

Emerging Trends in Decentralization and People's Participation in the Educational Governance

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Abstract

The major concern of education policy reforms has always been to make the delivery of educational programmes more effective and community need based. Since schools are the ultimate delivery points in the overall educational management, administration of school education in India has undergone unprecedented changes. The direction of policy reforms in management of elementary education indicated enormous efforts towards the changes that have taken place from centralized control of education to decentralized participatory management of the local people. The decentralization of administration encourages people to participate in planning and decision-making process. The present paper brings into light that enormous efforts have been made in the past to empower people and to decentralize educational administration at district, block and village levels. Keeping in view the emerging issues and challenges of educational administration, the study attempts to analyse the current and emerging trends in the decentralization and people's participation in the educational governance in different states of the country. The researcher has also made an effort to study the developmental course of community participation in educational governance in India.

Keywords: Decentralization; People's Participation; Elementary Education & Educational Governance

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I. INTRODUCTION

School education system in India has expanded at a phenomenal rate during the post- independence period. The number of institutions has increased tremendously in the last few decades. There has been a considerable boost in the number of students and teachers in the educational system. The educational system has become complex due to the various governments' initiative to bring about qualitative and quantitative improvement in the system. Supervising, monitoring and controlling the complex educational system by a centralized structure was not an easy task. Due to the unprecedented expansion of school infrastructure across the country, a large number of initiatives are being taken to improve the governance of the education system at the national, state, district and sub-district level. Thus, to cope up, reformation of educational management was needed to shift from highly centralized, standardized and command-driven forms of management to more decentralized and participatory decision-making at lower levels.

Hanson (1998) has defined decentralisation as the transfer of decision-making authority, responsibility and task from higher to lower organizational levels or between organizations. According to **Bray (1984)** decentralization is the process in which subordinate levels of a hierarchy are authorized by a higher body to take decisions about the use of the organization's resources. Thus, from the definitions it can be interpreted that transfer is being initiated by higher authorities to the lower bodies.

Decentralisation of authority means conscious effort to bring dispersal of decision-making power to the lower levels of the organization. In decentralization, certain planning powers are reserved at the top level. All the responsibilities of school management are devolved to the local bodies in decentralization of school governance. It is believed that effective school management is only possible through wider involvement and participation of the community. When people are entrusted with some power or given the decision-making power, the people at the bottom get empowered leading to effective management of a system entrusted with them. This increased capacity of decision making at the local level has been expected to improve the educational delivery system and its quality directly by increasing the amount of input and its quality in the schooling. Since decentralization of educational administration promotes people to participate in the planning and decision-making process, continuous efforts have been made in the past to empower people and to decentralize educational administration at district, block and village levels. It is in this context that the initiatives towards

decentralization and people's participation in the educational governance in terms of policy reforms and programme practices at different levels became significant.

Thus, in order to suggest ways of implementing policies of education through decentralization of school management, the researcher has attempted to analyse the decentralization policies and practices from various angles. In this research paper an attempt has been made to analyse the current and emerging trends in the decentralization and people's participation in the educational governance in terms of policy reforms and programme practices at central and state levels with the following objectives:

Objectives

1. To trace the developmental course of community participation in educational governance in India.
2. To analyse the current and emerging trends in the decentralization and people's participation in the educational governance in terms of policy reforms and programme practices at state levels.

Developmental Course of Community Participation in Educational Governance in India

Contemporary discourse on education management in all countries assert for shifting the educational governance from central to local levels. The participation of the community members in the educational arena was negligible in the ancient period. During the Vedic era education was almost teacher centred in India. The ancient Rishies played the key role in whom to teach, what to teach, and who to teach. The other influential components of the then society had almost little involvement in deciding the policy of education.

The involvement of local bodies (Panchayati Raj Institutions and Municipalities) in the management of education in India can be traced as early as the second half of the 19th century as a consequence of Woods Despatch (1854) that directed that the maintenance of schools to be done from the local tax levied. Thereafter several subsequent developments took place in favour of local self-government, including the historical resolution of Lord Ripon. The real benchmarking of the government policy on decentralization can, however be attributed to Lord Ripon, who in his famous resolution on local self-government on May 18, 1882, recognized both the considerations of local government in administrative efficiency and political education. The Royal Commission on Decentralization (1907) under the chairmanship of C.E.H. Hobhouse recognized the importance of Panchayats at the village level. The commission recommended that "it is most desirable, alike in the interests of decentralization and in order to associate the people with the local tasks of administration, that an attempt should be made to constitute and develop village panchayats for the administration of local village affairs".

The Britishers at that time were not concerned with decentralized democracy but were aiming for colonial objectives. The Montagu Chelmsford Reforms and afterwards the Government of India Act (1919) accelerated the process of transfer of power to local bodies. The Hartog Committee (1929) was against decentralization. It suggested withdrawal of powers already delegated to local authorities because while reviewing the functioning of these bodies, the committee found that there is no positive impact on education management of these bodies.

The post-independence years witnessed an altogether different phenomenon in this concern. With the governmentalization of primary education, schools became totally alienated from the community they served (**Govinda & Diwan, 2003**). However, India continuously strived to accelerate the process of development through active participation of people at the grassroots. Gandhiji considered the community as a part of every school said that the community's engagement in terms of owning and managing the schools needs to be focused and promoted. The need for decentralization of management to attract community involvement at the grassroots level was first of all recommended by B.G. Kher Committee (1953). It recommended involvement of all types of local bodies to promote and manage education in the interest of mass education. Revival of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in the modern period started in 1959 as a consequence to Balwant Rai Mehta Committee Report which suggested the establishment of a three-tier organizational structure of democratic decentralization at village, block and district levels. The Mehta Committee report also recommended that subjects like agriculture, animal husbandry, minor irrigation, handicrafts, primary education and other similar subjects should be transferred to Panchayat Samiti and state government would stop functioning in these areas.

Community participation was also suggested by Kothari Education Commission (1964-66) as an important factor for fulfillment of constitutional directive of article 45 for providing free and compulsory elementary schooling to all the children between 6-14 years. Further, the Bongirwar Committee (1971) regarded education as an instrument of social change and stated that education cannot function in isolation from social forces. Recommendation in favour of democratic decentralization included Ashok Mehta Committee's recommendations on Panchayati Raj in 1977.

A major breakthrough in decentralized educational governance came with the formulation of National Policy on Education, 1986 and Programme of Action. It postulated that "the local committees, through appropriate bodies will be assigned a major role in programmes of school improvement". Thereafter, some states adopted the system of Panchayati Raj in educational management. An added step in this direction was the

introduction of Article 40 of the Constitution which stated that “the State shall take steps to organize village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government”. Panchayats were as a result seen as the units for the decentralization of governance from the inception of the constitution in India. The Constitution thus directed all states to create local self-government bodies under the framework of Panchayati Raj through an electoral process.

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts were historical events in the process of democratic decentralization in India. These amendments strengthened the local administration by devolution of power with the establishment of a three-tier system of Panchayats and municipalities at the village/town, intermediate and district levels in rural and urban areas respectively. These amendments enabled the states to create Panchayati Raj bodies and entrust them with authority and resources. The 73rd Amendment to the Constitution of India not only provided Constitutional mandate to the Panchayats, but also gave it a uniform and formal structure for effective functioning. The Eleventh Schedule to the Act has a list of 29 subjects. The Schedule gave responsibilities of education, including primary and secondary schools, technical training, vocational education, adult education and non-formal education to the Panchayati Raj institutions.

Article 243B of the Constitution stated that, in every state, panchayats shall be constituted at the village, intermediate and district levels in accordance with the provisions of Part IX of the Constitution. Article 243C of Part IX of the Constitution empowers states to make provisions through law for the composition of panchayats. Article 243G of the 11th Schedule recommends the delegation of authority related to education, including primary and secondary schools, technical training and vocational education, adult education and non-formal education and spread of literacy and cultural activities to the Panchayati Raj bodies.

In the opinion of **Kumar (2015)**, community participation was visualized as one of the basic components of all major UEE projects which were initiated in pursuance of NPE 1986 recommendations like Bihar Education Project, U.P. Basic Education Project, DPEP, Lok Jumbish (Rajasthan) etc. Community participation was visualized as one of the basic components of all major UEE projects which were initiated in pursuance of NPE 1986 recommendations like Bihar Education Project, U.P. Basic Education Project, DPEP, Lok Jumbish (Rajasthan) etc. In DPEP, decentralization and community participation have been put into practice on a very large scale. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) was also an elaborate nation-wide programme formulated by the central government to universalize elementary education. It also lays emphasis on community ownership of the school system.

The Central Advisory Board of Education (Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India) formed a Committee in February 1993, to frame guidelines on decentralized management of education on the parameters of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments. The committee recommended the setting up of Village Education Committees (VECs) and delegating them with responsibilities of issues related to education. The principle behind this was that the development of rural areas can be best achieved by entrusting the local people with the responsibility of managing their own affairs.

The District Primary Education Project is a Central government initiative to promote the challenging, holistic planning and management approach to Universalization of Elementary Education. The DPEP adopted the strategy of people's participation in the planning and implementation processes to achieve the vision of UEE. The decentralized, participatory planning processes was emphasized to ensure that the needs and problems of the local area are sufficiently addressed through the project and that local community facilitates participation, achievement and school effectiveness.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan launched in 2001-2002 is a Government of India initiative to achieve Universal Elementary Education. The Abhiyan aims to bridge social, regional and gender gaps with the active participation of the community in the management of schools.

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act) was enacted to achieve the intention of the Article 21A of the Indian Constitution which recognized a fundamental right of all children between the ages of 6 and 14 years to free and compulsory education. The RTE Act is a central legislation on a concurrent subject. It has specifically defined the duties of the appropriate governments and local authorities under Section 8 and 9 respectively. According to the prescribed regulations of the RTE Act, 2009 all government and aided schools should set up a School Management Committee comprising of elected representatives of the local authority, parents of children admitted in the schools and teachers, with 75 per cent members as parents or guardians. The Act also precisely specified the minimum standards all the schools required to maintain with respect to infrastructure and human resources.

Thus, the organization and administration of school education in India has undergone a phenomenal shift over the years due to the several educational policy reforms undertaken in the education system due to decentralization. The direction of administrative reforms in management of school education highlights the process of changes which has moved from centralized command and control of education to decentralized participatory management of the people. Since schools are the ultimate delivery points in the overall education management structure, numerous development programmes like the District Primary Education Programme

(DPEP), the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and the Right to Education Act have given momentum to make the delivery of educational programmes more effective. The participation of community members in school functioning has been institutionalized under the Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009. Under the RTE Act, School Management Committee (SMC) is mandatory to be composed in every government owned/run elementary school in the country. The SMCs are empowered with the responsibility of monitoring school functioning and participate in formulating plan and policies to facilitate successful education.

The Current and Emerging Trends in the Decentralization and People's Participation in the Educational Governance in Terms of Policy Reforms and Programme Practices at State Levels

Decentralization has been justified for political, economic and socio-cultural reasons (Mc Ginn and Welsh, 1999; Govinda and Bandyopadhyay, 2010; Sharma 2000) and seen as a better alternative to the central authority as it was considered to be more responsive and adaptable to local needs. Kullipossa (2004) suggested that productive outcome can be achieved if the responsibilities and powers shared by the central and local governments are clearly defined and if national and local conditions are in place. Mukhopadhyay, Vasavi and Ramkumar (2009) argue that structures to decentralization vary across states and there is a considerable amount of confusion and conflict in the manner in which the Panchayati raj institutions have been devolved by various state governments. After reviewing the situation in different states of the country, Govinda and Diwan have identified different approaches towards establishing a system of local governance and community participation in education. The basic principle is transferring the responsibilities of educational governance to the democratically elected local self- government bodies.

Even though most of the states have adopted the guidelines of the RTE Act, there are wide variations in the decentralization process among various states. The structures to decentralization vary among different states and there is substantial amount of confusion and conflict in the manner in which the Panchayati Raj institutions have been devolved by various state governments. Devolution of powers and transferring the responsibilities of educational governance to the democratically elected local self- government bodies is not even across the country. Within the broad principle of governance by locally elected bodies, the situation in some of the states is mentioned below:

Kerala:

Kerala has become a model state for achieving universal primary education. The much-acclaimed educational progress of the state can be attributed to KSSP (Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad), a people's science movement. It conducts state-wide experiments for upgrading the pedagogical efforts in schools of Kerala with the active participation of the people. KSSP strongly recommended for integrating all moves towards decentralization of educational governance by empowering the Panchayati Raj bodies. The democratic decentralization process underwent a shift after the introduction of Kerala Panchayati Raj Act in 1994. Thereafter in 1996 the 'People's Campaign for Decentralized Planning' was set up in the state which laid the foundation for a significant different pattern of educational governance. For educational governance, the headmasters of the respective schools were made the ex-officio members of the Panchayats and were supposed to report to the Panchayats. The then Left Democratic Government supported this campaign and allocated about 40 percent of the state plan budget to the three-tier Panchayat System to enable a decentralized planning and development process. The State Planning Board gave powers to the Panchayat bodies to draw five-year development plans of the respected responsibilities ushered to them. The People's Planning Campaign together with Kerala Shashtra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP) included the local self-government institutions to revive the quality of educational system of selected areas of the state. The campaign was successful in giving the people their rights and responsibilities for self-governance at local levels. Subsequently, the state government adopted legislations for transferring powers and responsibilities to the Panchayati Raj bodies in the field of education and also among several other social development sectors. The People's planning campaign resulted in local empowerment and qualitative improvement of the educational process due to the various experiments taking place in Kerala. The panchayat development plans done by these local bodies include school improvement planning as an integral component and even allocates a substantial amount of fund for this purpose. Though the process of devolution of powers to the Panchayati Raj bodies in Kerala is not complete, but the allocation of significant part of development funds to these bodies indicate the positive growth in the process of decentralization and community participation.

Madhya Pradesh

The educational governance in Madhya Pradesh is a combination of delegation of authority and devolution of powers. Here all schools have been established and managed at the primary level almost wholly by the state government. Since the Madhya Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 was enacted, the state government has been making persistent efforts to decentralize the management of school education to the local level and to empower the Panchayati Raj bodies. This transformation has been initiated through two sets of processes. On

one side, significant power have been delegated through executive orders of the state department of education to panchayat bodies at different levels i.e., district, block and village levels. Whereas, the state government on the other side is synchronously moving ahead with a legislation to transfer the school education system to the control of the panchayat system. This dual approach is likely to continue till the whole education system comes fully under the legal control of the local governing bodies. For empowering the local governing bodies, village education committees (VECs) have also been established involving the elected panchayat bodies with other community and school representatives. It has become difficult for the Panchayat bodies to monitor the primary education system due to the different types of schools in the state- Formal Primary Schools and Education Guarantee schools. In Formal Primary schools, the supervision and management has been designated to the Gram Panchayats through the Village Education Committee. The school headmaster is made the secretary and the school expenditure is borne through the Village Education Committee. The Education Guarantee Schools are government initiative to improve access to education in the remote areas of the state. The government guarantees opening of schools on community demand. The community takes responsibility of providing space and nominating guruji for the schools. The government ensures resources for transaction of primary education like salary, teacher training, teaching learning materials and contingencies. Both of these schools exhibit decentralized governance, but more community involvement can be experienced in EGS. In M.P the involvement of the Panchayati Raj Institutions is creating a positive environment towards village primary education. Thus, the involvement of local communities in school education is not enough but formation of a committee comprising of parents, school representatives, local elected members and school children is required for bringing quality improvement in elementary education.

Rajasthan

Rajasthan has been slow in executing legal measures to transfer powers related to primary education governance to Panchayati Raj bodies. In 1994, the Rajasthan Panchayati Raj Act was enacted followed by the formation of a three-tier local self-government. Standing Committees for development portfolios like education, economic services, basic services were formed to discuss the plans as well as monitor functioning of development activities at the Panchayat, Samiti as well as Zilla Parishad level. The management of primary education was under the control of Panchayati Raj and Rural Development Ministries. In Rajasthan community participation in primary education has been initiated mainly by two important externally funded projects namely Shiksha Karmi Project and Rajasthan Lok Jumbish. The Shiksha Karmi Project was formed with the intention to improve access to basic education in remote areas of the state. The project has provision for three types of schools- Shiksha Karmi day schools, Prehar Pathshalas and Aangan Pathshalas. The focus areas of the project were to identify the villages where primary schools do not exist or were dysfunctional and making the community aware of a functional school. They also do regular school mapping, micro-planning and school monitoring with the help of NGOs and VECs. In 1992 the Rajasthan Lok Jumbish Project was initiated which was also funded externally. The main aim of the project was to transform the mainstream education system by mobilizing, motivating and energizing the community towards basic education. These initiatives of the NGOs of national repute working in the field of education have attempted to build a system of local governance for primary education from the grassroots level. Rajasthan in the recent years has experienced a significant expansion of schooling facility mainly due to community participation through initiatives like Shiksha Karmi Project, Lok Jumbish Project, DPEP and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. The projects have started shouldering responsibility of educational development on the community. The state government, however, is yet to legitimize these bodies through official recognition.

Bihar

To accomplish the huge task of Universal Elementary Education, the Bihar Education Project Council (BEPC) was initiated in the state in 1991. Achieving this huge goal was not possible without the active involvement of community members. Thus, Bihar Education Project Council (BEP) included the strategy of community involvement for universal access, universal enrolment, universal retention and universal achievement. In pursuance to the 73rd and 74th amendments the Bihar Panchayati Raj Act was formed in 1993 and 29 subjects including subjects including primary and elementary education was transferred to Panchayat bodies. The Bihar government has devolved certain responsibilities to the local elected bodies for monitoring the elementary schools. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory education Act, 2009 also stressed on the involvement of community members like PRI members, parents, teachers and local community members as SMC for school management and supervision. The BEPC has also shown persistent efforts towards community participation by the reorganization of Village Education Committees (VECs) and organizing training of VECs from time to time. The Bihar Vidyalaya Shiksha Samities instead of VECs were formed under Bihar PRI Act, 1993 to overcome the drawbacks of VEC and for decentralized planning and management of elementary education and implementation of SSA at Panchayat and village levels. Bihar Prarambhik Vidyalaya Shiksha

Samiti (Bihar Elementary Education Committee) Act 2011 was formed after the implementation of RTE Act, 2009 for ensuring people's participation in the governance of the elementary schools of the state. The VSS Act 2011 was further amended in 2013 which has a provision for 17-member SMC. According to it, a Vidyalaya Shiksha Samiti comprising of minimum 50% of mothers will be formed for each elementary school controlled and maintained by the state or local authority. After two decades of decentralized school governance, incomplete devolution of powers can be seen in the state. The governance over elementary education has not been completely transferred to the local self-government in the state.

Thus, from the above discussion of some states, it can be inferred that even after a substantial period of Panchayati Raj getting constitutional status and implementation of RTE Act, 2009, elementary education has not been transferred to the local government uniformly in all the states in India. The achievement of the Acts rests on the action taken by the different states of the country. This is because the status of implementation of this Act varies across the states. After so many efforts of decentralization of educational governance, the educational development in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan has been quite unsatisfactory. As discussed above, in Madhya Pradesh, decentralization is limited to delegating administrative power and functions. In Rajasthan, the externally funded projects of NGOs like Lok Jumbish Project and Shiksha Karmi Project, is attempting to decentralize primary education management by building it from below. Kerala is one of the states in India which has transferred powers and responsibilities of elementary education to Panchayats, and the management of elementary school is highly decentralized. The initiatives of the People's Planning Campaign have proved to successfully mobilizing the community members towards educational improvement. Even the state government has given about 40 percent of the state plan budget for various programs meant to be drawn up by the local bodies. In Kerala there is a proper linkage among the school Headmaster, PEC, PTA to monitor management and developmental processes of the schools. In contrast to Kerala, in Bihar the decentralization of school management is still in its developmental stage. The Panchayats in Bihar do not possess the power to generate adequate resources for development in areas lying under their jurisdiction. The present need of the state is complete transfer of elementary education to local self-governments. The collective practices of the different states throw light on the dynamics of empowering the community to manage primary education.

II. CONCLUSION

Decentralization has been emphasized by various national and international agencies because it ensures people's participation and ownership. It overcomes the drawbacks of centralization and bureaucratic mode of functioning and improves the quality of education due to greater community accountability. Educational management system in India is decentralized with the assumption that grassroots level bodies can better understand local priorities, problems and help in finding their solutions. It mobilizes and motivates people to take the responsibility of identifying their own educational needs and enthusiastically participating in school planning and educational management at elementary levels. In this developmental course, the nation as a whole and the states have been taking consistent efforts towards decentralization and also in trying different ways in which decentralization can improve the performance and accountability of local government institutions. Earlier it was a general notion that the schools will transform the society, but today we are anticipating the same society to transform the school.

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