

Decentralization and Accountability Contexts: District Education Officers' Perspectives on Education in Post-Devolution Pakistan

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Abstract

Through devolution reforms, district-level education managers in the developing world are working within a new accountability environment. This research examined district education officers' views regarding the role of education as it relates to tradition, gender and religion in post-devolution Pakistan, in order to gain insights into local education managers' accountability contexts in a conservative and educationally underdeveloped society. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews with twelve district education officers in the North-West Frontier Province (presently called Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). It was found that the officers generally viewed the function of public schools as an agent of modernization, while acknowledging that schools should also transmit traditional values. The former perspective comes from their accountability to their employers and their own backgrounds, while the latter suggests they are responding to the needs of local constituents. They were also dealing with their accountability to local politicians and provincial bureaucracies. These multi-accountability contexts may pose a considerable challenge to local education managers, but may be effectively managed by forging a network of key stakeholders.

Introduction

Across the globe, central governments have been shifting administrative authority and responsibilities to local entities. This shifting of power from the top echelon of administration to lower levels is generally termed decentralization. In the 1990s, virtually all countries in the developing world advocated greater decentralization in education management (Chapman 2008). As the last decade of 20th century began, increasing attention was paid to the political aspects of decentralization, with an emphasis on democratization, the development of civil society and the privatization of public sector services (Cohen & Peterson 1996). Decentralization was implemented to strengthen local governments and make them more responsive to the needs of service recipients, thereby improving public service delivery. This transfer of political authority from the central government to local governing bodies is typically called devolution. Under devolution, local education managers are critical actors in education accountability, as they are often designated as the individuals primarily responsible for delivering public education

services.

The purpose of this study is to understand the nature of the challenges associated with local education managers' accountability in post-devolution Pakistan. Specifically, the study examined the views of district-level education officers regarding the role of education as related to tradition, gender and religion, all of which were contentious issues in the North-West Frontier Province (presently called Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) where this study was conducted. The views of district education officers on these issues can provide meaningful insights into their accountability contexts. Pakistan, with its low educational achievement and rapid social changes, is in many ways representative of developing nations with their multitude of challenges associated with devolution reforms. These research findings are expected to enhance understanding of the implications of decentralizing education administration, and suggest a way for local officers to manage the reality of a new and increasingly complex accountability system in a society striving to achieve education for all.

Context of Pakistan

Pakistan is situated in South Asia and, with a population estimated to be 165 million (Government of Pakistan 2011), is the 6th largest nation in the world. Islam is the official religion of Pakistan and has been evoked by past rulers as a way to unite the nation and legitimize their rule (Rahman 2004). The combined gross enrollment ratio for the primary, secondary and tertiary education levels was 39.3% (UNDP 2009). Although the literacy rate in the country increased from 45 to 54% and the net primary enrollment rates rose from 42 to 52% between 2002 and 2006, these rates remain the lowest in South Asia (World Bank 2010). There is also a notable gender and inter-regional gap in Pakistan's education system (World Bank 2010).

North-West Frontier Province (hereafter, NWFP) was chosen as the research site because this province, along with Balochistan, registered a lower human development index calculated based on districts average (.6065 as of 2005) than the other two provinces (Jamal & Khan 2007). NWFP is also known to be a conservative and politically unstable region. The majority of the population is Pashtu speaking (68%) and follows a clan culture guided by a code of honor called *Pukhtunwali*, which obliges *Badal* or revenge by violence on an entire family and tribe. *Pukhtunwali* also promotes *Melmastia* or hospitality towards a guest (NWFP Government of Pakistan 2010). The complexity and interplay between the Islamic religion, ethnic and clan culture, and geopolitics make it all the more challenging for the province's district education officers to successfully meet their accountability requirements.

Pakistan introduced a devolution reform in 2000 and designated district governments as the primary bodies to deliver quality basic education up to the higher secondary level. The actual implementation started with the issuing of respective provincial local government ordinances in 2001. The reform was comprehensive, with many aspects

involved in the decentralization; the government's official document stated that the reform was "devolving political power, decentralizing administrative authority, de-concentrating management functions, diffusing the power–authority nexus and distributing resources to the district level" (Government of Pakistan 2000, p.1). The reform was intended to empower the actors at the district level to be "the masters of their destiny" (Government of Pakistan 2000, p.1).

Within each district, a new education administration structure headed by the Executive District Officer – Education (hereafter, EDO) was created to manage all aspects of education. In the NWFP, the actual handling of education administration rested with a School and Literacy Department. The department's job description included implementation of the government policies, monitoring and supervision of schools, coordination of the entire sub-sector of education, formulation of the district's annual plan and its implementation, and collection and compilation of education data (Shah 2003; 2009). EDOs were assisted by District Education Officers (hereafter, DEOs) of varying ranks and responsibilities. Senior district education officers were appointed by the provincial government. Under devolution, these district-level officers were supposedly the front-line of education accountability to service recipients.

Conceptual Framework: Accountability System in Devolution

As a central tenet of its belief, devolution presumes to increase the accountability of those who are directly responsible for providing public services. Indeed, accountability is often considered to be "most closely associated with many of the changes which resulted from decentralization" (Brown 1990, p.238). Accountability refers to the individuals' responsibility for their performance in accordance with the expectations of their particular role (Rowbottom 1977). Largely speaking, local public service providers of education must attend to three types of accountability: professional-bureaucratic, professional-political and professional-client (Kogan 1986). The first two are grouped as contractual accountability in which individuals are accountable to their employers or political masters (Becher, Eraut, Booth, Canning, & Knight 1979). In devolution, district-level education officers are essentially held accountable by their superiors in the district government bureaucracy, but they may also continue to be answerable to a higher echelon of administrative bureaucracy, such as a provincial government, that may determine their promotions. Meanwhile, professional-political accountability is based upon the principal-agent relationship where bureaucrats fulfill the policy intents of elected figures; in this relationship, district-level education officers are expected to faithfully execute their tasks as demanded by district government parliamentarians.

The third category of accountability, considered to be highly valued in devolution, refers to the professional-client relationship. In a strict sense, bureaucrats are only answerable to their employers and the elected officials. Indeed, it can be said that accountability to clients is not contractual but moral (Becher et al. 1979). In the past,

this moral accountability implied that the professionals were expected to do their best to serve the clients with their expertise (Kogan 1986); according to this traditional model, clients' participation in policy-making may not be considered of the utmost importance. However, today's devolution rhetoric of "bringing the government closer to the people" is highlighting the importance of attending to the voices of service recipients, especially when the voices are not uniform or some voices may be unheard.

In this paper, the conceptual framework of educational accountability described above served as a lens through which the district education officers' perspectives were analyzed. This study sought to understand the various accountability contexts under which district education managers in Pakistan's NWFP were working, and speculate how such accountability contexts might affect their work. Such information, it is believed, would provide valuable insights into the functioning of decentralized education management in a conservative and educationally underdeveloped society.

Methodology

The research methodology for this study is essentially qualitative. In the field of policy study, understanding the perspectives of local implementers is increasingly recognized as a legitimate endeavor of investigation (Levinson & Sutton 2001). The author's epistemological assumption in conducting the interviews is interpretative in the sense that human behaviors are inherently meaningful and the meaning is conditioned by the context (Schwandt 2000). Understanding the views of district education officers may provide insights into comprehending the wider cultural, social and political environment which, in turn, affects the officers' implementation and achievability of challenging accountabilities.

In conducting this field research, the author employed semi-structured interviews. This interviewing technique elicits opinions from the participants, while allowing the researcher control over the line of questioning (Creswell 2009). This data-collection approach is effective in understanding the kinds and depth of the interviewees' concerns within a framework conceived by the researcher. Interviews for this study were semi-structured, with pre-determined questions as well as the opportunity for developing dialogue that could lead to new discoveries. The author conducted all the interviews himself, following an interview protocol with a set procedure.

During the interviews, three topics were explored: public schooling and tradition, girls' education and religious education. The topics of girls and religious education were chosen in view of their contentious nature in the conservative society of NWFP. Questions were asked in a straightforward manner, such as "How do you view the roles of public (government) schools?" and "How do you view the roles of girl education?" Then, further probing questions were asked based on the interviewees' responses. The discussion of education and religion mainly centered on Madrassa education, as it was the dominant form of religious education in the province.

The collected data was later analyzed using a coding technique. First, the author read through all the data to gain an overall sense of the information. Second, the data were coded according to contexts, processes, activities and relationship/social structure (Bogdan & Biklen 1992 in Creswell 2009). Third, descriptions of themes were generated based on the nature and frequency of the related data codes. Finally, a narrative was created to make sense of the data within the framework of this study. Additionally, the analytical process was informed by the author's familiarity with NWFP from a previous stay as a development worker in the province and Pakistan (1996-1997).

In principle, the interviews were conducted in English. The author was accompanied by an Urdu- and Pashtu-speaking interpreter who assisted when interviewees so requested. On average, each interview lasted two hours, including rapport-building conversation. The author took notes during the interviews and audiotaped them for the purpose of cross-checking. Later, all the notes were compared to identify common patterns in the interviewees' responses.

The field research was conducted in two districts of NWFP during the period of August 28 - September 5, 2006 and in another two districts from September 10-16, 2008. These four districts, out of the twenty-four districts in the province, were selected based on comparative geographical characteristics; two of them were urban and the other two were in rural areas. A total of twelve district-level education officers were interviewed, including three Executive District Officers - Education (EDOs) and nine District Education Officers (DEOs). DEOs included both deputies and assistant deputies. All of the interviewees had substantial experience working in the schools under their responsibility, thus were familiar with the school environment in the local areas. All the EDOs interviewed were males, while the DEOs included four females. Access to the interviewees was granted by the provincial Minister of Education. Upon writing this paper, all individuals' names were withheld to respect anonymity.

It should be noted that the seven interviews conducted in 2006 were part of another study conducted by the author. The previous study, whose findings were reported in Komatsu (2009), used interviews as well as on-site observations to identify political, economic and social constraints faced by the local education administration. The present study combines the interview data from the previous study and the new data collected in 2008, and presents the analysis in a new conceptual framework of accountability. Between the two data-collection periods (2006 and 2008), a national election was held in early 2008, which led to the resignation of then president Pervez Musharraf in August 18, 2008. Despite such political turmoil, which is not a very unique event in the history of Pakistan, the devolution reform introduced in 2000 continued to be in place. The author does not believe that the general environment surrounding the district education officers in NWFP drastically changed between the two periods of data collection, so no analysis of contextual changes was necessary when analyzing the data.

Limitations

This study has three main limitations. First, the trustworthiness of the data may be compromised since the author depended on the openness and articulation of the interviewees. Interviews inherently run the risk that the researcher's presence may invite biased responses (Creswell 2009), compromising the integrity of reactions to the interview questions. To reduce this risk, the author clearly explained the research intent at the onset of each interview, assured the interviewees of their anonymity and tried to create a dialogue atmosphere in order to solicit open and honest responses. Second, the sample size may be too small to justify the generalizability of its findings to the entire province and, to some degree, to Pakistan. While care was taken to choose districts that represent the size and urban/rural character of the province, the area covered by the fieldwork was limited due to security concerns, which deteriorated during the study. Third, the duration of the research period was rather short, raising a question as to the extent to which the study was able to explore the depth of interviewee perspectives. As noted in the second limitation, security concerns posed a major challenge to the research by affecting the coverage, duration and timing of data collection. Despite the relatively small scope of the data collection, however, the author believes that the findings provide useful information for better understanding accountability contexts and their associated challenges as faced by local education managers under devolution.

Findings and Analysis

Public Schooling and Tradition

The role of school education in a traditional society is an important theme in the context of Pakistan, where rapid social changes are being experienced due to globalization. One key question was whether the district education officers viewed schools as change-agents or as protectors of deeply rooted values held by local communities. This question is pertinent to accountability since the responses could tell us the goals that the officers hold and the accountability level to which those goals are related. Any ambiguity or dilemma on this issue may suggest the nature of future challenges the officers are likely to confront.

In the interviews, the majority of district education officers emphasized the role of education as a values transmitter. The officers' views are somewhat different from that presumed by the mainstream paradigm of educational development rooted in human capital theory. The human capital development theory posits that education produces a productive labor force. In the context of NWFP, however, the human capital theory does not seem to hold strongly. In one survey, local residents of four South Asian countries were asked to identify the perceived benefits of education. Among 3,770 respondents surveyed, all of those in India (n=1001), Sri Lanka (n=504) and Bangladesh (n=500) felt that education would produce a higher living standard. On the other hand, no more

than 60% of the respondents in Pakistan (n=1765) felt the same (Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre 2005). In the absence of robust growth in the country's industries, it is not surprising that local Pakistanis, especially in such a rural region as NWFP, do not strongly associate education with higher incomes. To them, education may be generally considered a transmitter of values and morals. District education officers echoed this view, seeing education primarily as advancing morals, as indicated by the following remarks.

DEO A (male): "With education, one's ignorance will be diminished. Revenge culture in our traditional society will disappear." (Komatsu 2009)

DEO B (female): "Public educational institutes teach "manners" to pupils. Some pupils respect properly-mannered teachers more than their parents. I notice a big difference in attitudes between pupils who have acquired proper manners at schools and parents without an education. Pupils also learn skills to solve daily problems. They learn to listen to others and respect their opinions. In traditional society, people use violence to solve problems. Primary schools are conducting a debate program once a month as an extra-curricular activity." (Komatsu 2009)

The preceding remarks indicate that, in principle, enlightenment was at the top of the agenda for district education officers when evaluating the roles of education in a traditional society. The two interviewees quoted above stressed the role of education as a change agent in reducing the violence prevalent in their society. The following officer also pointed out the problem of "ignorance" of the people, and once again saw the role of education as a change agent. The same officer accorded to education the promotion of individual freedom, while instilling the citizenry with a sense of responsibility towards the country.

EDO A (male): "Education has to deal with ignorance of people. Ignorant people think only of pursuing their own interests. They don't think about serving to the country or development of nation they live in. They don't choose work such as police and doctors. Police and doctors are a "good Pakistani" serving to others. ... Some tradition is not desirable. For example, in some villages, families are very rigid about marriages. They do not allow children to choose their partners. In some cases, this results in murders. This is not good. Schools should teach their students how to convince parents politely and change their attitudes."

EDO A recognized that society was changing and education had to deal with the changing social circumstances. Fierce competition brought about by global capitalism is encroaching upon rural areas, encouraging the pursuit of self-interest and risking the erosion of social cohesion. A solution was proposed by instilling a sense of collective and citizen responsibility towards the nation. In other words, globalization as a form

of modernization is countered by the creation of national citizenship, another form of modernization. Meanwhile, individual freedom was respected when it came to marriage. In recent years, particularly since the decentralization reform was put in place, these district-level government officers have been attending a series of in-service training courses organized by western donors. In addition to easy access to western media and literature (assisted by their English proficiency), they came into contact with outsiders whose mission was to sensitize government officers regarding individual human rights; this may have influenced the district education officers' views towards education.

In fact, EDOs and DEOs were in their positions precisely because of their views of society and education. The national government in Pakistan has been promoting modernization. The military governments throughout the history of Pakistan were mostly pro-modernization, including the most recent one led by Mr. Pervez Musharraf who launched the latest decentralization reform. Civil servants were recruited based on exams including mainly secular subjects, such as English language and social studies. In addition, these officers were choosing to send their children to private schools where English was an instructional language and textbooks were produced by Oxford publishers. From this aspect, district education officers constituted a modernizing force in Pakistani society. It follows, then, that district education officers relate to professional-bureaucratic accountability more than to professional-client accountability, despite the devolution reform. The fact that they are on the payroll of the provincial bureaucracy, rather than district governments, may make these officers even less responsive to local constituents' particular ethos and values.

Intriguingly, however, tradition was not completely discarded in the minds of district education officers. Typically, interviewees first stressed the role of education in modernizing the society, and later added that education should also serve to maintain some aspects of the traditional way of life. The following remarks indicate this disposition.

DEO A (male) "Education will change women's attitudes and way of thinking. Islamic studies and Pashtu are important subjects in this regard."

EDO B (male): "Education should also preserve traditional values. Traditional values are different in areas. In our area, respects for elderly are an important value. We used to attend burial ceremony when elders pass away. In bigger towns where people come from different areas, this tradition is disappearing."

As illustrated by the quotations above, EDOs and DEOs seem to recognize the necessity to reconcile modernization on one hand with ethnic and communal tradition on the other; the tension between the two spectrums relates to the issue of identity, with which Pakistan has been grappling since its founding. In NWFP, such tension often manifests in the area of ethnic identity. The persistence of ethnic identity here is illustrated by a remark of Wali Khan, an activist and living symbol of Pashtun ethnicity:

“I have been a Pukhtun (Pashtun) for thousands of years, a Muslim for 1300 years and a Pakistani for 40 years.” (Ahmed 1990, p.25). Some ethnic groups may not feel that they are enjoying the full entitlements of Pakistani citizenship. As a result, these groups may cling to their ethnic, regional or communal identities as a source of self-assurance. Modernization, tradition and self-identity are intricately linked to the nation-building of Pakistan that NWFP district education officers, as government agents and residents of the region, continue to wade through.

Girls' Education

One of the issues that concretely represents the district officers' ambiguity between modernization and tradition is girls' education. Formal education for girls is contested in some societies, especially when it appears to challenge the traditional expectations of female roles. Similar to the previous section, the views of district education officers on girls' education could offer valuable insights into their handling of accountability in the post-devolution environment.

Girls in Pakistan have long been deprived of the opportunity to attend school due to cultural, economic and administrative reasons. NWFP, in particular, has had a wide gender gap at the primary school level (Farah & Shera 2007). Culturally speaking, some of the conservative groups oppose girls' education outright due to traditional and religious reasons. Male leaders feel threatened by the possibility of losing their power and authority to girls and women who are becoming rights-conscious; men are therefore reluctant to send their daughters to school. Islamic doctrines are called upon to legitimize their opposition to girls' education, though this legitimization is challenged by universal education in other secular Islamic countries such as Malaysia and Turkey. Poverty is another constraint affecting girls' education. Parents often cannot afford to send all of their children to school and often prefer to send boys. Lastly, it has been a challenge for education managers to provide sufficient numbers of female teachers. There are simply not enough educated females qualified to teach in rural parts of NWFP (Komatsu 2009).

Despite these constraints, however, more and more girls are enrolled in NWFP schools. The girls' primary school enrollment rate was as low as 35% in 1995-1996, but has recently increased to 64% (NWFP Government of Pakistan 2010). The government of Pakistan has clearly made girls' education a policy priority (Government of Pakistan Ministry of Education 1998; 2005). More and more schools for girls have been constructed in the region, along with awareness and incentive programs specifically targeting girls, including the provision of food. The data and field reports suggest that the people in the conservative NWFP region were gradually accepting girls' education.

When interviewed, all EDOs and DEOs expressed their support for girls' education. In fact, one female officer insisted on the need to sensitize males. The female officer asserted that education was particularly needed for males so that they would not oppose girls' education. When it comes to the mode of delivery and the content of girls' education, most interviewed officers believed in separate education for boys and girls,

though divergent views were given on the content for girl students. One male officer insisted that girls and boys should essentially learn the same contents within the same curriculum, because they would have to compete in the same examinations to enter higher education institutions or the labor market. While agreeing that girls should learn essentially the same contents as boys, other officers believed that girls also needed to acquire special manners and skills to be a “good mother.” One female officer pointed out the importance of home economics so girls could learn to cook and knit. This view of education as a transmitter of social values and expectations was supported by all of the female education officers interviewed.

The dichotomous views toward girls’ education - as an opportunity to expand the choices of girls and women but also an opportunity to transmit traditional values that define gender roles - indicates one ambiguity that district education officers must face. At the time of the interviews, attacks on girls’ schools were increasing in NWFP, especially those near the border with Afghanistan. It was suspected that girls’ schools were viewed by some conservative forces as carrying western values of gender equality. In this context, EDOs and DEOs seemed to recognize the need to move cautiously in promoting girls’ education. Ideally, more consensus-building among local community members is desired in order to accommodate Islamic, ethnic, traditional and modern values so that girls will feel safe going to the schools.

It should be added that girls’ education also presents a critical issue for district education officers in handling vertical accountability contexts, namely professional-political accountability at the local level on one hand and professional-bureaucratic accountability at the provincial level on the other. Local constituents may not be particularly enthusiastic about girls’ education. In this case, local politicians would not see the political utility of girls’ education and refuse to provide support through adequate financial allocations (Keefer, Narayan & Vishwanath 2003). Reform-minded district education officers would have difficulty in choosing between accountability to the local politicians and to their provincial bureaucratic superiors who push for the agenda of “education for all.” This is an essential accountability dilemma faced by local service providers operating in a devoluted administration in countries that are experiencing rapid globalization infused with international norms and standards.

Religious (Madrassa) Education

For years, the national government of Pakistan has been attempting to integrate religious schools into the mainstream public education; with devolution, therefore, district education officers are increasingly pressured to deal with the integration process, while attending to the voices of local religious factions. Religious teaching is an integral part of the educational landscape in Pakistan. The Federal Ministry of Education, in its National Education Policy 1998-2010, introduced a plan to include compulsory reading lessons of the Qur’an in elementary and secondary public schools (McClure 2009). However, it is the special educational institutes dedicated to teaching religion that may offer district

education officers an acute challenge in dealing with professional-client accountability.

In Pakistan, the most well-known religious education institutes are Madrassa schools where Qur'anic education occupies the core of its teaching process. By 2006, 12,153 Madrassa schools had been registered at Pakistan's Federal Ministry of Education, mostly concentrated in Pashto-speaking NWFP and Balochistan (McClure 2009). Madrassa schools comprise many types in terms of teaching arrangements; some teach only the Qur'an, while others include modern subjects such as math and social science. Some are flexible and inclusive, while others are more dogmatic and exclusive. In poorer rural areas, Madrassa schools are likely to provide only Qur'anic education because these schools are managed by only one teacher who tends to be a specialist in religious education.

It has been reported that some Madrassa schools instill intolerance in the minds of children (Fair 2006). The Pakistani government decided in 2002 to require all Madrassa schools to register, imposing restrictions on the hiring of foreign teachers and attempting to 'modernize' the schools by offering to pay for teachers of modern subjects (McClure 2009). At the time of data collection, Madrassa schools were outside the jurisdiction of education departments. With increasing numbers of Madrassa schools including modern subjects, however, EDOs and DEOs would be likely to find themselves dealing with these religious schools.

The following three remarks by district education officers summarize the general attitude of interviewees towards Madrassa schools:

EDO C (female): "Public education is different from religious education taught at Madrassa. The biggest difference is that government schools teach the diversity of values. Also, the teachers of government schools are more sophisticated. There are lots of physical punishments at Madrassas." (Komatsu 2009)

EDO B (male): "Most of Madrassas provide good Islamic education. But there are some that do not. I had my two children go to Madrassa. After the first day, I had to have them withdraw from the school. They came back home with stickers on their chest. The stickers were provided by the Madrassa and said "Shiia are Hindu believers." Some of religious leaders in charge of Madrassas became political and created sectarian conflicts. Some Madrassas stockpile weapons. The government should deal with these Madrassas. In any case, these extreme Madrassas are not the majority; perhaps one out of ten."

EDO C (male): "Madrassa schools contribute to the society by teaching literacy. However, Madrassa should introduce modern subjects. In fact, they used to be scientific institutions. Many renowned scientists came from Madrassa. The present form of Madrassa is not appropriate. They should go back to the original form. They should not be separated from the society."

The responses above indicate that district education officers in NWFP were concerned with the present form of Madrassa education. Recent studies show that the negative image of Madrassa schools and the threats they pose to the West have been exaggerated (Andrabi, Das, Khwaja & Zajonc 2006; McClure 2009). However, interviewees concurred that the teaching in some Madrassa schools indeed may have been encouraging the growth of anti-western feelings and sectarian conflicts in the region. While acknowledging the contributions of Madrassa schools to the society, EDOs and DEOs seemed to maintain the same stance as the central government, that at least some of these schools were problematic, therefore needed regulating by the government. As a long-term strategy, the introduction of modern subjects into the religious institutes was seen as a desirable path to align Madrassas more with public education policy.

As in girls' education, district education officers were treading carefully when dealing with Madrassas since their educators and religious leaders exerted a considerable influence in NWFP. In the context of decentralized governance, professional-client accountability demands that service providers respond to a wide range of interests in the local area, including those of religious leaders. It was not yet clear how district education officers would actually approach these religious schools with a modernization agenda in their minds. The overall responses of interviewees indicate that district education officers were unlikely to do anything soon that could affect the core teaching process in these religious schools. The conclusion seems to be that these officers would eventually need to deal with the balance between meeting professional-bureaucrat accountability, namely responding to the demands of the national and provincial governments to incorporate secular education in Madrassas, and meeting professional-client accountability, namely accommodating the local demands for continuing religious education.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study examined the views of district education officers regarding the role of education in post-devolution Pakistan. The questions received mixed responses from EDOs and DEOs. They appeared to regard the foremost role of education as a transmitter of modern values to help reform the country. Many of their comments suggest that the officers viewed formal education as an important vehicle to change the traditional society. At the same time, however, these officers recognized that schools should also transmit traditional values and were well aware of the influence of conservative forces in the society. Their attitudes towards girls' education and Madrassa education illustrate the dilemma of accountability between their employers and local constituents. Although the data was collected some years ago, these study findings are still pertinent to the present situation since the basic devolution structure remains.

One way to resolve the conflict of "multiple accountability contexts" (Marks & Nance 2007, p.4) is to adopt, as Kogan (1986) proposes, a participatory democratic model of accountability. The participatory model is said to be effective in a plural society where

different values collide and coexist. The model seeks “to involve non-elite groups and employees of public organizations in policy formulation and its administration” (Kogan 1986, p.89). In this model, negotiations with various stakeholders are encouraged. In NWFP, the author’s previous research (Komatsu, 2009) found a culture of horizontal human relationships, even in the bureaucracy. By tapping into this potential, EDOs and DEOs may be encouraged to form a network of education stakeholders to discuss and examine the issues of public education. In this case, these district officers are expected to facilitate networking, rather than simply respond to the various demands from those to whom they see themselves as accountable. Accountability arrangements are indeed meant to secure trust between stakeholders (Kogan 1986). Multiple accountabilities call for the forging of trust among key stakeholders that could help district education officers overcome some of the challenges brought about by devolution. Networking and trust-building would be challenging tasks for the district education officers, but such work might eventually ease some of the dilemmas they face every day.

District education officers are on the frontline of bureaucratic and public accountabilities in the post-devolution era. They will continue to struggle with the conflicts arising from multiple accountability contexts in the foreseeable future, which indeed reflects the very struggle that the nation of Pakistan tackles, to find the right balance between tradition and modernization. With devolution, the district education officers’ balancing act may predict the future of Pakistan itself.

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