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Abstract

This study aims to analyze Gilgit-Baltistan Education Strategy 2015-2030 and its revised strategy and implementation plan issued on September 2023 by the Directorate of Education Gilgit-Baltistan. An objective analysis reveals that none of the promised goals outlined in Education Strategy w.e.f 2015 to 2023 have been achieved at any satisfactory level. Revised Strategy and Implementation Plan w.e.f 2023 to 2030 do not reflect on major causes of failure to achieve previously set targets/goals. The strategy paper entails abstract assumptions, encouraging intervention from private sectors and an idealistic call for financial commitments from provincial and federal government. The findings of the study reveals that the subject strategy fails to chart out clear guidance to acclimatize the available resources and it does not incorporate any pragmatic mechanism to eliminate risk factors indicated against each set of goal and objective. The study underscores the importance of considering judicious utilization of available financial and human resources and revision of departmental regulations and statutory laws to curb undue favours and prevent political interferences in Education department Gilgit-Baltistan.

Keywords: education strategy, private sector, federal and provincial government

1. Introduction

Gilgit-Baltistan Education strategy 2015-2030 and its revised strategy and implementation plan without a doubt carried out with lofty aims and noble objectives. However, literature reviewed and cited in the study do not sufficiently cover important areas such as laws, rules and regulations pertaining to organizational structure, employees job analysis, description and specification. This lack of necessary documents review reflects in poor diagnosis of flaws in organization and development of strategy and implementation plan. It also limits the organizational approach to develop a reform strategy to achieve stated goals and objectives. Moreover, reform and developmental approach is Eurocentric in tone and texture emphasizing idealistic expansion in infrastructure, numerical increase of employees and complex expansion/intervention in various educational areas. Less focus on qualitative aspects: motivation and moral boost up of teacher, social role and self-recognition, normative, ethical, cultural and religious persuasion for education in teacher and learner is altogether missing. As mentioned in review of strategy 2015-2013, statics shows none of set targets have been achieved upto 50% and there is zero percent result in some targets dependent on financial commitments. Let's have a look into three broad goals and 14 objectives elaborating major assumptions and risks indicated in the revised strategy paper containing 57 pages.

2. Improve Education Access and Equity

To achieve major goal-1 "Improve Education Access and Equity" in Gilgit-Baltistan, five objectives are set: 1) Increase access to appropriate early Childhood education program, 2) Increase enrollment and completion rates until matriculation by providing adequate number of functional schools, 3) Ensure education access to children marginalized by gender, poverty, remoteness, disability or other reason, 4) Establish accelerated programs for out of schools children and adults, 5) Provide distance education to increase access and life-long learning.

In order to achieve above objective, this strategy recommends to 1) Establish institutions of Early Child Education across GB, 2) Create conducive environment for early childhood learning, 3) Standardize pre and in-service training of ECE trainers, teachers and facilitators, 4) Establish a uniform student assessment system for ECE, 5) Create local, national and international partnerships to support achieve these objectives.

Risks factors indicated in achieving above objectives are lack of funding for new Early Childhood Education, frequent transfer of teachers and political interference in Education department. These factors; according to strategy paper, can adversely impact planning and implantation of strategy. As per strategy and implementation plan, all five objectives require high financial commitments and steps to increase financial grants from federal government and foreign donors require vigorous campaign on part of civil society, political leadership and officials of education department. However, to avoid risk factor; lack of funds and frequent transfer of teaching staff by political interference, no pragmatic recommendations have been given in strategy paper.

This revised strategy paper containing 57 pages is devoid of current funds utilization manners in educational institutions. There is no single evidence that would elaborate how development and maintenance budget is utilized and to what extent expected outcomes are achieved. This strategy also lacks diagnosis of alarmingly indicated risk factor: political interference. One cannot find the words "political and interference" in any other chapter or conclusion except single mention in risk factor lines in objectives. A strategy; by its definition, must follow the scientific procedure of identifying problem, analyzing it and recommending measures to correct the problem with available means (Murray, 1998). This strategy must have incorporated types, causes and effects of political interference alongwith mentioning a clear cut guideline to avoid this risk in future. It should have indicated organizational strengths in terms of available human resource apart from indicating organizational loopholes that enable politicians and pressure groups to intervene in the department making education manager to acquiesce to their illegal and unjustified demands.

A pragmatic diagnosis of political interventions in Education department can be carried out by categorizing its causes into two broad levels: 1) internal or organizational, 2) external or societal. Organizational causes that allow political forces to manipulate posting and transfer of teachers can be found in Service Regulations (SROs) or departmental policy laws. The SRO 2009 provides the method of appointment, qualification, experience etc of education managers at district, divisional and GB level (S.R.O, 2009). The inherent flaw in this regulation act is that it overlaps teaching and administrative nature jobs. Education management inherently consist two tier services: field or teaching and official or administrative. Teaching cadre roles in management includes school

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management and inspection of teaching and learning processes, research and conduct of examination, review and revision of syllabus and curriculum, teachers training and faculty development. Administrative jobs are related to employee appointment, promotion, posting transfer, disciplinary laws and procedures, finance, audit and accounts, planning and development. SROs introduced and enacted so far amalgamate these two distinct natures of jobs enabling political forces to influence posting and transfer of employees against all management positions from both teaching and administrative cadre. Teaching cadre employees being large in number and organized into association and with help of political party in government manage to hold both administrative and teaching management positions in various offices. Sooner the party loose government, posting transfers in education department take place abruptly. So, one can easily equate this management to a “spoil system” of administration (Britannica, 2024). There are no clear rules and procedures to ascertain seniority and cadre for posting, experience and line of promotion against teaching and administrative positions in management. This gap provides excuses to higher authorities to depute any teacher against any management position without following any standardized posting transfer policy. This practice results into political influence and in past, such practices have been manipulated by political party in government. Managers who are posted against such positions by political forces remain obliged to politicians and they cannot resist to undue demands. In case of refusal, these managers are threatened to be repatriated to schools and often they have been done so. Astonishingly, SRO 2009 provides that an un-trained graduate teacher (TUGT) can be promoted against management position of AEO/ ADI: an amorphous nomenclature, which simultaneously refers to both teaching (field) and administrative cadre (official) positions. Therefrom, the teacher is elevated to a position at district management level. Imagine, a teacher who has served for a certain period of time at school teaching different subjects is posted against an administrative position at any office where Civil Service Laws to be interpreted, disciplinary rules to be applied or developmental schemes to be framed, can this teacher be a best choice, is a question none can certainly answer in affirmative gestures. Since 2008, no direct induction against administrative posts has been carried out; rather, posting of teachers on attachment basis against administrative positions has been a trait in violation of rules and regulations. In spite of the fact that the FPSC has clearly directed to segregate administrative and teaching cadre posts for direct recruitment (RECRUITMENT TO THE POST OF LECTURER (MALE) (BS-17) GOVT COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, EDUCATION DEPARTMENT NORTHERN AREAS GILGIT, 2008) but, so far this instruction has not been followed and resultantly the FPSC rejects requisition for recruitment against administrative positions during the last two decades. This is what the sorry scheme of affairs that enable uncouth politicians to influence and haunt the sacrosanct department of Education. Politically induced postings and transfers are not limited to management positions, but, schools at villages, far-flung areas also suffer from these interventions. Politicians in search of their vote bank favour teachers who want to leave villages for cities to live in. A teacher initially appointed at a village school try to get posted at city in search of civic amities does not feel shy to aggrandize political affiliations and do not care about children of his community at village. Resultantly, schools at villages often get short of teachers and it reflects in poor results. There is need to frame rules for cadre service in management instead of spoil system of management. Posting of teachers also needs to be tenure based instead of union council, or tehsil wise. It will save the department and will make it impenetrable to political whims.

External or societal causes of political interference in posting and transfer of teachers can be found in greater context of political, religious and ethnocentric culture of Pakistan. The only constitutional way to political leaders to influence public organizations is through their Ministers. However, the Minister of Education cannot introduce any policy or law repugnant to civil service rules or departmental policies without taking into confidence the education managers. In fact, education managers are one who briefs the minister about ongoing or to be framed policies, projects and schemes. The factual position of department, its need assessment in policy papers are the instruments which come to debate in the parliament are necessarily initiated through education managers. Hence, credibility and professionalism on part of education administrators can easily avert ill-conceived policies from office of the minister. In recent past, religio-sectarian and ethnic factors have influenced education management and have been a source of stress for education department (Shafa, M. 2011). At present, ruling political parties influence posting/transfer of teachers and administrators to increase their vote bank and to coax the party supporters. However, it depends upon the credentials of education managers to avert such influences and a man of credentials must be a hard nut to crack for such satanic sways.

Apart from above dimensions, political interference in education system can be viewed in form of interventions from non-governmental organizations: particularly, sponsored by the Western countries. These NGOs do have their own political agenda which cannot be ignored altogether. As the education mission is heavily loaded with subjective values and understandings of each nation, their theoretical and normative assumptions cannot be applied as they are in context of Gilgit-Baltistan or Pakistan. Educating new generations on patterns of other nations may yield results incongruent with cultural, social, religious and political aspects of GB society. HEC Best University Teacher Award winner in Social Sciences and Humanities, Dr. Salma Hassan HOD Psychology Department GC University Lahore came up with the conclusion that “we should encourage students not to accept western theories and assumptions as they are, there is need to develop our own theories because Western theories are not applicable to Pakistani culture” (HEC, 2023). Transformation of nation states into corporate unions in the West diminishes role of government in social sector. In our case, state’s primary responsibility is yet to foster the notion of nation and woven the very fabric of the society/nation. Education is basic and primary tool in hands of the state that can integrate multi-composite societies into a single nationhood (Perez, 2017). Privatization in the name of public-private partnership in education sector can be devastating for the state and the nation.

The second risk factor: lack of funds, also needs to be investigated comprehensively comparing and contrasting existing number of students, employees, schools and paraphernalia. A short glance at these numerical reveals that government school class rooms have an idle student-teacher ratio (25-1). Maintenance budget for a financial year is sufficient (minimum one million to maximum two millions for a high school). The fact is that existing strength of resources (men, money and material) never been utilized judiciously. Moreover, public sector organizations in GB solely depend on federal budget and education department can improve fair utilization of available funds through proper financial administration and auditing of accounts. This strategy paper does not refer to audit mechanism, administrative staff capacity and there is no mention how to improve employee’s efficiency in development of

budgeting, proper utilization of funds, auditing and accounting in the department. If proper utilization of available funds is ensured, existing financial capacity can have a great impact.

3. Goal 2: Enhance the Quality and Relevance of Education

To enhance quality and relevance of education, five target objectives are listed. 1) Improve the quality of teaching and learning through teacher training, 2) Enrich the curriculum and strengthening teaching-learning approaches, 3) Improving class room learning through co-effective measures, 4) Improve student assessment, 5) improve the quality, relevance and effectiveness of technical vocational education.

To improve quality of teaching and learning through teacher training, staff development center is recommended where cluster-based mechanism trainings will be given. In-service training and development is to be linked with incentives and career development.

Strategy review results show that the above set targets have been achieved 24% and 19% during the initial phase (2015-2023) of this reforms strategy which is alarming. Improvement of teaching and learning quality is not merely dependent on (pe)dagogy or instruction methods, there are several other factors involving teacher's persuasion and his image building as "being teacher" and his role and position in his society. In-service training and development linked with incentives and career development is purely a materialistic approach propelled by Western corporate sector. Teaching profession in terms of incentives may be less attractive and resultantly careerists may find more incentives in jobs other than teaching. This motivation may not persuade and inculcate spirit of "teaching" in teachers. Hence, dissatisfaction trumps over promised incentives in terms of promotion and salary increase. Teacher training provided erstwhile by private consultancies merely focus on instruction (pedagogy) of a particular text, ECD and assessment system which yields nothing but imbue complex inferiority among government teachers. This strategy paper fails to explicitly outline the important areas of teacher training and motivation. In fact teacher training needs to be developed taking into account social, moral, religious and spiritual considerations of this noble profession.

Development of staff center for teacher training is a good idea but patterns and content of training needs to be indigenized. Western methods and content for teacher training developed in a peculiar cultural context do not fit in context of GB. Therefore, identification of training areas and development of content for such training needs to be given first priority. There is need of assessment by experts who better grasp the socio-cultural realities and are able to develop interface between education mission and social realities of Gilgit-Baltistan.

To enrich the curriculum and strengthening teaching-learning approaches, establishment of center is recommended that will review and enrich curriculum keeping in view national standards and local needs.

Curriculum wing at Directorate of Education is dysfunctional for many years. There is need to depute experts in history, sociology, psychology and philosophy who would better grasp the "context of GB" and reflect on curriculum areas accordingly. The strategy paper recommends formation of a wing to revamp the curriculum. Risks involved in achieving these goals are indicated as resources and financial constraints. However, curriculum wing at Directorate of Education Gilgit Division has already been established many years ago and still there is staff deputed including a senior Headmaster of BS-18 as Deputy Director Curriculum and auxiliary staff. Since devolution of education subject to provinces in 2010, this wing was supposed to contribute in development of curriculum and syllabus text (Shahid, 2010) but no contribution is evident yet. This strategy paper is devoid of contribution of curriculum wing and challenges it faced for the last two decades. Without a contextual analysis of successes and failures of existing wing, indication of risk factors is meaningless and recommendation for a new wing is bewildering. Current human resource in Education Department is capable of improving curriculum and assistance can be sought from faculty members of Karakorum International University.

The next objective to improving class room learning through co-effective measures, provision of safe drinking water, availability of toilets, equip classrooms with teaching learning materials require financial support. Increase in education budget by federal government can ensure these objectives are achieved. Similar is the case with development of student assessment system by Board of Elementary Examination. Special trainings sessions by experts for development of formative and summative assessment system is needed. Moreover, GB Education Strategy paper incorporates a vital element of technical education and vocational training. It recommends a robust system for analyzing emerging market and skill development of youth under TEVT Act 2018. It is foremost necessity of the society that the technical education should be interfaced with emerging markets to increase employability rate among youth. To achieve these objectives, provision of funds needs to be increased utilizing all means including special grants from federal government and sponsoring agencies.

Overall, provision of qualitative and relevant education through available resources is heavily dependent on existing number of educators and their commitment towards teaching profession. There is dire need to train teachers as visionary leaders, *Masihah* and motivators. Teachers who were nominated for in-service training; provided by consultancies like AKDN, exhibit less devotion and could not develop true spirit of teaching. There is evident lack of reformative zeal and moral boost among teachers towards enlightening their new generations and communities. There is dire need to explicate the factors that push the best teachers, principals and headmaster to rust in clerical jobs or to consort politicians. Understanding of societal taboos, cultural, historical and religious impediments is fundamental for development of curriculum, quality and relevance of education. Steps towards realization of education as a vision and mission among educators will increase dedication, self-esteem and satisfaction.

4. Goal 3: Improve Education Governance and Management

To improve education governance four objectives are set: 1) strengthen informed and effective policy and decision making, 2) establish mechanism for effective human resource management and development, 3) empower and enable educational planning and leadership at local level, 4) establish effective public-private-civil society partnership for quality education.

The strategy paper elaborates governance and management of education department is carried out under Steering Committee chaired by Chief Minister GB and Chief Secretary GB and Education Coordination Committee headed by the Secretary Education GB. For

improvements in governance of education department, Reform and Innovation Unit (ERIU) is recommended alongwith developing Monitoring, evaluation and research under EMIS mechanism. It also recommends development of vigorous appraisal system for employees and establishment of Human Resource Development Unit. For better human resource management, modification of recruitment rules, policies, procedures, job analysis and vigorous performance appraisal system is indicated. However, results in review 2015-2023 are appalling similar to other goals. HRM in non-teaching cadre through reforming service structure, promotion and capacity development is necessary to manage and to best utilize meager financial resources.

Public sector organizations are governed under prescribed laws, rules and regulation which clearly define organizational structure, role and responsibilities of employees, their service structure. This strategy paper does not refer to existing service rules and regulations, organizational hierarchy and job description of teaching and administrative staff. It is astonishing that how these expert consultancies did not bring into debate and missed the service regulation Acts and governance mechanism. As indicated in various risks factors, political interference and financial impediments halts education development, governance is more about safeguarding departments from these challenges. As for as political interference, insufficient funds and lack in teacher training and expertise are concerned, job analysis, segregation of administrative and teaching cadre is necessary. Imagine, a head teacher, principal appointed considering his/her teaching credentials and resultantly award winner as best principal/teacher prefers to leave school for office job in his early career in public sector. What sort of political, organizational, social and normative factors instigate him/her to leave schools and students of his community is a necessary investigation this strategy paper is oblivious of. To my own understanding, political and organizational factors are relevant to service structure defined in SROs. Posting from teaching cadre to administrative cadre service heavily influenced by political parties and administrator cannot resist to undue favours fearing repatriation to schools. Social aspects are mainly due to social taboos, given status and fickle honor ascribed to colonial construct of administration. Lack of moral persuasion as “being teacher” is relevant to one’s world view, revolutionary zeal and missionary zest for reforming own community. This lack in educated youth is also because of colonial mind set and neocolonial educational and cultural imperialism. A holistic approach to “educate the nation” rather than expanding educational infrastructure is necessary for post-colonial societies like ours.

The implementation mechanism at strategic level provides for Education Steering Committee and Education Coordination Committee to oversight GBES. At organizational and operational level, existing organizational structure under DG Education at GB level will assist Education Reform and Innovation Unit (ERIU) (to be established) which will ensure day to day monitoring of the strategy implementation and report progress to Education Coordination committee. Until the time ERIU is fully functional, the Director of Educational Planning at the Directorate of Education will be the focal point for implementation of the strategy. The Educational Planning Directorate and later ERIU will function as a secretariat for facilitating and coordinating with all the relevant directorates, units, components and stakeholders working for successful implementation of the revised GBES.

For successful implantation of revised GBES, consistent support from all stakeholders on the various important aspect of education is necessary. At political level, role of minister for Education in approving projects and financial grants is necessary. At institutional level, high level of commitment and professional competency is required. The organizational structure of ERIU is headed by DG, Director ERIU, Deputy Director EMIS, Monitoring and Evaluation, Curriculum and Deputy Director Public, private and civil society partnership (PPPs).

The next important step is development of Human Resource Development Unit (HRDU) at Directorate. This unit will be responsible for updating existing human resource policies related to recruitment, performance evaluation and promotion of teaching and non-teaching staff. It will also prepare job descriptions, terms and reference, performance indicators and guideline for all regular and temporary staff. It will also establish a human resource information system for maintaining and updating staff information and all records of employees.

The establishment of HRDU is a key factor that will ensure HRM in the institution. Due to non-existence of such unit, services reforms and capacity building of various cadre employees did not take place. Financial benefits, pays and allowance are considered as key factors in job satisfaction. Apart from above, degradation in organizational behavior, formation of employees associations and court cases against department are due to non-maintenance and under development of service carriers. HRDU will ensure all these challenges are addressed.

It contains a huge part on generating funding from various sources including federal government, private and foreigner donors. Details of budget involved from 2013 onwards indicate increase from 683m to 5,170m.

The GBES 2015-2030 recommends structuring the education budget based on the New Accounting Model (NAM) and the Medium Term Development (Budgetary) Framework (MTDBF). The strategy advocates the Education Department to use MTDBF as a tool rather than as a process of cost accumulation. It recommends increasing the non-salary operational budget for educational institutions by rationalizing staff recruitment and focusing on increasing teaching force according to the standardized norms.

The original GBES 2015-2030 estimated a gradual increase of education budget to implement the activities and targets set to ensure quality education in Gilgit Baltistan by 2030. The proposed increase was the allocation of additional Rs. 4,900 to 6,200 million over a 15-year period between 2015 and 2030 to meet the strategy targets. Given the current economic and inflationary situation, this revised GBES estimates the additional allocation to range between Rs. 5,000 million and Rs. 8000 million between 2023 and 2030. This gradual increase is financially viable for which the School Education Department and Directorate will undertake better planning of the salary, operational and development budget based on the targets defined in this updated strategy. Critical assumptions for proposed budgeting include inflation and price escalation, GDP growth rate, capacity gap and active stakeholder participation.

5. Conclusion

The existing structure of Education Department GB needs drastic reforms in all aspects. First of all, vision and mission of education should be clearly elucidated making sure it is adhered to the ideological state apparatus. Secondly, organizational laws related to

service structure as per job analysis of each vacancy needs to be framed so as to clearly segregate all cadre jobs thereby avoiding litigations against department by its own employees. Thirdly, teaching training and faculty development courses and programs required to be developed considering political, social, moral and religious considerations so as to train teachers as visionary and missionary reformers who take their job as sacred mission. Once trained teachers in such lines, the challenges of financial constraints would be minimized and economical utilization would yield promising results. Gilgit-Baltistan Education Strategy 2015-2030 paper can be termed as an idealistic explanatory statement as it lacks pragmatic approach to overcome challenges and hurdles. It is not a "strategy" at all by virtue and approach as it is infused with NGOizational aspirations and privatization. Education department GB is a public organization and needs to be catered as a national institution that aims to provide equal access to quality education for all nationals across GB. Education managers who claim to be part of this (s)trategy paper need to consider the role of government in providing free education for all citizens and in case this mission is relinquished to private sector, the state would lose its credentials to be a nation state.

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