

GOVERNANCE OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION: AN ANALYTICAL VIEW

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ABSTRACT--*The issue of education, and making it accessible to the public, has been one of the major concerns of Pakistan since decades. It is a problem which has garnered quite a lot of attention over the years, both at home and abroad. Education at the elementary level requires special attention because this is the most critical stage of an individual's entire academic trajectory, and has important implications for the country as well. The Punjab government has recently launched many new schemes in order to increase enrollment rates and to provide this basic facility to the vast millions deprived of it. The method chosen for this purpose has been public-private partnerships and privatization, with the help of millions of dollars in aid from international donor agencies. This paper argues that these projects initiated by the Punjab government are based on neo-liberal policies which challenge the spirit of public service and create further inconsistencies in the society. Specifically, the implementation of new managerialism in local governance has meant that the right for education for all is seriously undermined, and has further eroded the belief in the state as the provider of basic necessities. The paper then argues that these concerns require policy re-examinations and changes in order to reverse the damage incurred through these reforms.*

Keywords-- *elementary education, privatization, public-private partnerships, neo-liberalism, new managerialism, local governance*

I. INTRODUCTION

Pakistan's education system suffers from an extensive crisis; a crisis which is further exacerbated by certain policy failures (Naviwala, 2016). This fate seems to have ailed the education system since time immemorial, however, it can be argued that certain policy implementations, in the guise of making the system more efficient, have increased the severity of the problem.

Primary education is the defining period in an individual's life, and carries within it the responsibility of being the cornerstone of a country's economic, social and cultural development. Therefore, the society's responsibility towards it increases tenfold. Unfortunately, the elementary education system in Punjab, Pakistan has suffered a similar fate of inattention and policy failure. The recent aggressive privatization of primary schools, mostly in rural Punjab, serves to highlight the case. The modes of public-private partnerships and privatization itself have been extensively used in schools in order to improve the condition of primary education.

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The schemes of public-private partnerships (PPP) and privatization popularly began to be implemented in 2016, with the announcement by the Punjab government to privatize 5000 public schools. The plan is to privatize schools to private NGO's as well as private individuals (Khan, 2017). The motive for implementing this widespread privatization has been described as the enhancement of management and administration of schools as well as improved service delivery.

This neo-liberalist model for education systems has its roots in a deeper, policy based movement of reforming the public sector. This movement has been labelled as the new public management (NPM), where the focus has been to reduce centralized authority, to clearly differentiate between purchaser and provider roles and to eliminate lifetime employment provided by the state (Polidano, 1998). Privatization and deregulation serve as the two most common methods for achieving these purposes.

This paper attempts to point out that this privatization and PPP scheme of elementary schools is in vein with a deeper, ideological agenda. The NPM ideology is a foreign, enforced policy program enforced due to several political and societal failures. The main reason for this remains the crippling dependence on World Bank and IMF loan programs, an issue in which a host of developing countries are entangled in. The massive development aid provided by these IFI's to developing countries has carried political conditions which some regard as a 'broader, deep seated neoliberal agenda seeking to remake the institutions and practices of nation states' (Desai & Imrie, 1998). The reduction of the role of the state for the provision of basic necessities such as education and employment would highlight and intensify the existing crisis. The imposition of these reforms fueled by neo-liberal agendas would therefore result in a further loss of social cohesion and economic mobility (Irfan, Rasli, Sami, & Liaquat, 2017).

This paper, therefore, presents this argument in the ensuing sections; the first section would define the momentum of privatization and public-private partnerships in the education system in Punjab, the second section would define these reforms in relation with the NPM ideology, and the third and final sections would evaluate and analyze the consequences of these policy changes with respect to Pakistan's existing economic and social structures.

II. BACKGROUND TO THE ISSUE

The globalization process which has gained such rapid ground in the recent decades, can be said to have a massive contribution towards the application of neo-liberal policies around the world. The situation of Pakistan is no different; in this context then, it becomes easier to trace the designs of our education policies. The case of Pakistan's education policy making becomes clear when we examine the degree of global control which has influenced our decisions. Subsequent development in this regard has only weakened our national powers, while handing over more control to these foreign bodies (Saeed, Zulfiqar, Ata, & Rathore, 2015). These global powers in turn propagated two important components of neo-liberal policies which construed heavy involvement from the private sector: privatization and PPPs.

It may be said that the seeds for the privatization and PPP movement were sowed in 1991, with the establishment of the Punjab Education Foundation. The PEF was formed as an autonomous body in 1991 through the Act of the Punjab Assembly. The purpose of its creation was to promote private and public responses towards

education. The not so subtle intention behind this proclamation was to help and involve private investors build new schools for the public. Since its inception, this autonomous body has used a demand-driven approach towards solving the matter of delivering education to the public, and has since then privatized thousands of schools.

This market based approach, where it is believed that competition is the key to ensure quality has drawn widespread support from international agencies, namely the World Bank and Department for International Development (DFID), UK. These agencies provided funds separately for Punjab's education policy, headed by the then Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif. With the help of funding from these agencies, Punjab became one of the largest recipients of aid for its education system (Naviwala, 2016). In 2010, some of this aid was channeled into creating the Punjab Educational Endowment Fund, created with an endowment fund of Rs.4 billion. This foundation was created on DFID's model of 'deliverology', where service delivery units, in this case public schools, were to mirror standards of private sector efficiency (Carrasco & Gunter, 2019). The functions of PEEF have been defined as providing scholarships to deserving students, which would then create the human capital needed for Pakistan's development.

It is clear that this strong funding and clearly defined policy objectives propelled the education system outcomes and its service delivery. The 'deliverology model' was enforced enthusiastically in Punjab, notably through performance audits at the remaining public schools in the province. The pressure for increased efficiency in performance led to forced audits in Punjab schools, which proved highly unpopular with the agencies and offices working on Punjab's educational system. The approach led by CM Shahbaz for this purpose was highly autocratic and tyrannical, which ultimately backfired for the educational system. This hyper managerial style of Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif was further fueled by the donor agencies pressure for impossible and high achieving targets as presented by foreign 'development' experts (Azad, 2016).

These pressures in turn lead towards bureaucratic failures on an already overburdened system, thus resulting in unreliable and falsified documents related to these audits. This blind perusal of efficiency therefore paid little attention towards effective reforms and important ramifications towards the issue. This privatization agenda and managerial style of 'performance audits' is testimony of the fact that reforms were pushed through without little attention to efficiency, and were little more than 'pumped up steroidal strategies' (Carrasco & Gunter, 2019).

This is not to say that Punjab has not spent enough on its education system; on the contrary, its spending is generous as compared to its resources. Punjab's spending on education equaled almost \$2.99 billion in 2016, an amount which is double the number since 2010 with the redistribution of power from the center in the form of the 18th Amendment. This amendment also included the devolution of social sector ministries including Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, thus making education a fundamental responsibility of local governments. The Punjab government then significantly increased the budgetary allocations for students for education in the last few years; in 2015-2016, a budget of Rs. 287 billion was provisioned for public education, representing an increase of 85% over the past six years, while on average, Punjab spends Rs. 16,689 per student, with development spending equaling Rs. 1,174 per student (Sial, 2015).

While the education spending remains high, the delivery of service remains poor. World Bank and USAID reports on Punjab's performance point out the ineffectiveness of this spending; thus presenting new targets, and newer challenges to overcome. The viable options which are presented remain decentralization, deregulation,

devolution, public-private partnerships and privatizations (Farah & Rizvi, 2007). Thus, institutes such as PEF and PEEF have increasingly focused towards these policy objectives for the purpose of reform.

III. MECHANISMS OF REFORM

The preceding discussion leads towards defining the finer details of these reforms, and towards elaborating the momentums of change have driven the focus of these reforms towards change in donor support and new initiatives such as privatization.

Since the early 90's, the model of public-private partnerships (PPP) began to be implemented in public schools. In this model, a variety of 'arrangements' became apparent; in some instances the government retained control of finances and expenditures and handed over the management to private parties, and in other instances the finances were provided by the private partners while the government retained control of curricula and academic calendar. These strategies have labelled the following objectives as key drivers: increasing efficiency, generating resources and 'and improving the governance and quality of social service delivery, particularly for the poor' (Farah & Rizvi, 2007).

The PPP model is defined as an agreement where the government seeks to engage with the private sector in order to reduce the gap between the service delivery differences between the public and the private sector. Therefore, in order to secure PPPs, governments in developing and transitioning nations try to attract the private sector by offering them generous financial incentives, e.g. subsidies and payments for investments (Kakabadse, 2017). The PPP model of heavy subsidization is being relentlessly pursued by the governments of Punjab and Sindh, along with international donor support. The PPPs in Punjab are almost entirely administered by PEF, with World Bank providing a helping hand through a series of loans to the provincial government totaling almost \$1.7 billion till 2018, spread over a time period of ten years (Afridi, 2018).

PEF's model for public-private partnerships of schools encompasses these four categories:

- I. Voucher program where students are provided tuition-replacement vouchers to be spent in low-fee private schools
- II. Programs which provide per-student stipends to existing low-fee private schools
- III. Programs which funds the establishment of private schools in rural or under observed areas
- IV. Programs which includes public school turnover which entails the transfer of management of these schools to private entrepreneurs and civil society members.

The goals for education policy have been set to include Education For All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDG). The National Education Policy plan 2017 has also adopted the UN's plan for Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) for its education sector, where help from the private sector is enlisted as a major policy imperative. According to these directives, 'Public-private partnerships is seen as critical to reaching the goals of access and quality at all levels of education creating possibilities for both voice and choice and improved service delivery' (MinistryofEducation, 2003). The idea of PPPs was further influenced by international development institutions such as the World Bank, USAID, and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), with their policy recommendations framing the basic structure of PPPs in Pakistan, whereby popularizing the market model of education reform.

The most popular model of public-private partnerships used by PEF has been the 'low fees private schools' (LFPS) model. LFPS regulated under the PPP model is a form of arrangement where these schools are financed and regulated by the government, and may or may not charge fees from students. However, the model may also include variations on terms of the provision of education, financing and regulation (Srivastava, 2016). The popularity of the model has in turn led towards LFPS catering to an increased number of lower-middle and low-income households, with the number of LFPS being an estimated 70,000 till 2018. This popularity proved to such that it prompted the Punjab government to announce in 2016, more support for these schools, along with increased funding from World Bank. The government has also announced that no new public schools would be built in the province, rather all efforts would be directed towards fostering and subsidizing LFPS. In return, the strategic benefits from PPPs are listed as follows (Kakabadse, 2017):

- I. To minimize risks in investments in education
- II. To gain the maximum amount of efficiency, expertise, knowledge, skills and flexibility from the private partner
- III. To achieve the same level of quality in public service as delivered from the private sector
- IV. To achieve long-term budgetary sustainability.

The objectives outlined in the National Action Plan have been somewhat met in part due to the frenzied application of the PPP model in Punjab. World Bank report on Punjab's education policy points out that the PPP initiatives have increased enrollment rates and the percentages of children passing school. The World Bank report also posits that the new schools working under the PPP model meet the required Quality Assurance Tests (QAT). The key performance indicators as measured by the World Bank indicate that Foundation assisted schools and schools operating under the model of PPP has expanded to include 29 districts in Punjab, while 54000 more schools have received grants and subsidies to improve performance (Bank, 2012).

The QAT evaluation systems preferred by the World Bank has resulted in increased pressurization from PEF officials and other bureaucrats, and has led to new challenges for schools working under PEF partnerships. This new environment of 'fear', which masquerades under quality enhancement has become a significant new challenge for public schools.

All of these reforms, though arguably useful or not, contain in them a deeper, broader ideological agenda. Neo-liberal reforms have been imposed, both overtly and covertly, in mostly all developing countries since the 1990s. The next section describes in more detail the theoretical and ideological basis for these reforms.

IV. THE MECHANISMS OF CHANGE AND NPM

NPM policies derive out of a pro-market neoliberal ideology. The term 'neoliberalism' itself has a variety of various meanings but the following definition would suffice to be used as a construct for this paper:

'Neoliberalism' broadly means the agenda of economic and social transformation under the sign of the free market that has come to dominate global politics in the last quarter century. It also means the institutional arrangements to implement this project that have been installed, step by step, in every society under neoliberal control (Connell, 2010, pp. 22,23).

The major influence of public sector reforms in developed and developing countries is thus influenced by the neo-liberal agenda of the new public management ideology. In a nutshell, the NPM ideology may be explained as a set of beliefs which favor the pro-market and anti-state neoliberal ideals, the utilitarian principles of public choice theory, and strategic economic policies such as privatization, deregulation, and liberalization (Maesschalck, 2004). The characteristics of this ideology is that public sector organizations should focus on customer management, decentralization, competition, public services contracted out to the private sector, increased user charges, and that the market forces of demand and supply should determine the affordability and availability of state services to the public (Gruening, 2001).

After the implementation of NPM in developed countries and the pressures of international donor agencies such as World Bank and IMF, developing countries were forced to conform their public administration systems along the lines of NPM. Most notably, the popularity of these policies has been in part due to the adoption of free-market economics and neo-liberal frameworks as the ideal modes of production in developed countries after the 1970s. As part of this shift, the concept of the welfare state was rendered inefficient, the state model of goods and service delivery was forsaken, and the private sector was championed as the 'efficient' and fair administrator of goods and services. Over the last two decades the world economy has undergone massive changes, due to the widespread adoption of NPM directives in both developing and developed countries, which have occurred in the form of privatization, globalization and deregulation. These processes had not only affected the government's strategies but also their governance of public bodies. Many of these changes have been undertaken in order to facilitate the growth of the domestic market at home and abroad (Haque, 2004).

The distinguishing features of the implementation of the NPM regime have some of the following characteristics:

- I. The vast advocacy of privatization schemes and PPPs for the provision of even the most basic of necessities,
- II. The development of action plans where the focus is to address the styles of governments and governance, and which rejects outright the old traditional model of the welfare style of public administration (Hood, 1991).

The origins of NPM lie in several new institutional economics theories; broadly these can be said to include public choice theory, transaction cost theory and principal agent theory. All of these theories predominate with the scientific management and instrumental reason backed logic. The main focus of NPM reforms is therefore the reform of intra-organizational processes and management, and it stresses the need for economy and efficiency in all types of service and goods delivery (Hood, 1991). The evidence of donor support for NPM reforms in developing countries becomes more evident when we consider the fact that all major international funding bodies, including the World Bank, IMF, the United Nations Development Program etc., have unanimously advocated the principles of reinventing governance in the form of free market economics, and have subsequently introduced reforms which include performance related targets. These performance based targets and development plans have all been imported from Western capitalist nations with advanced economies and strong democratic traditions (Haque & Mudacumura, 2006).

The influence of NPM in Punjab's education policy becomes evident when we reconsider the policy directives approved by this pro-market school of thought. Most particularly, the massive amount of funding provided by World Bank and DFID is proof of this intention. The dependency created by these international bodies makes the

host country vulnerable to ‘suggestion’ for improvement in existing governance structures. And in some cases, it is demanded that these countries follow free market principles in order to be eligible for aid. Conditions for this aid, usually in billions of dollars, also mean that subsidies are discouraged, and governments are forced to privatize and raise tax rates in order to fund further loan payments. The host country’s dependency on this aid ensures that these conditions are usually met, and so the structural changes in their markets and governance structures (Dasgupta, 1997). It has been further observed that these IFI’s have been particularly keen to prescribe these pro-market reforms to nations which are significantly in debt to these agencies.

This dependence on aid has been the fate of Pakistan as well, and our dependency on these programs in turn defines, rather dictates, the policy framework our government will devise. After loan acceptance and agreement, the host country formally signs the Policy Framework Paper, which enlists the conditional ties the loan amount is subject to. This conditionality usually entails pro-market reforms, and a commitment to the free-market economics as preferred and, prescribed by, Western capitalist nations. If the government concerned already has incorporated market friendly mindset, the conditions imposed on them are usually not so severe (Dasgupta, 1997).

The educational system in Punjab has been subject to a similar fate. The World Bank has played an instrumental role in promoting the private sector in Pakistan’s education reform since the 1990s, and its support for PPPs in has grown stronger over time. World Bank funding for the Punjab education project is result and performance based, where the targets are strategically pre-defined. The favor of PPP for service delivery in education is another evidence of the pro-market agenda and NPM reformation. In the context of Punjab, the World Bank has generally viewed private sector involvement as a very positive direction for the future of education in the province. Future plans towards the education sector include reducing the role of local government such that efficient and quality delivery from the private sector is ensured (Bank, 2016).

Although the performance based systems in education reforms may indeed lead towards some form of betterment in a hopeless situation, it must be noted that reforms such as privatization, deregulation, divestment etc., which are prescribed by foreign bodies, would result in a loss of sovereign power of the state. This is particularly true of Pakistan, where policy dictates have all but eroded the sovereign authority of our governance system. Implementation of policy without reference to context is contradictory for enhanced performance, and lack of understanding of local needs would only intensify the incongruence. There is much evidence to suggest that these policy imperatives have not been inspired by local governance needs; had it been otherwise we might have been able to identify significant improvements in our local education systems. Economic imbalance is also likely to get wider, and self-reliance would be ever more difficult to achieve. This is in part of the fact that market forces demolish state authority over production and supply, while liberalization and privatization result in downsizing and loss of investments. The wheel then grinds onwards and foreign aid and global markets remain the only viable options for the state.

V. ANALYSIS

The discussion above leads naturally towards evaluating the consequences of these action in terms of Pakistan’s education system, the goals which we need to accomplish through our education output and how might we shape our policy programs in face of this foreign pressure.

In order to understand the full implications of this policy, we need to understand if the PPP implementation in public schools in Punjab has led towards favorable outcomes. According to World Bank reports on the Punjab Education Project, the effectiveness of the projects is limited due to substantial political and governance risks. The risk ratings assigned to various categories in this report are replicated here for further elaboration:

Table 1: Summary of Risks

Risk Category	Rating
1. Political and Governance	Substantial
2. Macroeconomic	Substantial
3. Sector Strategies and Policies	Moderate
4. Technical Design of Project	Moderate
5. Institutional Capacity for Implementation and Sustainability	Moderate
6. Fiduciary	Moderate
7. Environmental and Social	Low
8. Stakeholders	Moderate
9. Other: Security	Substantial
Overall	Moderate

Note. From “World Bank (2012). Pakistan: Increasing Access and Quality through Education Reforms in Punjab”, p.17.

The above summary of risks is proof of the fact that the current governance system is still viewed as inadequate by the World Bank and needs further ‘adjustments’. These risk categories would drive future performance targets, which would have to be achieved in order to secure the next round of funding. Thus, the race towards fulfilling targets, where quality would not be an important concern, and where there are likely to be greater incidences of fraud and corruption. Further evidence indicates that the use of Quality Assurance Tests, a standard set by the World Bank and bilateral donors, is not being met by PEF schools working under PPP programs. Besides, the performance tied incentives has led towards newer criteria for inclusion and exclusion, where only high achieving students are preferred, and those who cannot afford schooling are again left excluded (Afridi, 2018). This again

serves to prove that PPPs have no claim on creating equity nor equality, and that where market forces are allowed to intervene in the matters of basic rights, the 'right for education for all' becomes little more than a rhetoric.

The involvement of the private initiative, and private sector goals, would naturally be in conflict with public sector objectives. It is widely agreed that the objective of universality in the provision of services towards the public becomes replaced with the intent of providing services and goods to only those who can afford to pay. Thus, cost effectiveness and value for money becomes a serious concern in PPP schools. It was evidenced that the stipend per child paid by PEF was inadequate to provide for all the basic necessities at schools, which creates further compromises in quality. Private sector standards for quality and basic needs does not equate with the public sector's definition for quality, thus creating further concessions in quality rather than enhancing it (Afridi, 2018). This drawback is due to a fundamental difference in public and private objectives and opinions, where again neither equality nor equity can be observed.

Concern for controlling costs would also mean downsizings in schools and contract based employments, thus endangering those who look up to the public sector for the safety of their jobs. When this will be the case, where teachers' rights would not be protected, it would be highly impracticable to assume that children's rights are protected and secured. In addition to this, when IFI's dictate terms for teacher recruitment and training, then school management would naturally seek to retain only those professionals who fulfill this evaluation criterion. An important responsibility towards the Punjab government as defined by World Bank includes 'notify revised teacher recruitment policy, prepare teacher recruitment plans based on school-specific needs and undertake teacher recruitment according to approved plans' (Bank, 2016). We can well imagine what the resulting outcomes would be; thus giving us another reason to believe that a policy of aggressive downsizing would be observed in order to ensure 'quality'. It is a fundamental right of people to believe in the state for the protection of their jobs and livelihood; the loss of this right cannot be counted as a victory in any case.

The use of the voucher program model in PEF schools also underlines a strong ideological background. The voucher programs minimize the role of state as the provider of the service, while fostering the competition through the entrance of the private sector. In addition, opening up the market or 'freeing' the market also assumes that the market is naturally virtuous in itself so there is little need to regulate it. On the contrary, the involvement of the private sector in the provision of basic services, and privatization, has only resulted in market failures. One major market failure from this voucher system is that it did not bring more choice to the underprivileged nor did competition bring improved quality to the education sector (Malin, Hardy, & Lubienski, 2019).

Finally, it must be observed that these pro-market reforms have not only occurred in the education sector but in a variety of other public sector domains. Policy reforms of a similar nature have occurred in major public institutes, including hospitals, higher education bodies, airline, steel mills etc. A common feature among these reforms has been the award of autonomy in the shape of deregulation and governance changes, and the withdrawal of subsidies and grants such that these entities are then required to generate their own funds. As such then, the consequences of these reforms had to be borne by the public, which had to face increased user charges and the loss of permanent jobs, thus adding burdens to an already overstrained public (Saeed, 2013).

VI. CONCLUSION

The implications of privatization and PPPs in public schoolings are severe and requires major policy reforms; the right of basic education cannot be disposed off to the private sector nor can it be expected that the market would act virtuously when allocating its resources. Furthermore, the private sector would only provide its services in areas or regions where its operations would be profitable. This eliminates the possibility of private schools opening in rural or unobserved areas, and the cost of creating this incentive would lead towards further loan burdens on local governments. The nature of our governance system, one that of a colonial mindset and imperial attitudes, further constrains the development of policy where public welfare is the main goal. This mindset owes to our history as a fragmented nation and years of servitude to colonists, thus making our institutions, be it judiciary, the bureaucracy, the legal system or local governance, incapable of acting for the better of the wider society (Saeed, Ch, Ahmed, & Ata, 2013).

This dilemma of the state shrugging off its responsibility should become a major public concern; the vast majority of the population of Punjab cannot afford expensive private education. The future of the nation's children's education should not be subject to ruthless directives of demand and supply. NPM objectives of efficiency in public service ultimately harm the spirit of state provision of goods and services. PPP schemes and the channeling of funds to the private sector, so devised after NPM objectives, only creates further imbalances, rather than creating concrete and valuable changes.

Recommendations for improvements in public sector education include innovations in teaching methods and the establishment of a universal schooling system, at least at the elementary level. The government should dictate curriculum for schools which must be imposed in private schools as well, this is to ensure that an equal quality of education at the elementary level is being provided in both private and public schools. The government should also be made responsible for publishing and distributing this curriculum material at all schools in the province. The primary focus of all future policy should be towards eliminating all difference between private and public schools; there may also be collaborations between the two on methods to improve service delivery in public schools, which may have a more beneficial impact than a partnership.

Finally, we must be fundamentally concerned with the morality of our actions. It is neither ethical nor justifiable to hand over the issue of basic rights to the private sector. We must design policies which protect an already weak and challenged public, and which do not expose them to the merciless greed of the corporate sector. The system which neo-liberal policy advocates will keep on providing exceptions to the rich, and will further deteriorate the existing power equations of this society (Saeed, 2013). These sort of mindless developments must be questioned, where the beneficiaries are few, and not the public at large. The well-being of future generations depends upon this realization.

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