.

The paper proposes a new decentralised governance framework to improve public sector provision of school education in the province. In the new governance framework, DEAs will be dedicated institutional hubs to promote education in districts. School management will in most measure be allocated to School Councils, who exercise control over budgets, facilities and human resource. It is proposed that the new framework be applied initially to primary schools only and that middle/high schools be incentivised to become autonomous under their own citizen-led Boards of Governors. This highly decentralised structure promises to turn the existing power relation between education providers and households upside down and to make the former directly answerable to the latter. This may be a key step for Punjab to provide quality education to its children.

Notes

¹ Punjab (estimated population 94.4 million) had 59,685 government and approximately 47,000 private schools in 2011 (Punjab Bureau of Statistics 2011).

² Section 25 A of the Constitution of Pakistan requires the state to provide free and compulsory education to all children of 5-16 years.

³ One toilet in the school is reserved for teachers. If this happens to be the only one available, students have to do without a toilet.

⁴ These include: running errands; collecting data and submitting these in the district office; court appearances; conducting examination; and assisting other government departments in national events, such as census, polio vaccination and elections. Teachers are paid a small compensation for conducting examinations and for their participation in national campaigns, but most other duties are uncompensated and a completely unnecessary claim on their time.

⁵ Sometimes it is argued that the older among us and our elders studied in worse conditions in schools that did not have electricity or furniture or toilets; so if they could do without these facilities, why place an excessive emphasis on them now? This view is flawed on several counts. First, data are not available to establish that learning outcomes were better in those years and it will be unfair to presume that these actually were so. Second, relying on worse examples is hardly of any analytical or practical value. Third, the world has move on and, like in other fields of life, one must expect and demand better services and standards in education. Looking backwards to justify inaction is a recipe for disaster.

⁶ 1 US\$ = Rs. 90.4 in December 2009.

⁷ OECD's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a program that tests students' learning outcomes across several countries on standardized measures.

⁸ The tenure of the last elected District Governments expired in 2010. Since then, elections have not been held and District Governments are led by officials appointed by the provincial government.

⁹ A union council comprises a group of 3-4 villages. Several government departments (education including) have their officials at the union council level. 3-4 union councils are grouped together to form a Markaz.

¹⁰ In 2008, the median district had 1,694 primary schools, 193 middle schools and 108 high schools.

¹¹ Tehsil is a sub-district administrative unit. A typical Punjab district will have 3-4 tehsils.

¹² Primary school teachers are usually in BPS 9 and subject specialists are recruited directly in BPS 17. DOEs are in BPS 17 and 18 and the EDOs are in BPS 19. The DCO is mostly a BPS 19 officer in Punjab.

¹³ According to the Pakistan Education Task Force (2010), an average rural family spends between 13-20% of the household income on education of its children.

¹⁴ Also see Clarke and Jyotsna (2006) for a discussion on bonding, bridging and linking social capital in the context of education provision in Rajasthan.

¹⁵ In a study of 21 districts in Punjab, GTZ (2010) found that between 31-49% members of SCs were parents of children currently enrolled in the school.

¹⁶ This proposal is similar to the one presented by Pritchett and Pande (2006) in concept but markedly different in detail. It advocates establishment of a pool of teachers (comprising existing and new teachers), which individual SCs can draw upon on need basis. It also proposes teachers to be paid directly by the SC from the budget allocated by the DEA. The new teachers will be paid *only* for the period of their assignment with an SC.

¹⁷ These additional persons will serve two purposes. First, this will give SCs options to choose from. Second, the DEA will have additional staff that can be readily deployed to perform non-educational government duties, such as census, elections, special campaigns, etc. without disturbing normal teaching activities in schools.

¹⁸ This effectively does away with the notion of posts allocated to school by education managers in their discretion. In the SC controlled dispensation, the Council will determine how many teachers it can afford, which in turn will be a function of school enrolment and performance.

¹⁹ The current minimum wage is Rs. 8,000 per month.

²⁰ Several studies (e.g. World Bank 2006) examine successful experiments where communities recruited local teachers at a fraction of what regular teachers were paid. This enabled them to provide additional teachers in their schools with relatively small cost increases. These practices are unethical, as these are based on exploitation of poor households (especially females) who have limited employment options and, therefore, have a weak bargaining position.

²¹ Figures will vary from district to district, but on average, primary school teachers are about 52% of the total number of teachers in Pakistan.

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