**Accountability of the educator**

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Everyone who is even a little bit familiar with how governance works knows that only those systems work that can be held accountable. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. There is a dire need of checks and balances for the systems to work. Those systems that have in-built checks and balances work and those systems that lack effective accountability do not work or do not work that well.

Capitalism is a highly exploitative economic system and it has historically evolved due to the value generated out of colonialism, slavery, exploitation of the labour, and changing the terms of trade in favour of the emerging capitalist class through state patronage. Capitalism still works through the exploitation of the peripheral regions of the world, labour exploitation, exploitation of the free environmental commons, imperial wars and imperial proxy wars.

However, capitalism is also dynamic, productive, and has in-built correcting mechanisms. It has an automatic feedback loop. So, when there is no demand for a certain commodity, that commodity or market for those commodities perishes and new commodities, markets, and technologies take over. Capitalism works on market demand and supply signals. It minimizes the red tape of bureaucracies and inefficiencies.

That is why capitalism has survived as an economic system for the past few centuries and peripheral capitalism even thrives in developing countries like Pakistan. There have been many endogenous and exogenous shocks to capitalism in the last few centuries and these shocks are in-built in the way capitalism functions and they will continue to take place till a better economic system replaces capitalism. Maybe the Chinese and Southeast Asian countries’ state capitalism will replace the unbridled free market capitalism in this century.

However, capitalism has survived as an economic system because it is dynamic, productive, and has an in-built accountability feedback loop. The planned economic system collapsed with the fall of the USSR because it was an inefficient system and did not have an in-built feedback loop. The Chinese and Southeast Asian countries’ state-led capitalism has been very successful and needs to be studied more to learn lessons for the development of countries like Pakistan.

However, the success of the Chinese and East Asian Tigers state-led capitalism has been that their states and bureaucracies had ample state capacity and they have guided the private sector and continue to guide the private sector, but they have ultimately let the private sector to lead by carefully monitoring and calibrating it. Even the public sector and the local governments in China work on the basis of a competitive model of capitalism; and that is why they have been successful.

In short, you need state capacity to plan, guide, calibrate, implement, monitor, provide incentives, punish in the case of non-delivery but you also need accountable systems that change their market behaviour on the basis of the laws of demand and supply and feedback loop in-built in the system. Peripheral capitalism works its way through caste, gender, ethnic, and local and regional networks. There is enough political economy literature that has analysed and researched what is written above.

The literature on educational outcomes in Pakistan both by the national Idara Taleem-o-Agahi (ITA) and research by Harvard academic Asim Ijaz Khwaja and his co-authors shows that educational outcomes for children are better (even if marginally) in the private schools in Pakistan than the public schools even by using fewer financial resources that the public sector. This set of research on educational outcomes does not refer to elite private schools in the urban areas necessarily whose educational outcomes are bound to be better than the resource-crunched public sector. This research refers to low-fee private schools that have opened up in every nook and corner of urban areas including the urban slums and also in the rural areas in the more developed provinces of the country.

And one of the possible explanations for better educational outcomes for low-fee private sector schools could be that these schools are more accountable to their customers: parents, neighbourhoods, and communities. Despite the fact that teachers in public-sector schools have received more education and training and they are paid more than the teachers who teach in low-fee private schools; the educational outcomes for children are still marginally better even in the low fee private-sector schools compared to the public schools because of less teacher absenteeism, better motivation, and better accountability.

We refer to the International Growth Centre (IGC)’s Policy Brief on Educator Accountability by Saher Asad et al, 2020 in this article today to take this debate forward. The IGC research team conducted a randomized control trial (RCT) in 240 rural primary schools of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) during the education year in 2017-18. The learning levels are low for children in Pakistan, and they are even lower in KP compared to Punjab.

The government of KP wanted to reform the accountability system of educators. It wanted to link the educator promotions to performance rather than seniority (that is the prevalent system). The RCT of the IGC research evaluated two criteria: it linked teachers’ promotion to the teachers and their students’ performance, and it linked the head teacher’s promotion to the head teacher and their subordinate teachers’ performance.

The research team of the IGC found out that there has been no significant impact on the learning levels of students or performance of educators during this RCT and the reform process. According to the authors, “This may be due to ‘system incoherence’ – the accountability relationships created for educators and district officials were not sufficiently aligned around improving learning because of design constraints but also serious implementation challenges.”

In the policy recommendations of this policy brief, the researchers state that changing district officials’ mindset is difficult and it is not easily possible to make it more pro-accountability and oriented towards a performance-based rewards system. The inspection system of the education department has low incentives and low stakes; therefore, incentives and stakes for the inspection system should be increased. The very bureaucratic system in the education department in rural KP lacks “system coherence”. The education department was not committed to the reform process and school inspectors did not objectively assess head teacher/subordinate teachers’ performance. Even if one element of accountability was improved due to this reform intervention; it had no significant overall impact on the performance of teachers or students as other elements of the accountability system were not aligned with the reform process.

Building state capacity to deliver social services has to be designed better and implemented better to achieve meaningful outcomes. It means reorienting the political economy, democracy, governance, and the very priorities of the state, government, and society; so that they are geared towards delivering for the public rather than amassing the state resources to aggrandize certain institutional interests and lock horns in intra-elite conflicts in the country that undermines political stability and long-term development prospects and outcomes.

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