

**School-Based Management:  
Voices from Government Schools of Punjab**  
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**Abstract**

*School-based management (SBM) places decision-making 'closer to the action'. This study focused upon analyzing the voices of government secondary school headteachers and teachers about the implementation of SBM. A total of 48 headteachers and teachers were selected through purposive sampling from two districts of Punjab. A semi-structured interview was developed to collect the data. The data were qualitative and thematic analysis technique was applied. It was found that recent government initiatives are unable to bring the desired results. If schools are given greater autonomy over financial, administrative and resource management, they can become more productive.*

**Keywords:** School-based management, government schools, Punjab

**Background of the Study**

Multiple indicators of school performance show that government schools in Punjab are declining. The educational achievements of the students of government schools are poor (Andrabi, et al., 2007). Parents are unsatisfied with government schools in Punjab (Hussain & Hameed, 2014). The enrolments in government schools are decreasing (GoP, 2015). Though, government schools have better-educated and better-paid staff and more physical facilities (Andrabi et al., 2007) yet they have failed to deliver (Kardar, 2011).

Successive governments of Punjab have taken several initiatives in Punjab but no significant improvement can be traced (GoP, 2013). Changes in the basic structure of the system have become imperative. School-based management (SBM) can be one of such initiative as apart from the advanced counties, many developing countries like Philippines, Sri Lanka, Argentina and Mexico have successfully implemented SBM (Barrera-Osorio et al., 2009).

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### Literature Review

Decisions made closer to the actual product bring higher efficiency (World Bank, 2013). Centralized decision making cannot fulfill the needs of every single unit (Andrabi et al., 2007). SBM entails empowering schools in making decisions regarding human, physical and financial resources of the institution. Decentralization of decision making powers to schools has resulted in enhanced student learning, a better learning environment and more responsive to local needs, greater resource mobilization, and optimum use of financial resources (Barrera-Osorio et al., 2009). SBM was adopted as a reform for improving administrative efficiency. Three major changes in the educational systems i.e. school-based management, focus on learning outcomes, and transformation of schools into knowledgeable society and global economy look inevitable. Many developing nations also have turned towards SBM in response to demands for quality education (Caldwell, 2005).

Though the government has taken some steps to improve the quality and access of education yet the policy of centralized decision making in Punjab regarding government schools continued (World Education Forum, 2013). The benefits of SBM instigated us to conduct a study about implications of SBM in Punjab. This study investigated the voices from government schools of Punjab regarding implementation of SBM. The research questions of the study were:

- i). What kind of autonomy should a government school have under school-based management in Punjab?
- ii). What should be the mechanism of decision making under school-based management in Punjab?

### Conceptual Framework

SBM is far away from a uniform set of strategies. But it has two key dimensions i.e. the degree of authority being devolved and to whom it is devolved (Barrera-Osorio et al., 2009). The degree of authority may be classified into two main categories i.e. financial and administrative. The theoretical framework of this study included these two key indicators—financial and administrative management.

### Research Methodology

An exploratory research approach based on semi-structured interviews was adopted. The population of the study consisted of government school headteachers and teachers. Purposive sampling technique was used to select a sample of 24 headteachers and 24 teachers from two districts of Punjab – Sargodha and Khushab. A semi-structured interview was developed to collect data from the participants. With the informed

consent, the interviews were audio-recorded. The findings are presented on the basis of identified themes and sub-themes.

### **Findings of the Study**

Firstly, the recent initiatives taken by the government and their positive impacts were discussed. Then, after providing a definition of SBM, the respondents were asked whether SBM can be implemented in Punjab or not? An overwhelming majority of the respondents believed that SBM can be implemented.

No positive change is possible till the authority is shifted downwards (HT, 1).

We have to shift towards decentralization sooner or later. All modern management theories require decentralization (T, 7).

Few teachers were circumspect due to favoritism of the headteachers.

SBM should be implemented in Punjab but only after changing mindset of the headteachers (T, 23).

The next question related to identification of powers which should be delegated to schools regarding financial and administrative matters.

#### *Financial Empowerment*

Almost all the headteachers mentioned that financial decisions should be given to schools which will make the spending more efficient.

Complete authority over local purchase will make the schools more responsive to school's needs (HT, 24)

We can save thousands of rupees for the government if we get free hand to purchase from the market (HT, 6).

Repair of building and provision of learning allied material was the next aspect which was recommended by the headteachers.

The majority of responding teachers also favored the devolution of financial powers to schools yet a strict audit was also recommended.

A strict accountability mechanism should be established before giving extraordinary financial powers to schools (T, 19).

Thus the majority of the respondents believed that schools should have complete control over the budget allocated to them.

#### *Administrative Empowerment*

Following findings were made regarding administrative empowerment of schools.

### Hiring and Firing of Staff

Majority of the headteachers were of the view that it will be difficult to delegate hiring/firing authority to schools. But they suggested the increased role of the schools during the recruitment process.

The centralized recruitment policy is not bad. Anyhow the headteacher should be part of selection committee (HT, 17).

On the other hand, some headteachers were of the opinion that hiring and firing of the teachers is one of the main components of SBM and should be introduced in Punjab also.

A member from district administration may be included in the committee but the powers should lie with schools (HT, 9).

Whereas, the majority of the teachers mentioned that schools should not have any authority over selection and dismissal of teaching staff.

I strongly oppose delegation of hiring and firing authority to school. Nepotism will ruin the merit policies (T, 22).

Only a few teachers were in favor of delegating hiring/firing authority to schools or headteachers. Their arguments were based on the hiring/firing authority of the successful private schools.

### Medium of Instruction

Medium of instruction was identified as the next major theme. Majority of the headteachers were in favor of the school-based decisions regarding medium of instruction.

According to the local conditions, the medium of instruction should be decided by the school (HT, 13).

While a few headteachers proposed that selection of medium should be decided at *tehsil* or district level.

Medium of instruction should be decided on district or *tehsil* level because Punjab has diverse ground realities (HT, 7).

Mostly, the responding teachers believed that medium of instruction should be decided at school level.

School is in a better position to decide the medium according to needs of the locality where it is situated (T, 11).

The majority of our respondents were of the opinion that the schools should have powers to decide about the medium of instruction.

### Leaves/Vacations

The headteachers and teachers strongly recommended that all leaves must be approved by the school administration and not by the higher offices.

Punjab has different weather conditions so schools should decide vacations according to the local weather. The department should fix the number of working days (HT, 8).

Majority of the teachers also suggested school-based decisions regarding their leaves. They think that it will simplify the process.

If leaves are sanctioned by schools, the process of getting leaves sanctioned will become easier (T, 15).

Regarding vacations at schools, majority of the teachers suggested school-based decisions. Some of them also mentioned about *tehsil* and district administration.

I think that decisions regarding vacations should be taken by the independent schools. If it is not feasible, then district authorities should make such decisions (T, 3).

Only few teachers expressed that if vacations are decided by school, mismanagement will prevail. Overall, the headteachers and teachers opined that all leaves and vacations should be decided by the schools.

#### Transfers of Staff

The headteachers mentioned rationalization policy and argued that such transfer should be made on the recommendations of the school.

Schools should be taken into confidence before making any transfer on administrative grounds (HT, 14).

Some of the headteachers talked about local and political pressures if school administration is involved in teachers' transfers.

Surely, it will be difficult for the headteachers to resist the local and political pressures (HT, 8).

While majority of the teachers supported the centralized policy of teachers' transfers.

All the administrative transfers should be made by the administrators on the same criteria (HT, 4).

The headteachers and teachers had different arguments to support their perceptions. The headteachers wanted more powers regarding the transfers of the staff while the teachers advocated centralized decisions.

#### *Decision Making Authority*

The headteachers and teachers were further asked, to whom the authority to make the school decisions be devolved? The following three major sub-themes were identified.

### Headteachers

Some of the headteachers were of the opinion that the headteacher should have powers to make all major decisions. They think it more practicable to make one person accountable for school performance.

The more persons you include in decision making, the more complicated will be the accountability (HT, 7).

On the other hand, majority of the teachers disapproved delegating powers out rightly to one person.

The government sector is already suffering due to autocratic leadership. The headteachers will turn into dictators (T, 20).

Few teachers viewed that headteachers should make all the decisions.

### Teachers' Committee

Some of the headteachers and almost half of the teachers were in favor of a teachers' committee. They said that community in major parts of the province is not literate enough to make right decisions for schools.

A committee consisting of teachers and headed by the headteacher should make the decisions (HT, 12).

Implementation of national level policies will be easier if the teachers participate in the decision making (T, 19).

Majority of the teachers wanted their active role in decision making.

### School Management Council/Committee

Very few headteachers and teachers showed their confidence in already existing SMCs as a decision making power in case of SBM.

There is no other option available except SMCs. Any other decision will damage the system (HT, 24).

While some of the respondents recommended a reshaped SMC.

It is also possible to make clusters of four to five schools to be governed by a single committee (HT, 17).

A significant number of respondents wanted inclusion of community.

The respondents also enumerated multiple benefits of implementing SBM in Punjab. Majority of them expressed that if schools are empowered to make decision on significant matters, long delays and cumbersome paperwork will be minimized.

We will be able to respond quickly to the problems. The school quality will rise in no time (HT, 5).

Smart spending of the allocated budget will be possible without any delays and paperwork (HT, 22).

Some other respondents discussed different aspects of potential benefits of SBM like community involvement, sense of ownership among staff and community, justified accountability, etc.

A sense of participation of community will increase which will automatically lead towards a sense of ownership (T, 9).

The respondents also suggested trainings for individuals involved in decision making, selection of headteachers through a strict process, and strict audit and accountability.

### Results and Discussion

Majority of government school headteachers and teachers reflected that no significant improvement has resulted from the recent initiatives. These initiatives mainly targeted the input variables like improved physical facilities at schools but the relationship between physical infrastructure and student academic achievement is still inconclusive.

The respondents believed that performance of government schools in Punjab can be improved through SBM. Complete control on allocated budget and autonomy in local purchase was suggested by the respondents. Decentralization of financial management makes the schools more responsive to local needs. It was found that financial empowerment at school level increased the quality and enrolments at public schools in Colombia.

The study found that headteachers wanted more autonomy in staff management while the teachers suggested lesser control of schools over the jobs of teaching staff. The possible reason of this disparity among opinions may be the leadership style of the government school headteachers. Democratic leadership is missing in government school in Punjab and they are less inclined towards staff participation in decision making. Majority of the respondents recommended school-based decisions regarding selection of medium of instruction while some have opposed this idea. The study also concludes that some other administrative decisions like leaves and transfers of staff, and summer and winter vacations should be decided by schools. The headteachers are in the best position to distinguish between high and low performing teachers (Harris & Sass, 2014), the participants' views can be justified. Furthermore, due to weather and institutional diversity, the respondents were more inclined towards school-based decisions.

Who should be empowered to make school-based decisions? The respondents had mix responses. The headteachers were more inclined towards real powers for headteachers while the teachers wanted their active roles in making decisions. Both of them also talked about the active participation of community. The teachers were reluctant to empower the headteachers alone as headteachers in Punjab are more

people-oriented than the task-oriented. In this situation, teachers think that headteachers' decision will base upon their likings and disliking.

### **Conclusions**

The study concludes that initiatives to improve only input variables are unable to improve the government schools in Punjab. SBM can be one of the initiatives to make schools better. SBM will entail financial and administrative empowerment of schools. The decision making mechanism should include people from schools, community and parents. The respondents agree that implementation of SBM will bring a significant increase in school quality and students' learning.



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