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**Decentralization and
People's Participation in
Educational Governance:
A Review of International
Experiences**

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DECENTRALIZATION AND PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATIONAL GOVERNANCE: A REVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES

Mahima Upadhyay and D Rajasekhar¹

Abstract

This paper reviews the studies on decentralization in India and outside with an objective of providing a conceptual understanding of the current and emerging trends in decentralization and people's participation in educational governance. The paper first provides a background on the problem of poor educational outcomes and how decentralization is helpful in addressing these problems. After providing the concept of decentralization, an attempt is made to discuss how decentralization in education is looked at in different countries by addressing the questions such as what is decentralized, why is it done and what results it brings. Finally, an attempt is made to learn lessons by comparing and discussing national and international experiences of decentralization and people's participation in educational governance.

Introduction

Poor educational output is a persistent problem even after concerted and collective efforts made in this direction since the declaration of Millennium Development Goals (MDG). The MDG report, 2014 indicates that although considerable progress has been made in achieving the target of universal primary education, 58 million children in the primary schooling age-group are out of school; high dropout rates remain a big challenge and more than one in every four children entering primary school in a developing region is likely to drop out; and the global number of illiterates remains high despite rising literacy rates. Apart from these quantitative estimations, the quality of education also speaks of the grim state of educational outputs. Weak learning outcomes are a characteristic feature of most of the developing and underdeveloped regions of the world where children learn much less than what the curriculum suggests. Besides this, lack of basic school equipments and supply, poor infrastructure, and the quality and availability of teachers at schools are common concerns shared by the developing and underdeveloped countries. The picture is somewhat identical for secondary education as well. This is disturbing, considering the importance of education for human, social and economic development.

Governance and management related issues are one of the associated factors with such poor educational outputs. Access, accountability, efficiency and equity affect the quantity and quality of education to a great deal. Decentralization is often presented as a promising policy option to overcome these issues and thereby improve the outputs. Moreover, in the case of provision of public services like education, decentralization allows quicker identification of problems and offers more appropriate solutions to them (Machado, 2013). The channels through which decentralization is supposed to offer better results mainly include local knowledge leading to responsiveness; participation giving way to representation, a sense of ownership and accountability; local competitiveness enhancing the chances of provision of better quality of services and the mobilization of resources at the local level. Local governments have the information and incentive to allocate the resources according to the local

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preferences and hence leading to responsiveness. This improves the quality of expenditure and maximizes its impact, leading ultimately to the greater use of services by the people (Faguet and Sanchez, 2009). These processes, theoretically inherent in the concept of decentralization, are discussed by Serrano and Llop (2012, pp.5) –

...[G]overnments decide to initiate decentralization processes around education... seeking improvements in efficiency, improvements in financing and redistribute power to decision making bodies with better knowledge of educational needs. The efficiency goal is argued on the basis that a centralized system is often characterized by having a high bureaucratic burden thus incurring losses of resources and time. By decentralizing decisions, they are accelerated and at the same time, better information is available to run. The efficient allocation of resources by subnational governments allows to adjust better of the allocations in education as opposed to large national budgets that are not always allocated efficiently. On the other hand, the redistribution of decision-making is seen as a way to include the less weighted groups giving better facilities in attending their needs.

Similarly, Fiske (1996, pp. 24) explains how decentralization can result in better educational outputs in terms of improved learning –

[D]ecentralization will improve the quality of teaching and learning by locating decisions closer to the point at which they must be carried out, which will energize teachers and administrators to do a better job and assist teachers to design education programs to meet local needs and to support improvement in learning

Many countries have therefore adopted decentralization as their preferred policy option in various sectors. It was estimated that 80% of the world's countries were experimenting with one or the other form of decentralization since the late 1990s (Manor as quoted by Channa, Anila and Faguet, 2016).

However, recent literature suggests that decentralization may not always lead to an improved level of services. There are other determinants also and the expected outcomes in this regard are local rather than global (Brosio, 2014). This is exemplified by the country cases that portray rather a mixed picture².

This paper analyses the experiences of a few countries with regard to decentralization in the area of education with the objective of providing a conceptual understanding and identifying emerging trends in educational decentralization. The focus here is on what is decentralized, how it is done and what outputs are achieved. The scope of the paper is limited to primary and secondary education only.

² A number of empirical studies on decentralization and education by various scholars, Brosio (2014), Shen, Zhao and Zou (2014), Faguet and Sanchez (2009), Machado (2013), Mahal et al (2000), Yoem, Acedo and Utomo (2002), Yolcu (2011), to name a few, discuss and analyze the experiences of countries with educational decentralization either individually or in comparison to other countries. Looking at these descriptions and analysis, one thing is certain- that educational decentralization has not led to uniform outcomes throughout. In some countries, it has improved the outputs on certain parameters while in others the results have not been so promising.

Decentralization is taken in the sense of transfer of authority, power or functions to the local, not the provincial or regional level, be it the local government or the schools.

Decentralization, Educational Governance and Outputs

The term 'decentralization' has meant different things to different people in different times. The reason for this is probably the multidisciplinary application of the concept which has resulted in attributing various shades of meaning depending on the context in which it is discussed. However, it is commonly understood that decentralization is transfer/ dispersion of authority, powers, functions and resources from the centre towards the periphery, though the content and pattern of this transfer may vary. Based on this content and pattern of transfer, decentralization may take many forms. Deconcentration, delegation, devolution and privatization are the most commonly discussed forms of decentralization that are followed to apply decentralization in practice. Among these forms, deconcentration is considered as the weakest and devolution as the best. However, recent literature indicates that all the forms are complementary to each other. In the arena of education, decentralization has largely been pursued as a part of the overall decentralization strategy. Looking at the experiences of various countries following educational decentralization in the last few decades, it appears that the educational decentralization has corresponded to the forms discussed above. In some countries, it is seen as mere deconcentration of some of the functions, in others administrative powers have been delegated while in some countries the design of decentralization policies corresponds to the devolution. This pursuance of educational decentralization by different countries has generated varied combinations of changes in educational governance and educational outputs. A closer examination reveals some connectivity also, though arbitrary, between the changes in the pattern of governance and resulting outputs due to decentralization. An explanation of a few country experiences may be instrumental to explain this further.

To begin with, **COLOMBIA** is a case of gradual decentralization where decentralization evolved over a long period of some twenty-five years. The whole period could be divided into phases: **Phase one**, beginning in the late 1970s, transferred authority in financial matters increasing the tax collection and revenue generation powers of the municipalities; **phase two**, since the mid 1980s, brought changes in political and administrative matters like popular election of mayors and promotion of local participation in decision making. The 1991 Constitution further deepened the political decentralization through citizens' initiatives, municipal planning councils, open town meetings, the ability to revoke mayoral mandates, referenda, and popular consultations and popular election of the governor and finally, **phase 3** brought a number of laws which entrusted municipalities with greater responsibility for public service provision and social investments (Ceballos and Hoyos, 2004 as quoted by Faguet and Sanchez, 2009). It is notable that the government institutions including the educational system began to decentralize in the 1980s even before the 1991 Constitution came into force which codified and formalized the piecemeal reforms.

Decentralization reforms brought considerable changes in the role of the Ministry of Education that was the central authority for education. The new Constitution circumscribed its role to an advisory and monitoring body. Its functions mainly include the formulation of a national education policy,

regulate and establish criteria and technical qualitative parameters and contribute towards improving access, quality and equity of education. The functions of the ministry enumerated in the official website of the Ministry of Education, Colombia, clearly state that it has to advise departments, municipalities and districts, according to the principle of subsidiary, in terms defined by law. Departments headed by an elected governor and its assembly and municipalities headed by an elected mayor and the municipal councils were made responsible for the governance and administration of basic education. This transfer of authority to the municipality was devolution as the powers and functions once devolved could not be reassumed by the ministry. However, it could intervene to resolve any administrative complexity. Educational planning adopted a 'bottom-up' rather than the traditional 'top-down' approach. However, the local plans should fit into the general parameters established by the ministry and the departments. The mayor has to be the leader for provision and coordination of education in a municipality. Regional leadership has now to come from the secretary of education in each department. For ensuring the participation of various stakeholders, large committees of elected and appointed members were also constituted which must approve the decisions made by mayors or governors. At local level, these committees are to include the poor, the representatives of ethnic groups and the government. Regarding financial resources, a co-financing strategy was adopted and to help municipalities assume responsibilities for education, an increasing share of national sales tax was assigned to local levels (Hanson, 1995). Hence with decentralization of education, the national level has the jurisdiction in designing curricula and general educational guidelines, departments at regional level are responsible for paying and training of teachers and have disciplinary rights against them, and municipalities at the local level are responsible for maintenance and construction of school buildings. Together, departments and municipalities are responsible for the management of education services at pre-primary, primary and secondary levels and all three levels share the responsibility of evaluation of the education system (Falleti, 2005).

Faguet and Sanchez (2009), with the help of the original database from 95% of Colombian municipalities, have demonstrated that decentralization has resulted in improved enrolment rates and this was driven by the contribution from local governments. The investment and expenditure pattern comparison for the central and the local governments clearly indicates the service-oriented priorities of the local government. Whereas infrastructure was the largest investment sector for the central government accounting for 38% of total investment, health and education were the top priority for the local government, accounting for 81% of the local investment budget. This coincided with a 20% increase in total school enrolment, 30% increase going to the public schools. Data suggest that school enrolment rises –

- As expenditure grows
- With the increased share of 'own resources' in total expenditure
- Where central transfers are a large part of total expenditure and hence municipalities face strong incentives set by the centre but at slower rate than in the case of own resource's large share in total expenditure³

³ Municipalities have little discretion on spending of transferred funds and are mandated to spend the bulk of it on education and health.

- With the quality of local governments' human resources
- With the share of students attending private schools indicating complementarity between public and private schools.

It is notable that even with increased expenditure the per capita expenditure term is negative, which indicates that not only the quantity but also the quality of expenditure is important. Interestingly, smaller, poorer communities and communities suffering less unemployment witness a greater increase in enrolment which can be taken as an indication of the responsiveness of the government or can be attributed to the smaller size of the communities that supposedly increases the participation from the community, leading to improved outputs. This analysis of the Colombian case of education decentralization by Faguet and Sanchez (2009) suggests that the increased participation and greater autonomy of the government at local level has helped Colombia to better its educational outputs in terms of enrolling more children in schools.

Corresponding closely to Colombia in its socio-political characteristics, **BOLIVIA** experienced greater responsiveness and greater equity with its decentralization experiment.

Opposite to the gradual evolution in Colombia, decentralization was a sudden change adopted by the government of Bolivia. Till the 1970s, Bolivia was a highly centralized country, characterized by civil conflicts and a socially diverse population with weak national identity. However, the country's failure to achieve a sustained economic growth for decades followed by social unrest-legitimacy crisis and the political motives of the ruling party to regain and sustain its voters for another generation led the government to adopt decentralization – to make the state more efficient and responsive to the population and to regain its legitimacy. Particularly in the education sector, a series of studies and reforms were introduced since the 1970s, though with little success to overcome the education crisis⁴ in Bolivia. However, education was formally decentralized in Bolivia in 1994 itself, with the Popular Participation Law. The law created new municipalities and transferred the schools to them. Municipalities became responsible for school infrastructure, maintenance and supplies. School councils led by parents were established to oversee school development and teachers' attendance and performance. Teachers' hiring and pay, however, remained with the central government. Participatory education councils were also set up at the municipal and department level and also for indigenous groups (Contreras and Simoni, 2003).

Like in Colombia, the decentralization in Bolivia affected the investment pattern, education being a large component of the total investment and expenditure. Funds to municipalities doubled to 20% of all national tax revenue and the allocation was done on a per capita basis. This made the allocation of funds more logical and systematic and brought in more equity. As described above, decentralization of education also increased the participation from the grassroots level in the form of oversight committees which were composed of representatives from local and grassroots groups. The provision of suspension of the popular participation fund, if the committee found them to be misused or stolen, gave a promise of accountability. Faguet and Sanchez (2009), taking the universe of

⁴ The state of education in Bolivia was deplorable prior to the education reforms introduced in 1994. Rural-urban and gender disparity was considerably high for enrolment as well as for learning achievements, high dropout and repetition rates were common and investment in education was low with a major portion of it going to teachers' salary.

municipalities in Bolivia (2008) have shown that decentralization in Bolivia brought a change to the sectoral uses of investment, bringing education to the forefront, and also in its distribution across municipalities, making it more equitable. Due to data constraints, the authors have not tried to evaluate the substantive outcomes in terms of test scores, but they believe that these improvements in the governance processes would lead to improved outcomes. However, the World Bank data suggests that after the reforms, an increase in gross enrolment rates from 94.5% to 108.4% and net enrolment rates from 91% to 97% has been recorded between the early 1990s and 2001; dropout rates reduced from 6.2% to 5.9% between the early 1990s and 2001; repeaters as a percentage of total students enrolled in primary schools decreased from 7.1% to 3.8% between mid-1990s and 2001 and there have been significant equity gains in the reduction of rural-urban gaps. It is difficult to attribute all these changes decisively to decentralization reforms. The increased coverage may be due to economic stability and slow economic growth, the gains in internal efficiency and reduction in rural-urban gaps may be more readily attributed to the reforms (Contriras and Simoni, 2003).

Contrary to the above cases of Colombia and Bolivia, in **BRAZIL**, decentralization does not seem to have brought much improvement in the levels of accountability that has affected the inputs into the education system and outputs in terms of efficiency of service delivery. The 1988 Federal Constitution in Brazil decentralized the responsibilities regarding provision of education. Accordingly, federal government finances the education at tertiary level i.e. in federal universities and federal schools while supplementing and allocating funds to the states and municipalities, the states being responsible for the primary and secondary education and municipalities for the primary and pre-primary education. Hence states and municipalities both share the responsibility of primary education in Brazil. Their respective levels of participation are not uniform, however, and vary from municipality to municipality. Though the states are supposed to transfer all the responsibilities regarding primary education to the municipalities gradually, due to low incentives, variations still remain high (Arretche, 2002 as quoted in Machado, 2013). The authority over curricula, responsibility for teachers' training⁵, responsibility for evaluation of the education system, management of schools, authority of hiring, firing and transfer of teachers and authority over the salaries has been transferred to the states headed by governors and to the municipalities headed by mayors that were earlier shared by federal governments and the states in Brazil (Falleti, 2005). Municipalities and states are to spend 25% of their tax revenue and transfers on their educational system. However, due to lack of any regulations and guidelines regarding expenditure of this earmarked fund, regional disparity increased. To deal with this, a national education bill, FUNDEF⁶ was passed in 1996 that provided for the redistribution of resources collected within the states to municipalities and the state government according to the number of students enrolled (Madeira, 2012) in their respective education systems.

Taking advantage of the fact that municipalities and states co-exist for the provision of primary education, Machado, 2013, through a comparison of state-managed and municipality-managed schools, has demonstrated that municipal schools are no better than the state schools and that in some cases,

⁵ Production of course material for teachers training remains centralized (UNESCO, 2005 as cited by Machado, 2013)

⁶ FUNDEF stands for Fundo para a Manutencao e Desenvolvimento do Ensino Fundamental e Valorizacao do Magisterio.

state-managed schools exceed the municipal schools. Performance of these two types of schools has been measured in terms of the inputs into education and the efficiency of service delivery.

Results show that decentralization alone has not been the determining factor of increased or decreased accountability and thereby improved inputs and higher efficiency outputs in Brazil. Community characteristics have also made their impact. Levels of poverty, inequality, participation, illiteracy and resources at a municipality's disposal have played a decisive role. Results suggest that levels of poverty seem to affect the inputs and outputs of municipal schools more than that of the state schools. In poorer municipalities, municipal schools, in comparison to state schools, have more students per class, more students per teacher, lower educational attainment among teachers, lower schools' facilities and lower test scores but higher retention rates. It does not mean that poverty has not affected state schools. To a lesser extent than the municipal schools, state schools in poorer areas are characterized by lower quality of facilities and lower test scores. In municipalities with higher inequality, state schools seem to perform better on student-teacher ratio, quality of facilities and education of teachers. Inequality, however, does not show any significant association with test scores in state schools and retention as well as test scores in municipal schools. Political participation, proxied by voter turnout in this case, seems to affect municipal and state schools in a similar manner. Higher participation is significantly associated with fewer students per teacher, better educated teachers, improved school quality (in municipal schools only) and higher retention rates. Levels of illiteracy among adults has led to lower provision of inputs and worst outcomes in both the cases, be it municipal or state schools. Adult illiteracy has negatively affected the retention rate and test scores in municipal schools while state schools are not affected by adult illiteracy for the retention rate but it does affect test scores negatively. With higher resources at their disposal, municipalities have performed better as far as educational attainment of teachers and quality of schools is concerned.

Similarly, the case of **TURKEY** suggests the importance of intervening factors in realizing the outcomes of decentralization. Though a highly centralized system characterized Turkish education since the beginning, in line with neo-liberal tradition, the education system started decentralizing since 1990 with the project of Developing National Education. Following this and other legal arrangements, the education system started obtaining a decentralized local structure and parents were offered greater roles and responsibilities in the school administration. However, this has not changed much as far as the actual participation of parents in school administration is concerned. Yolcu (2011) reveals this through seeking the opinions of school administrators working in different socio-economic levels of schools. As far as the necessity of participation is concerned, mixed views have been recorded. Medium and higher socio-economic level school administrators have a general positive attitude and lower socio-economic level schools have a general negative attitude towards the necessity of parents' participation. Problem solving, monitoring of and awareness about the necessities of the schools, sharing the responsibilities for the child as student, legitimacy and ease of implementation, lightening the schools' workload, are some of the reasons which make participation of parents necessary in school administrators' opinion having a positive attitude. In addition, it helps schools to be responsive to the needs and expectations of the students; this is the need of democracy and it is important for the success of students. A negative attitude emanates mainly from the lower academic qualification of parents. School

administrators from lower socio-economic levels are of the view that parents are not academically fit and can give suggestions only in the form of advice and think that their participation should be limited to moral and material support only. The level of participation, accordingly, is recorded to be higher in medium socio-economic level schools, active in higher socio-economic level schools whereas in lower socio-economic level schools, the parents' participation is just sufficient in PTA or class-parent gatherings but not in other boards or commissions. At lower socio-economic levels, parents have no influence on decisions and they act under the influence of school administration, medium socio-economic level schools involve parents in decision making but the parents focus on general things only. Parents exert greater influence on decisions in higher socio-economic level schools. Lack of financial contribution and creating pressure on teachers are the two main difficulties faced with the parents' participation in school administration in Turkey. Hence decentralization of education in Turkey has not led to increased participation uniformly and based on socio-economic levels of the schools; it has resulted in varied levels of participation. How this has affected the educational output is not very clear from the descriptive study of Yolcu, although it suggests that by participating more in school administration in higher socio-economic level schools, parents change the educational quality of these schools in the direction they demand.

If we consider the case of **CHINA**, over devolution of expenditure responsibilities has led to insufficient financing and provision for core public services like education and health and growing inequality across the country owing to the absence of a national common standard and growing regional development disparities (Shen, Zhao and Zou, 2014). Decentralization has been a gradual process in China as far as the fiscal arena is concerned. A highly centralized fiscal management characterizes China till 1978 followed by a contracting system till 1993 and finally tax-sharing from 1994 till present. China, though a unitary country, is highly decentralized in terms of its administrative structure and fiscal arrangements which are vertically divided into five levels, each responsible to the level immediately above it in the vertical structure. Apart from the central level, sub-national governments are organized into four-level hierarchical systems. There are 33 provincial-level units composed of provinces, autonomous regions, metropolitan areas and special districts; sub-provincial level consists of prefectures and municipalities at the prefecture level, counties, autonomous counties and cities at the county level and towns and villages at the bottom level. Governments at the township level serve as the basic administrative unit in the vast countryside whereas village governments, though providing public services, are treated more as community units rather than as the government organs (Shen, Zhao and Zou, 2014). Fiscal arrangements also correspond to the administrative structure and have five levels accordingly.

For the provision of education, local governments are responsible for basic education and financing is diversified with budget allocations constituting just over half of aggregate spending. The central government retains its role of policy maker and planner for overall education. The provinces are responsible for making the overall development plan including inspection, determining operational standards and offering assistance to counties to help them meet recurrent expenditures in education. Cities or districts in large cities implement compulsory education in urban areas and counties are responsible for rural areas. However, the responsibilities of counties and townships are not clearly

defined and practically townships bear most of the burden of financing responsibilities even in poor counties. This has led to a greater demand on local resources and local administrative capacity. The educational expenditure by various levels of government as of 2003 reveal the financial burden at local levels. In 2003, sub-national governments were responsible for more than 90% of budgetary expenditures on education, over 50% had come from the county and township levels. Particularly county governments have contributed more than 40% of the overall government education expenditure. Hence education comes as the single most important social service provided by counties and townships (World Bank, 2002). To reduce the inequality in financing and service provisions, earmarked grants are provided but this is insufficient to fulfil their needs.

The vertical fiscal imbalance has intensified the problem. The centralized revenue and devolved expenditures at each level at the expense of subordinate level has left the lowest levels of government incapable of financing the public services including education and thereby causing a low investment in education. Hence fiscal decentralization has negatively impacted the budgetary education spending as a share of total government spending (Zheng, 2008 as quoted in Wang, Zheng and Zhao, 2011). This is notable since as compared to India, East and South Asia, Latin America, United States and United Kingdom, China has the lowest spending of its GDP on education (Shen, Zhao and Zou, 2014). Further, the horizontal disparity among regions and within regions has led to inadequate spending towards education in poorer regions due to low economic development of these regions as compared to other regions and therefore the low quality of education in these regions. This has severely affected the national goal of universalization of nine years of compulsory education among school-aged children and literacy among adult population below 20 years. It is worthwhile to mention that a majority of such population reside in poorer regions which are not able to provide quality education to their population due to the financial burden. Till 2002, a total of 372 counties were unsuccessful in achieving the national target. Disparity in access-educational attainment (Dahlman, Zeng, and Wang 2008 as quoted in Wang, Zheng and Zhao, 2011) education spending and quality of services is substantial in rural-urban and coastal-inland regions also, urban areas spending 84% more in primary education and 69% more in junior secondary education than the rural areas and coastal areas, and 71% and 75% more than inland areas in the respective fields (Tsang and Ding, 2005 as quoted in Shen, Zhao and Zou, 2014). Therefore, the large gap between expenditure and revenue assignments and weak fiscal transfers have made the decentralized education system inefficient and ineffective in ensuring quality services and have passed the financial burden to the parents and unlike the case of Bolivia, it has not been successful in ensuring equity also.

The Devolution Plan (2000) in **PAKISTAN** devolved the responsibilities from the provincial levels to the district levels and provinces promulgated Local Governance Ordinance in 2001 in their respective provinces to install the new system of integrated local government. The ordinance devolved powers, responsibilities and functions regarding service delivery to the three levels of local government i.e. district, tehsil and union. The responsibility for education and health services is assigned to the districts, whereas the responsibility for municipal services like water- sanitation and urban services are on tehsils. Accordingly, districts are responsible for delivering elementary and secondary education, planning, monitoring and evaluation of education system at district level and salary and management of

teaching and non-teaching staff. However, the determination of teachers' salary, creation and abolition of posts and training of teachers is not devolved and rests with federal government and provincial governments respectively. District education is financed from a district government's own resources, provincial non-earmarked block grants and ad-hoc federal education grants to provinces and districts. Local governments are responsible to citizens for their decisions. The findings of Khan (2013) on opinions and reflections of Executive District Officers suggest that the monitoring of schools has improved through devolution. Schools' monitoring by district monitoring committees, school councils and district education officers has reduced teachers' and head teachers' absenteeism and improved the financial accountability of schools.

In **INDIA**, the decentralization of education took a formal shape in the form of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment in 1992. This provided for the setting up of local bodies (panchayats) uniformly throughout the country⁷, at village, block and district levels (village being the most basic unit) through the democratic process of election and the delineation of their functions and responsibilities. Regarding education, Panchayati Raj institutions were assigned the responsibility of primary and secondary education, technical training and vocational education, adult and non-formal education and libraries⁸. A division of responsibilities regarding education among local bodies at different levels is also recommended in various sections of the Panchayati Raj Act as follows:

- **Gram Sabha** (village council consisting of all the adult residents of the village) will handle the adult education programme in the village.
- **Gram Panchayat** (local self-governing body at the village level including the elected representatives at village level) is given the responsibility of providing education through primary and middle schools, of creating awareness among the people and ensuring the enrolment of all the children in primary schools, and of the construction and maintenance of hostels.
- **Panchayats at block level** are supposed to promote primary and secondary education, construct and maintain school buildings and provide education for working children.
- **Panchayats at district level** have a role in the construction of roads connecting all the schools and colleges in the district, construct and maintain primary and secondary schools and hostels, construct and maintain schools and hostels for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes students, provision for scholarship, free text books, teaching and learning materials for such groups.

Aspects such as planning-management, control-evaluation and adequate financial autonomy regarding revenue and expenditure lie at the core of educational decentralization. It is notable, however that the different states in India, in pursuance of the Act, have adopted different approaches regarding the management and governance of education. For example, in Bihar, the responsibilities of the

⁷ It is worthwhile to mention that panchayats were existing and functioning even before the 73rd Amendment. However, setting up of these panchayats was not a mandate; states were directed, not obliged to set up panchayats at local level. Hence the structure of panchayats was also varying in states. The amendment provided for a uniformed structure of these panchayats to be followed by all the states mandatorily.

⁸ Eleventh Schedule of Constitution enumerates 29 functions to be taken up by the panchayats which also includes the above-mentioned functions regarding education. However, the devolution of these functions is left to the states and there is variation across the states with respect to devolution of these functions.

panchayats regarding education are limited to the construction and management of the schools; Uttar Pradesh clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of local bodies but their implementation status is questionable; Kerala has devolved important functions like supervision of routine school functions including the performance of teaching and non-teaching staff, offering assistance regarding disciplinary action against such staff if needed, monitoring the existence of adequate staff at the beginning of the academic year and the state has also devolved 40% of its budget to panchayats for developmental plans including education which is not the case with many other states; Karnataka has devolved the teacher recruitments to the block level and several other such variations can be seen across the states (Govinda and Bandopadhyay, 2010).

Besides the Act, some government programmes and schemes like the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Education for All), have been instrumental in strengthening the decentralization of education in India. DPEP emphasized the district level perspective and formulation of district level annual work plans while Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan located the planning at the habitation level.

Community involvement and participation has been a professed goal of education decentralization in India since the beginning. It is worthwhile to mention that following the National Education Policy, 1986, almost all the states, through government orders, have established village education committees (VEC) including parents, community members and teachers while some states like Karnataka have established school development and monitoring committees (SDMC) (Govinda and Bandopadhyay, 2010) as a powerful decision-making institution at the school level with an outreach to the parents through the parents' council. Further, the Central Advisory Board of Education, 1993 also recommended the setting up of village education committees at village level and education committee at the block level as part of the panchayat system itself (Mukhopadhyay, Ramkumar and Vasavi, 2009). It is notable that in some states, VECs are also responsible for the mobilization and utilization of funds available from the government and other sources. Under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, VECs are credited with the responsibilities of deciding, in consultation with school authorities, how the funds will be used for the development of the school. Instances of their involvement in monitoring the attendance of teachers and students, volunteer teaching and teaching learning materials preparation have been there (Ramachadran, 2001 as quoted in Govinda and Bandopadhyay, 2010). Similarly, SDMCs are supposed to be engaged in the management of schools, ensuring enrolment of children, supervising student and teachers' attendance, community mobilization and help in ensuring the quality of education.

However, these constitutional, structural and legal arrangements have not led to active participation, increased accountability or improved learning outcomes in most of the cases. The involvement of panchayats has been minimal, with their engagement being mainly in the construction and maintenance of school buildings. The lowest tier of the panchayats has negligible say in educational matters of local schools. Lack of clarity and information awareness about their roles and responsibilities, financial dependence in the absence of adequate revenue generating powers, periodic alterations and functional instability and political cooption have been among the major reasons for the low involvement of panchayats in educational governance (Govinda and Bandopadhyay, 2010; Mukhopadhyay, Ramkumar and Vasavi, 2009). As far as the participation of the community is concerned, this also has

been low and has often been limited to contributions in cash or kind (Govinda and Bandopadhyay, 2010). Even in states like Kerala, VECs and school complexes, the institutional structures for community participation have not taken root and are characterized by lack of acceptance among stakeholders (Mukundan and Bray, 2004 as quoted in Govinda and Bandopadhyay, 2010). The study of Ramachandran (2002) as quoted by Govinda and Bandopadhyay, 2010, suggests "the VECs either do not function or seem to function with mechanical intensity rather than a genuine sense of participation and commitment." It is notable that like in the case of Brazil and Turkey, the importance of intervening factors like poverty, inequality and illiteracy is recognized as determining the level of participation (Mukhopadhyay, Ramkumar and Vasavi, 2009, Govinda and Bandopadhyay, 2010). As Mukhopadhyay, Ramkumar and Vasavi (2009) emphasize:

Although cases of positive contribution and engagement exist even among the most disenfranchised communities, the ability of many marginalized and illiterate communities to be able to contest the form of educational exclusion, dysfunctional schools and errant teachers remains limited. Cultural barriers, such as inability to engage with upper caste and traditional elite, the culture of political and social subordination limit the capacity of these processes and structures. The need to enable women, members of minority and disadvantaged groups to access these structures and become active participants in the process still remains a challenge.

Lower participation causes low accountability of teachers and thereby low results as far as learning outcomes are concerned. Pandey, Goyal and Sundararaman (2008) in their study of three states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka found that teachers may not be accountable because the community does not have the capacity to hold them accountable as parent members of VEC or PTA are not participating in their oversight capacity. The learning outcomes which were found to be low in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh and higher in Karnataka also mirror the lower participation and lower accountability of teachers. Data from Karnataka show that the members of SDMCs have received training on their roles and responsibilities and are aware on this as compared to their counterparts in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. Similarly, the fraction of teachers present and engaged in teaching is higher in Karnataka. Though the other factors such as a child's socio-economic background may be influencing their learning, teachers' engagement in teaching and teachers' attendance in Karnataka is found to be significantly and consistently associated with higher scores. The example of Himachal Pradesh also indicates that with the active involvement of Mother Teacher Associations, the attendance and performance of children has improved. Further, this helps in increasing the participation and enrolment of girls and making the school environment more gender friendly (Govinda and Bandopadhyay, 2010).

Discussion and Conclusion

The country experiences with decentralization in education thus provide current and emerging trends in educational decentralization, particularly in developing countries and reaffirm the mixed outcomes emanating from the implementation of decentralized practices emphasized in the literature.

A close look at these cases suggests that the decentralization reforms in education have been initiated with political motives rather than in pursuance of democratic and participatory ideals. In Colombia and Bolivia, decentralization was the result of internal disturbances which compelled the governments to decentralize its authority for saving itself from a legitimacy crisis and for continued popular support. Countries like China are characterized by an extreme level of expenditure decentralization with little revenue decentralization that indicates the motive of offloading the financial burden of the central government through decentralization reforms in the country, though efficiency arguments are often presented as a rationale. Pressure from the international community has also led countries to decentralize their educational management and governance. Practical political motives and international pressure thus play a relatively more important role on the ground.

Decentralization reforms have constitutional and legal back-up in most of the cases. In some cases, however, they have evolved gradually over a long period of time like in Colombia and India whereas in countries like Bolivia and Pakistan, reforms were suddenly introduced by the government.

The structure of the decentralized education system in these countries is such that different levels of government share authority over different functions regarding the provision of education. In most cases, the authority over curricula design, determination of staff remuneration and of general guidelines to be followed has not been decentralized and remains with the governments at the central level. Governments at the local level have been involved mainly in construction-maintenance functions whereas intermediary levels have been assigned the coordination role and sometimes a role in hiring-firing and training of teachers. Brazil is an exception as it devolved all powers and functions to states and municipalities. In India, states retain their dominance in educational governance and management, though directed to devolve their powers to the local bodies.

Financial dependence characterizes decentralization reforms in most of countries reviewed in this paper. Local governments have limited sources and power for their own revenue generation and they depend on central grants and transfers for undertaking functions devolved to them. The directions from higher levels of the government on expenditure curb the financial autonomy of local governments.

As participation is central to the idea of decentralization, participatory committees and councils are being constituted as a component of decentralization reforms. However, these committees and councils are weak, with limited voice in decision-making or functioning.

An analysis of the outcomes with respect to educational governance and the outputs described above is didactic and has an implication for policy formulation and implementation. As discussed in the paper, decentralization reforms have brought varied outcomes in different cases. In Colombia, Bolivia and Pakistan, decentralization of education has led to greater accountability, participation, responsiveness, autonomy and equity in the process of educational governance and has ensured increased enrolment, improved quality and reduced dropout rates. Brazil, Turkey, China and India do not, however, have a similar experience. A positive association between improved governance and outcomes can be observed. Even in cases where decentralization has not resulted in improved outcomes, better governance in terms of citizen participation was observed. For example, in Turkey, with higher participation, parents in higher socio-economic level schools have been successful in altering the quality of education as per their demand. Similarly, in India, with the active involvement of parent

committees, enrolment improved in Himachal Pradesh and learning outcomes were relatively better in Karnataka.

Although an in-depth analysis of factors influencing outputs through decentralized governance is not available for all the countries, the discussion in the paper offers some indications. The financial dependency of local governments seems to be a major influencing factor. In India, the dependence of local governments on states or the centre makes them paralyzed. In a comparative study of state and municipal schools in Brazil, it was noted that the municipal schools with greater resources at their disposal performed better in teachers' educational attainment and the quality of education. However, China could not ensure the access and quality of education even after financial devolution as limited revenue decentralization left local governments with little resources to deal with their educational expenditure. The cases of Brazil and Turkey suggest that it is important to take note of the surrounding environment and culture. Poverty, inequality and illiteracy influence the processes and therefore outcomes to a considerable extent. These findings correspond closely to the conceptual description of decentralization that suggests that community characteristics, local capacity, training and sensitization of officials concerned and experience with democracy determine the outcomes.

A review of experiences with educational decentralization thus offer policy lessons that may be taken into consideration while formulating and implementing decentralization policies for the education sector:

- Decentralization leads to the improved outcomes through improved governance processes.
- Efficiency and effectiveness in service provision is improved when the service providers, be it the local government or the schools, are held accountable for results (Gershberg, 2005). Accountability is a key mechanism to ensure quantitative and qualitative reforms regarding education.
- Accountability is greatly affected by the participation and awareness levels of the population which in turn is dependent on the distribution of literacy and the community's socio-economic characteristics. Therefore, it may be suggested that educational decentralization policies should be preceded by or concomitant to the policies aiming at ensuring the above.
- Sufficient resources at the disposal of local implementing authorities and financial autonomy are crucial for implementing the reforms.
- A clear statement and division of responsibilities is important to avoid later confusions in implementation.
- Awareness on roles and responsibilities at each level of implementation and in the community is very important to actualize the potential of decentralized education reforms.
- A certain level of central government intervention in terms of setting the common minimum standards and broad guidelines is instrumental in dealing with regional disparity which may increase by localization.

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