

Impact of Devolution in Education on Students' Achievement at Secondary School Level

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Abstract

Devolution in education from provinces to district changed the crux of power for controlling schools from provincially centralized system to districts in Pakistan. Devolution in education across the globe showed mixed results (though most showed positive results) so far as their impact on students' achievement was concerned. This article has tried to add to the impact studies in this regards. Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinations in Pakistan are conducted by autonomous boards. So SSC results could be the best means of recording students' achievement. The study presented in this article utilized a quantitative approach employing ex-post facto research using empirical data. One Examination Board was randomly selected out of 8 boards in the province Punjab and pre-devolution (1998-2003) and post-devolution (2004-2009) results of all five districts in Examination Board were analyzed. The results of the study showed that devolution in education has no significant impact on students' achievement. There was no improvement in students' achievement. Rather, the students average pass percentage decreased slightly after devolution. Even in some small districts the results were lower than pre- devolution period.

Keywords: decentralization, devolution in education, academic performance, students' achievement, examination board.

Introduction

Educational decentralization is the transfer of authority from the central education ministry in the capital city to either provinces or district governments or local school boards. It usually transfers financial, administrative and academic powers and responsibilities to provincial education departments, district or municipalities or school boards (Cummings and Riddell, 1992; Winkler, 2005). It is a complex process in which policy making, generation and utilization of funds, teachers' professional growth, designing and development of curriculum for schools trickle down to different sublevels of the government. This, in a way, changes parents, students and teachers attitude towards the school. The more an education system is decentralized, the greater is parents, community and teachers interaction increase among themselves where school acts as a focus of axis (Fiske, 1996). The purpose of decentralization in education is to raise learning achievement. The mechanisms for this, in theory, are "increased efficiency and greater local accountability in the supply of education, leading to higher quality schools that are more in line with the population's preferences" (Bray, 1994). Devolution in education has evolved considerably over the past two decades (Anila, 2011). Devolution is the transfer of power from a central government to subnational (e.g., state, regional, or local) authorities. Moreover, the decentralization/centralization debate is one that is consistently present in discussions of governance and management in education (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2011). There is a little research to show whether decentralization has any impact on the achievement of the children (Brown, 1994). There was a significant improvement in the performance of the school with decentralization and the provincial level test outcomes improved by 1.2 standard deviation of its distribution between 1994 and 1998 (Galiani & Schargrotsky 2001).

The results achieved through a national test score in Argentina after decentralization showed improved performance of public schools and found through their research that parents' participation had positive effect on school performances (Eskeland and Filmer, 2001; Galiani & Schargrotsky, 2001). Results from a sample of 6th or 7th grade Argentine students and their school suggest that autonomy and participation raise the students test scores (Eskeland & Filmer, 2007). But, in Brazil school financial autonomy and school boards showed no effect on test performance though there was a positive effect of decentralized direct appointment (Barros & Mandonca 1998). Furthermore, in a research conducted in the year 2005, by Galiani, Gertler & Schargrotsky found that, on average, the performance of students' in standardized Spanish and Mathematics tests improved due to devolution of education to locals but this was mostly in non-poor municipalities in well-managed provinces.

No significant impacts on schools in poorly managed municipalities were observed. There was a sharp decrease in the test scores in schools in poor municipalities located in weakly managed provinces. The results of this study were contrasting to the other studies as it showed that decentralization tend to increase inequality in education outcomes as well as drastically reduced the outcomes of the most disadvantaged.

King and Ozler (2000), in their study of Nicaraguan school decentralization, found that de facto decentralization (measured by the proportion of decisions made locally) increases student achievement; de-jure (so called with no solid intention) status does not have a significant effect. Improvement in teaching learning has not been a primary objective of decentralization initiative. Most of the time the transferring cost from national to regional budget, bringing stability to divided region and addressing demand for local autonomy drive the reform rather than educational consideration per esthete is an expectation that these changes may have some impact on the quality of learning (Naidoo, 2005). The impact of decentralization has been more apparent in the area of governance and organizational structure than in changed classroom practices and improved students achievement.

The empirical analysis on educational decentralization in Egypt suggests that the policy of decentralization has no effect on students' outcomes measurements which were divided into two categories: quantity and quality. The quantity was measured in terms of students' enrolment while quality was measured in terms of students test scores on scholastic achievement exams, repetition rates or dropout rates (Ghods, 2006). Freund & Drori (2003) conducted a study in Tel-Aviv Municipality Israel and came out with the results that devolution helped in improving achievement scores of matriculation students.

Decentralization left positive impacts on Teachers and their performance in the classroom is one of the most critical factors in improving students' learning. Qualified teachers are very important to maintain the standards of education. The aim of education is to provide equal opportunity of Education for all. The Recruitment and deployment strategies ensure a balanced distribution and support of teachers by decentralizing the management of schools. Decentralization could help address some shortcomings in deploying and utilizing teachers, in monitoring and supervision, and other management arrangements (Naidoo, 2003).

Studies have found that test scores in Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA) were higher where schools managed their own budget, recruit and select their own teachers and controls teachers' salaries (USAID, 2006).

Pakistan is a federation composed of four provinces, Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Gilgit Baltistan province. The form of decentralization that has been implemented in Pakistan is devolution as we see that local governments also have autonomous sources of revenue. Ever since the appearance of Devolution plan in 2000 and till its promulgation in the provinces on 14 August 2001, a series of consultation and technical group meetings were held at federal as well as provincial levels to develop a well-designed education structure at provincial as well as at district levels. Many posts were abolished whereas new posts were carved out with clear job descriptions (MSU, 2001). The education department of pre-devolution era was devolved through Punjab Local Government Ordinance 2001 in the Schedule I part A of decentralized offices.

Before the promulgation of 18th Amendment, the organizational setup of education in Pakistan was at three levels.

- Federal level (Ministry of Education, Govt. of Pakistan)
- Provincial level (Department of Education, Govt. of Punjab)
- District level (District level under Department of Education, Govt. of Punjab)

No federal level power from Ministry of Education was devolved to lower level through Devolution Plan 2000. After 2001 districts were responsible for planning, monitoring and evaluation of education systems at district level. Salary and managing teaching and non-teaching staff is in the jurisdiction of district. The districts can generate their own funds in addition to the funds transferred by federal and provincial government. Through Punjab Local government Ordinance 2001, even college education was devolved to district governments along with elementary and secondary but college education was excluded from it. Under the devolution programme the district management and community has been empowered at the grassroots level in planning, management, resource mobilization, utilization, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the education system (PLGO 2001; Zaidi, 2005).

Objectives of the study

The major objective of this research is to see the impact of devolution in education on students' achievement at secondary level

Research Problem

Keeping in view the impact devolution in education has in education globally, the research question may be: “How might devolution in education affect students’ achievement in Pakistan?”

Research Methodology

The research design was ex-post facto and exploratory. The empirical data were collected on large scale statistics of Matric results from Examination Boards.

Sources of the data

The Researcher collected Secondary School Examination results of BISE Lahore from 1998 to 2009.

Sample

In order to compare Secondary School Examination (Matric) results of the students before and after devolution, the Researcher randomly selected one of the board (One of the eight boards in the Punjab where students at secondary level appear in an external examination and each board covers 4 to 5 district). Lahore Board covered five districts i.e. Lahore, Sheikhpura, Kasur, Nankana Sahib and Okara. Gazettes for the years 1998 to 2009 were consulted from the library and computer section of the Lahore Board for the purpose of getting results of the students from government schools.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Though Punjab Local Government Ordinance was promulgated on 14th of August 2001 but local government elections and the local political and administrative establishment became vibrant by the end of 2002. That is why; devolution of education might not have affected education till matriculation examination 2003. The results of the students have been analyzed cumulatively and by districts.

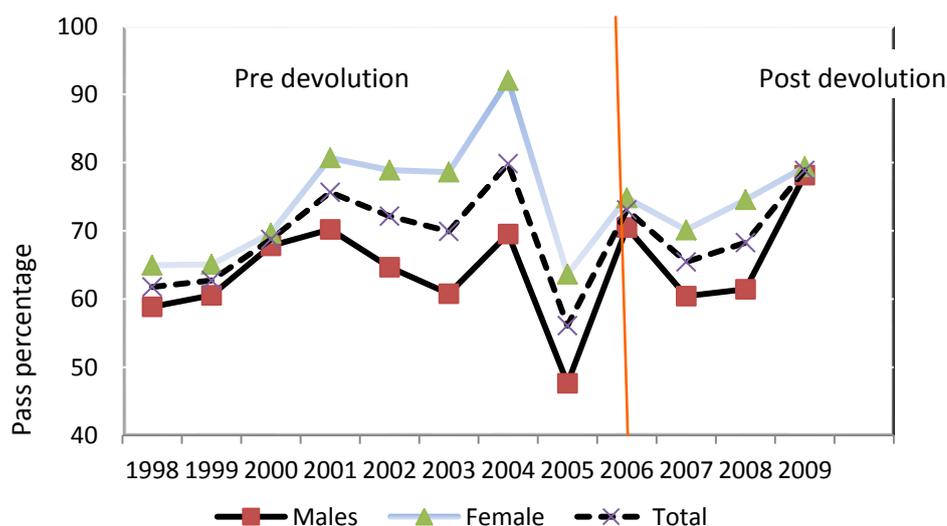
By year results of the students of BISE Lahore. Following table shows by year students’ results of SEC of Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) Lahore and their pass percentage by gender and cumulatively.

Years	Total boys appeared	passed	Pass percentage	Total girls appeared	passed	Pass percentage	Total appeared	Total passed	Pass percentage
1998	19243	12138	63.07	14247	9226	64.75	33490	21364	63.79
1999	20859	13526	64.84	15516	9941	64.06	36375	23467	64.51
2000	22385	15809	70.62	17682	12393	70.08	40067	28202	70.38
2001	24079	17206	71.45	19433	15481	79.66	43512	32687	75.12
2002	25434	16442	64.64	20785	15905	76.52	46219	32347	69.98
2003	28954	17019	58.77	22730	17564	77.27	51684	34583	66.91
Average pre-devolution	23492	15357	65.66	18399	13418	72.02	41891	28775	68.42
2004	37576	27099	72.11	28539	25922	90.83	66115	53021	80.19
2005	34822	15453	44.37	31888	19242	60.34	66710	34695	52.00
2006	27345	18440	67.43	34453	24128	70.03	61798	42568	68.88
2007	36205	19273	53.23	31556	20297	64.32	67761	39570	58.39
2008	36529	21241	58.14	32706	23211	70.96	69235	44452	64.20
2009	33203	24801	74.69	34504	26477	76.73	67707	51278	75.73
Average post-devolution.	34280	21051	61.66	32274	23213	72.20	66554	44264	65.57
Difference in pre and post devolution average numbers of students.	10788	5694		13895	9795		37779	15489	
Percentage increase	46	37		75	73		59	54	

Table 1

By Year Secondary School Certificate Results BISE Lahore

Figure 1 Pass Percentage of Students of SSE during Pre and Post Devolution Period



Above table and graph depict that decentralization in education led to an increase in the number of students appearing and passing the SSE. Overall, the average of students appearing SSE increased in the post devolution period by 59 % which was significantly quite high. Similarly, the percentage of those who passed SSE rose up to 54% after devolution. The pass percentage of the students fluctuated between 60 to 70 percent in the six years before devolution (1998 to 2003). During the years 2001-03, female pass percentage was higher than males and it stood at 76 to 79 percent which was quite high. Overall results in the year 2004 were 80% where as it was 72% for boys and 90% for girls which were quite high. This was due to ‘No fail’ policy of the provincial government. In this year the grading system was introduced. The researcher has to extract those students from the data base of BISE Lahore who had attained above F Grade. The old policy of failure below 33% of the total marks in each subject was once again introduced in the year 2005. The huge decrease in the pass percentage in the year 2005 can be attributed to the teachers and students and teachers slackness prevailed due to no fail policy which ended on public pressure in the beginning of the 2005. The results fluctuated between 50 % to 75 % during the post-devolution years. As some other policies like ‘no fail’ policy was working side by side devolution policy, impact of devolution cannot be assessed. Moreover comparing average pre and post devolution pass percentage revealed no impact of devolution in education on students’ achievement.

Comparison of Pass Percentage of the Students’ of Five Districts

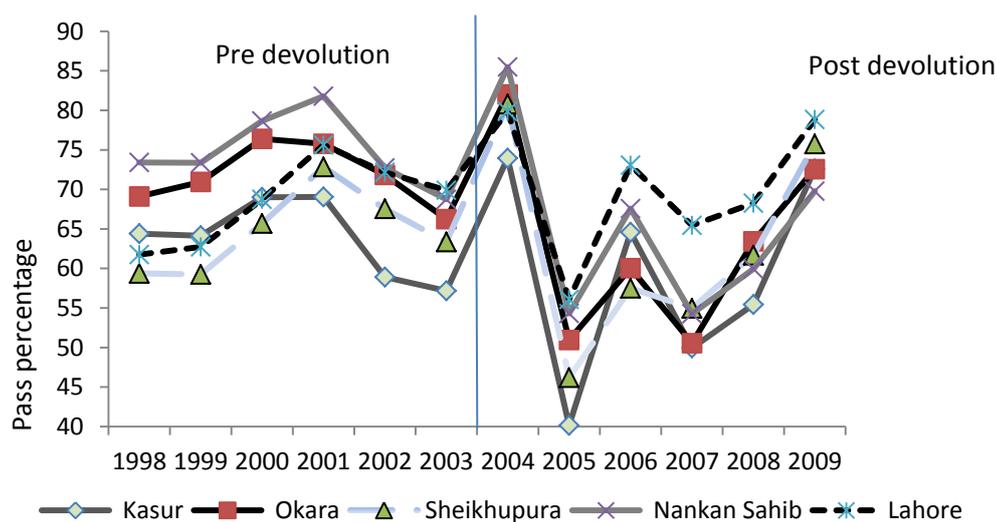
Following table shows a comparison of year wise pass percentage of the students’ matriculation results of five districts under Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) Lahore.

Table 2

Comparison of Pass Percentage of the Students of Five Districts

Years	Pass percentage of Kasur	Pass percentage of Okara	Pass percentage of Sheikhpura	Pass percentage of Nankan Sahib	Pass percentage of Lahore
1998	64.41	69.10	59.37	73.41	61.75
1999	64.14	70.94	59.24	73.36	62.71
2000	69.00	76.39	65.61	78.66	68.74
2001	69.04	75.75	72.83	81.78	75.63
2002	58.90	71.8	67.54	72.71	72.14
2003	57.17	66.23	63.34	68.74	69.89
Average Pre- devolution	64	72	65	75	68
2004	73.95	82.00	80.79	85.48	79.85
2005	40.15	50.95	46.18	54.30	56.09
2006	64.59	60.03	57.49	67.56	73.06
2007	49.93	50.54	54.95	54.26	65.44
2008	55.43	63.42	61.66	59.94	68.26
2009	72.58	72.56	75.74	69.76	78.84
Average Post- devolution	59	63	63	65	70

Figure 2 Pass Percentages of Students of SSE during Pre and Post-Devolution Period



Above table and graph show that the students' results of Nankana Sahib and Okara districts dropped down significantly after devolution in the year 2005. Before devolution, those were on the average above 68 % but like the results in other districts, the percentage rose in 2004 and then dropped down below 55% in the very next year. The results fluctuated till 2007 and then rose significantly in the next two years. Students' results of district Kasur, Sheikhupura and Lahore improved significantly after devolution except in the year 2005 when those dropped down drastically. Average pre and post-devolution results of the five districts dropped slightly.

Findings and Discussion

Decentralization in education led to an increase in the number of students appearing and passing the SSE. Comparing the results of the pre and post-devolution showed no remarkable effect of devolution in education on students' achievement. Rather it dropped down slightly in the post-devolution period. There was no improvement in students' achievement. Rather, the students average pass percentage decreased slightly after devolution. Similar results were observed in all districts except in district Lahore.

Actually many other factors contributed to this result. The policy of 'no fail' might have created slackness among teachers and students. As there was no stability in the policy, the moment it was cancelled by the government in the year 2005, results dropped down significantly. These results were not in agreement with the results of research conducted by Galiani&Schargrodsky 2001, Eskeland&Filmer, 2007 in Argentina where results improved due to decentralization of education to provinces. *The results of many international studies show that the school autonomy or devolution at local level has very little influence on students' performance.* In the countries expressing a significant correlation between school autonomy and student performance, mainly Australia and Canada, the effect disappears when controlling for socio-economic status. This result is not consistent with the suggestion of decentralizing education system as a way to increase student performance. Educational achievement in general cannot be understood in terms of simple relationships between single variables (Lie and Roe 2003). Movement of authority within the educational organization is only one of many factors that might have an influence on students' achievement. Many international researches have shown that the most influential factor on how well student perform is the student home background (Berit, H. (2009). As Trow (1996) says that Education is a course of action pretending to have a measurable outcome, but teachers can influence students

in various forms, and the most important one might not be measurable, he continues. He also includes family background, when pointing to the student's character and life circumstances as factors affecting student performance.

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