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THE IMPACTS OF ELITE CAPTURE AND APATHY TOWARDS DECENTRALIZATION IN EDUCATION AND HEALTH IN BALOCHISTAN

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Abstract

The study focuses on investigating elite capture as a barrier to the decentralization of powers and its impact on governance in the social sectors of education and health in Balochistan. Since there is limited work available on how elites dominate the governance structure and turn a blind eye towards the decentralization of social sectors such as education and health in Balochistan, it is pertinent to investigate how elite capture as an obstacle to decentralization complicates governance in social sectors of Education and Health in Balochistan? The study is guided by the theory of consociational democracy, especially its aspect of consensus and accommodation among elites. The study's findings are based on primary data collected through in-depth key informant interviews, a qualitative method. The tool of thematic analysis is used to interpret data from in-depth interviews, in which various themes and patterns are identified, gathered into themes, and used to provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. The study findings indicate that elite capture is a barrier to decentralization of powers in the social sectors of health and education, and as a result, there are governance issues in these departments. The study highlights the importance of consensus among elites for exercising true decentralisation of powers in the province, as mentioned in the 18th amendment, to overcome the falling dimensions in the social sectors of education and health in Balochistan.

Keywords: Decentralization; Education; Elite Capture; Health; Power; Social Sector.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Decentralization has gained global prominence to improve the quality of governance. Since decentralisation is implemented almost everywhere and in every type of country in the world (Faguet, 2011)**,** Pakistan is no exception, as decentralisation has been attempted since 1973. However significant effort in this regard was taken when the 18th Amendment was passed in 2010. Despite this decentralization efforts, many scholar think that Pakistan decentralised the political structure and kept the fiscal system centralised which provided the policymakers with an opportunity to manipulate policies in favour of the elites **(**Tunio & Nabi, 2021). Balochistan, being the most underdeveloped province of the country, has been facing the challenges of decentralisation due to elite capture, which refers to the politically and economically powerful groups that have a grip on and utilise resources that are meant for the benefit of economically and politically less powerful groups (Ahmed, 2023). This article aims to investigate elite capture as a barrier to decentralisation and the resulting governance issues in the social sectors of education and health in Balochistan. In the context of Balochistan, elites refer to a small groups of traditional and senior political leaders, and bureaucrats who have a disproportionate influence on the political system in the province; while elite capture means that these influential groups have concentrated powers in their hands to divert public resources for their personal and political gains. In this paper, we inquire about *how elite capture as an obstacle to decentralisation complicates governance in social sectors of Education and Health in Balochistan?*

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Governance deficits, corruption, inequitable resource distribution, and exclusive development are prevalent in states where small elite groups hold power and economic resources (Haque & Zulfiqar, 2024). Looking at different societies at a global level, it is found that the nature of institutions plays a significant role in corruption. Theorists on clientelism argue that, in the wake of a weak and unaccountable political structure, political elites utilise public services for their familial and friendship purposes, often at the expense of their voters (Ahmed, 2023). Literature indicates that elite capture and clientele politics are also a legacy of the colonized states. Haque and Zulfiqar (2024) is of the view that even after decolonization, the legacy of colonization is sustained in the post-colonial states in the form of elite capture, where in the political, bureaucratic and military elites promote rent-seeking behaviors that undermine socio-economic development, inclusive and participatory governance as well as empowerment of marginalized communities. Literature reflects that the practice of exclusiveness and marginalization is more common in developing countries, particularly ethnically diverse ones. Abdlai (2017) has expressed that resources are scarce in developing countries therefore every political leader tries his level best to obtain a powerful position in the government and thereby carry big chunk of resources to their ethnic group and region so distribution of power and resources rest on the pattern of power sharing among the elites.

Literature indicates the same issues in Pakistan, a developing and ethnically diverse country. Hussain (2012) described that Pakistani politics is fundamentally based on family interests and the control of power, despite 60 years of social and political changes; clans, tribes and *bradari* play a vital role in retaining dynastic politics. Elections are aimed at holding the state patronage. Discussing the political system and political leadership in Pakistan, Sultana (2019) has noted that the political system of Pakistan is based on the fact that party leadership is in the hands of some families who are so powerful that ordinary party members are unable to challenge the incumbent leadership of the party and hence parties are the personal fiefdoms of the party leaders. Besides, it is common practice among politicians to provide incentives and service delivery to those in their contact, in a way that is most visible to the public, because politicians are not interested in the common welfare of all, but rather in increasing in their vote bank (Mohmand, 2020). This fact is substantiated by Ali (2016) who studied the impacts of dynastic politicians on development and found that during the massive floods in 2010, local development

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decreased in the flood-affected constituencies and the decrease was more pronounced in areas under dynastic politicians which reflected their passive response to the natural disaster (Malik et al., 2021).

It is revealed that Balochistan is also in the grip of elites who have apathy to decentralization and inclusive governance. Khetran (2011) wrote that the inherited *Sardars* of Balochistan, who hold unlimited power and authority over the common people in Balochistan, are responsible for the underdevelopment, poverty, and political crisis in Balochistan. These *Sardars* have fearlessly perpetuated dominance over the masses in the province. When the 18th Amendment was passed, it was hoped that the 7th NFC award would bring significant changes in terms of socio-economic development through the Public Sector Development Program (PSDP) but the prevailing clientele environment frustrated the hopes of the common man (Baloch & Khan, 2022). To overcome the governance issues in the education sector, decentralization and community engagement were decided to be implemented under the Balochistan Education Sector Plan (PESP). On the other hand, some senior education experts and officers expressed that there is no true decentralization in the education sector: from a fiscal point of view, there is only a parody of decentralization because the education budget is only supply-driven; at the same time, from an administrative perspective, there is a deconcentration of power in which the ultimate powers rest with higher authorities (Khan & Zaman, 2019).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design for this study is qualitative, in which data has been collected from primary sources through in-depth interviews with well-informed research key participants. A sample of twelve participants was chosen for this study. Twelve Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted purposively. Through these interviews, comprehensive information was gathered from various stakeholders which included political leaders, executive officers who had expertise in the field of education and health in the context of Pakistan in general and Balochistan in particular and had key role in the portfolio of governance in Balochistan. Four political leaders who had executive and legislative experiences in Balochistan were interviewed, four medical officers who have experiences of health management in Balochistan, furthermore, three executive officers of education management who served in different districts of Balochistan i.e. Killa Siafullah, Pishin, Quetta, Sherani, Turbat, and Zhob, and finally one senior administrative officer who has administrative experience as secretary of education department was also interviewed. In this regard, different themes and patterns were identified from the data that was collected for this study. The data was transcribed, cleaned, various themes were drawn from the data and further this data was interpreted and reported in order.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Results

The following themes emerged as a result of the data collected with Key Informants working in different fields of education and health in Balochistan.

4.1.1. Elite Capture Is the Main Hurdle in The Way of Decentralization Powers in Balochistan

The data findings revealed several themes that highlight how elite capture and apathy towards decentralization complicates governance in the education and health sector. One of the important themes that emerged was that elite capture is the main hurdle to the decentralisation of powers in Balochistan. This theme is directly related to the broader research focus on how elite capture as an obstacle to decentralization complicates governance in social sectors of education and health in Balochistan. The theme is also important for it highlight the importance of consensus among the elites on the pattern of consociational democracy for cooperative governance in the ethnically diverse province of Balochistan.

Most of the research participants believe that despite the 18th amendment, apathy to proper decentralisation of powers by political and bureaucratic elites has badly impacted the

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governance of the public sector, especially the social sectors of education and health. As P-1 shared:

> Centralisation of powers in social sectors of education and health is not needed because the local level political and administrative leadership are well aware of the issues in the education and health sectors, and they can better resolve the issues by engaging the local community. participant further elaborated the local level leadership knows better than provincial level leadership about the need of a school or Basic Health Unit (BHU) for the people of the concerned village or town.

In this respect, the administrative and fiscal powers in these social sectors needs to be decentralised to the district level. Still, those in power at the provincial level do not transfer these powers to the district level because they don't like to let the powers go from their hands to local level leadership, and as a consequence, Balochistan faces challenges in meeting the public demands and needs in both sectors. P-5, who served on a senior administrative positions in the education and health department, elaborated:

> "Despite our several plans and proposals for proper decentralization in social sectors of education and health, the provincial level of political leadership do not want to properly decentralise the powers to local and district levels in the social sectors".

In the same way, P-3 revealed:

> "Those in authority do not like to decentralise powers to the lower level because they think it is against their political interests. And the centralised powers and decision making have impacts on the proper and equitable distribution of resources in public sector development, especially in the social sectors of education and health. The participant further explained that due to the unwillingness and insincerity of power elites, Balochistan is still underdeveloped, with the lowest literacy rate and health care being its glaring examples.

Furthermore, another participant P-2 expressed:

> Decentralisation is done in almost all types of countries to improve the development sectors, in which social sectors of education and health are the important ones; but in Balochistan, powers are kept centralised by those in authority. The centralised authority has also impacted the equitable distribution of resources among the various ethnic groups in the province**.**

In addition, P-4 explored:

> "Decentralization of powers is the most common practice all over the world. Countries with various ideological and constitutional differences have devolved the powers of social sectors like health, education, sanitation, and other community development programs by community participation and engagement, but here the powers in all the public sector development are centralised and exclusive. It was further expressed that even for a small piece of work related to community development, local government and other departments must seek approval from higher authorities based in Quetta. The irony is that even at times, political leaders at the provincial level request provincial-level bureaucrats to undertake small tasks that address public needs. Because of this centralised tendency, there are a number of problems in serving and facilitating the people; especially, issues in education and health are the grievous ones

The above accounts indicate that the political and bureaucratic elite are well aware of the need and importance of decentralisation of powers in improving the governance in the public sector, but they are not ready to decentralise powers mainly for their personal and political gains. The findings also indicate that centralisation of powers also causes inequitable distribution of resources because the central authorities are not well aware of the local needs and demands of the people.

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4.1.2. Elite Capture is Causing a Governance Crisis in the Education Sector in Balochistan

The key informant interviews suggest that elite capture is contributing to a governance crisis in the education sector of Balochistan. This endorses the importance of the broader question of this research, namely, how elite capture complicates governance in the social sector of education in Balochistan. The existing literature and interview participants believe that, despite the 18th Amendment, apathy towards proper decentralisation of powers by political and bureaucratic elites has significantly impacted the governance of the public sector, particularly in the social sectors of education and health. As P-7 disclosed:

> Although the authorities recognise the importance of decentralising powers to overcome challenges in the education sector, the political and bureaucratic leadership at the provincial level do not truly decentralise both fiscal and administrative powers to the district level. Department management at the local level faces the challenges of service delivery, equitable resource allocation, and overcoming issues such as dropout and quality education.
>
> According to the PSLM report, in Balochistan, the percentage of out-of-school children aged 5 to 16years is 47%, in which 35% is from the urban area and 51% from rural areas of the province (Yaseen, 2017). According to Balochistan Education Sector Plan, education sector in Balochistan is facing both operational and strategic planning. On one side the operational planning is missing and on the other hand the strategic planning is characterized by absence of well-designed and well-thought out need based short term planning. Almost 95% of the development schemes are spent on construction sector like bricks and mortars in which majority of these schemes go to the constituencies of powerful ministers and opposition leaders by sideling the neediest constituencies due to the weak political stake and thereby worsening the regional inequalities in the province. Moreover, the planning is centralized in which the divisional and district level management have little say in planning and budgeting; the sector plan even mentions, " the entire development budget is spent as per the wishes of members of the provincial assembly, Even the Secondary Education Department (SED) has a very limited say, let alone the lower tiers, in identifying schemes for development component of the budget(BESP, 2020-25, p. 172).Furthermore, participants P-7 and P-8 expressed, "Powers are kept centralised by the higher authorities for personal and political gains." P-4 noted, most of the political leaders who hold the powers prefer their own constituencies and voter-bank instead of need-base distribution of resources. Hence the data findings indicate that members of assemblies are preferring their personal interests and their constituencies and voter-bank instead of need-based distribution of powers and resources in Balochistan which complicate the governance in education sector in Balochistan.

In the same way, P-8 a senior management officer expressed:

> The powers, both administrative and fiscal, are still centralised despite the fact that the department at the district and local level has the capacity to manage the departmental affairs. Participant further added that previously department had the power of transfer and posting up to grade 15, but now these powers have been given to District Education Authority (DEA) which is impacting the timely transfer and posting and hence a hurdle in timely service delivery in the department.

However, participantP-6 expressed his opinion:

> "Powers have been decentralised in the education department; now it is up to the education officer to exercise the powers. Participant moreover disclosed that there is pressure from top political and bureaucratic leadership, but it is up to district administration to deal with the said pressure and exercise their due authority.

Centralised budgeting is another issue that is impacting governance performance of the sector. As a matter of concern, P-6 and P-7 shared that the budget is supply-driven instead of demand-

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driven, in which although demands are asked from the department, the budget is approved and allocated by those in authority at the provincial level. This centralised budgeting is a hurdle to meet the needs of the public and the targets set by the government.

Similarly, another participant P-8 elaborated:

> Balochistan is a sparsely populated province in which many schools are situated in far-flung areas, for which transportation is a big issue; the government is giving a five-thousand-conveyance allowance per month, which is quite a meagre amount. District management faces severe challenges in transferring and posting personnel in those areas, which ultimately impact service delivery in the far-flung schools. The budget is spent through the cluster budget. Every cluster head is demanding the required budget, but the budget is supply-driven, and there is already a scarcity of resources, so it is hard to meet the demands and needs of schools.

The above data reveal that, despite the 18th Amendment wherein education is decentralised to provincial level, the viability of decentralisation of administrative and fiscal powers to local level in education and several attempts to decentralise having been made through Balochistan Education Sector Plan, yet the powers remain centralised. Although some measures have been taken for decentralization, in reality, there is only deconcentration of powers. The finding from education sector plan also reveal that most of the development funds go to the constituencies of powerful minsters and opposition leader which aggravates the regional inequalities and marginalization of politically insignificant constituencies. The data findings further reveal that fiscally, there is only a parody of decentralisation because the budget in education is centralized and supply-driven rather than demand-driven, meaning that although the budget proposal is asked for by the department, it is approved according to the wishes of the central level political and administrative officers. Therefore, it can safely be concluded that the education sector is under the influence of the provincial elites both administratively and fiscally. further, the data findings indicate that the elites endorse the positive impacts of decentralization on the governance yet they have not reached a consensus to properly institutionalize the decentralization in education sector.

4.1.3. Elite capture is causing a governance deficit in the Health Sector in Balochistan:

The majority of participants and the available literature indicate that apathy towards the decentralisation of powers is impacting the performance of the health department in overcoming health issues in the province. In this stance, P-9, as a Public Health Manager in the health department, disclosed:

> I strongly believe that centralization of powers has a profoundly negative impact on the performance of service delivery in our department. He added that those who hold the powers at the provincial level are unaware of the real needs and demands of the public, so they make decisions based on personal likes and dislikes instead of addressing the issues of the people at the districts and local levels; so centralised decisions favour only a small number of people. Balochistan, where healthcare services are already scarce and dispersed, centralization of powers only serves to further finding the middle ground the accessibility and quality of healthcare.

Nasir (2023) has noted that due to the hold of a small number of individuals, the entire health system is confronting the challenges of shortage and deficiencies of medicine, logistics and trained human resources. Therefore, to improve health care in Balochistan, a holistic approach, including empowering local health officers and community engagement is required (Nasir, 2023). As Participant P-10 explained:

> Powers, both administrative and fiscal, are centralised in health department which has severely impacted the overall indicator of health. P-10 added that there are four aspects of health which have been impacted by centralisation: one is Medicine. Medicine is the most

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basic element if we look for health care, but the centralization of the purchasing of medicine has badly affected the provision medicine of to the patient.

Participant P-10 elucidated:

Medicines are purchased by the Medical Store Depot of Balochistan (MSD) at the provincial level which is not aware of the local needs of medicine. Most of the time, the medicine in hospitals is not favourable to the concerned locality, resultantly medicine in stores being useless. MSD of Balochistan is purchasing low-quality medicine from substandard companies due to which the medicines are either ineffective or even dangerous for the patients. Second is Logistic powers: the powers of logistic support are also centralised due to which service delivery is a big challenge for the health management staff.

Participant P-10 furthermore expounded:

During the coronavirus pandemic, the powers were decentralised only to the commissioner level and the health management staff, like Medical Superintendent (MS) and District Health Officer (DHO), were powerless. Third is Human Resources: the power at the human resource level is also centralised. The transfer posting of doctors is maintained in the secretariat, while the authority for appointing, transferring, and posting of non-medical staff (paramedics and nurses) resides at the directorate level. As a result, at the district level, MS and DHO have no control over the staff to ensure they deliver the required services to the public. Fourth is specialised staff: the shortage of specialised staff is another issue. Every district has a chronic deficiency of specialised staff, especially in areas such as anaesthesia, Intensive Care Unit (ICU) experts, and radiologists. Despite the high demand for the said specialists at the district level, only 50 specialists have been selected whose workplaces are limited to Quetta. Even if a doctor is willing to serve in the district, the required logistics are not available at the district level, so he/she has to serve in Quetta as a compulsion.

According to the Health Resources and Services Availability Monitoring System (HeRAMS) Balochistan Baseline Report (2021), which has evaluated health facilities from the perspective of buildings, functionality and accessibility. 1- buildings and equipment: As per the report of 1404 buildings, 34% are not damaged, 62% are partially damaged and among the causes of damage, 87% are damaged due to lack of maintenance; so far as the equipment condition is concerned, among 1404, only(349) 25% are safe,(603) 43% are partially damaged, (11) 1% are fully damaged and (441) 31% are not relevant, the main cause of damage of 88% is lack of maintenance; 2- functionality**:** in the report the functionality of 1396 units were part of the report in which only (600) 43% are functional, (656) 47% are partially functional while (140) 10% are non-functional, and among the main causes of dysfunctionality are 85% lack of staff, 54% lack of medical supplies and 46% lack of medical equipment; 3**-** Accessibility**:** in the report the accessibility of 1256 units is investigated in which 220(18%) are partially accessible and the major cause of inaccessibility is physical**.**

Noman (2023) believes that primary health care is improving in Balochistan, but it has still challenges at infrastructure, human resource, finance, and accessibility levels, which need evidence-based policy making, community engagement and empowerment, sustainable finances, as well as sustained and durable financial support (Noman, 2023). According to Participant 10 (2025), “doctors serving in the field face numerous hurdles in serving the people due to the centralisation of powers.” They further explained that the doctors are not provided with the logistics and medicines on time, and there is another issue that even the available medicine is not usable in the given locality. Medications that are usable in hot areas are sent to cold regions and the vice versa. As in the views of P-11:

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> "The centralised system of transfer posting and budgeting is severely impacting the service delivery in the Department of Health, and due to this very fact, we are unable to overcome the declining indicators."

Altogether, the findings reveal that the centralization of powers impacts governance performance and service delivery in multiple ways. For example, the data show that a centralised mechanism for medicine procurement is often problematic because, most of the time, medicines are purchased and sent to hospitals, but they are not suitable for that locality. This results in wastage of money and compromises the healthcare of the people. The same is true for centralized transfer and posting, which has severely affected service delivery in the health department. An unfortunate aspect of these chaotic circumstances is that the provincial-level political and bureaucratic leadership are aware of the importance of decentralization, and they also know that, according to the 18th Amendment, both fiscal and administrative powers should be decentralized to the local level. yet they couldn't develop a consensus to decentralize the power to district level for better governance performance in the health sector.

4.1.4. DISCUSSIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the impacts of elite capture and apathy to decentralization in education and health in Balochistan. The data findings of this research study provided a significant insight into the complexities of governance in the education and health sectors that were caused by elite capture and apathy to decentralisation of powers. To better understand the data findings of this study, the data findings are interpreted within the theoretical framework of Consociational democracy; specifically, its lens of elite consensus is used to analyze the findings. The province of Balochistan is ethnically diverse and its political system is based on politics of ethnicity so the concentration of powers not only complicates the governance but also disturbs the of equity among various ethnic groups which is a serious threat social cohesion. So the consociational aspect of grand coalition and elite consensus can better resolve the governance issues by agreeing on the dispersion of powers to the local level and making the decision-making more inclusive by engaging various stakeholders in the distribution of powers and resources.

The discussion demonstrates that elite capture is a hurdle to the decentralisation of powers in public sectors in Balochistan. The outcomes of the findings can be better understood through the lens of grand coalition and elite consensus at the provincial level, as the findings revealed that the central level leadership know the importance of decentralisation of powers, yet they are not ready to decentralise them. So the elite consensus can better resolve the governance crisis posed by the centralisation of powers.

The discussion also includes that true decentralisation is not implemented in the education sector despite the fact that in several education sector plans, the importance of decentralisation is endorsed, and it is decided to implement it for the better outcomes in the education sector. The lens of elite consensus guides the study that elite capture is complicating the governance in the education sector in the form of service delivery, overcoming dropout children and control on illiteracy. In fact, the political and bureaucratic elites at the provincial level have not yet reached an agreement to decentralise the powers to the local level despite the 18TH Amendment and the Supreme Court direction about decentralisation of power from the federal to the provincial level and from the provincial level to the local level.

The discussions furthermore reveal that there are governance issues in the health department of Balochistan due to elite capture and a lack of decentralisation. The centralised procurement, centralised transfer-posting and even if some powers are decentralised, they are given to the district administration instead of the department. So the consociational aspect of the grand coalition and elite consensus at the provincial level will be helpful to understand the governance crisis in the department and resolve the governance complications accordingly.

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In a nutshell, it can safely be inferred in the light of data results and analysis that elite capture and apathy to decentralisation are severely impacting the governance in the social sectors of education and health in Balochistan. Although the authorities both political and administrative at provincial level know the importance and outcome of decentralization of powers in education and health sector in Balochistan, yet the powers, both administrative and fiscal, have been kept centralized. Although there is partial decentralization in both the sectors but that is actually meant seeking legitimacy both national and international level rather than genuine service purposes. So the situation calls for genuine consensus among elite for genuine consensus so as to properly institutionalize decentralization to overcome the governance crises in education and health in Balochistan.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the effects of elite capture and apathy on decentralisation in the social sectors of education and health in Balochistan. The study was specifically aimed at investigating the governance challenges that were posed by elite capture and aimed to disperse the powers to the local level in the departments of education and health in Balochistan. The data results and discussion revealed that elite capture and apathy to decentralisation of powers are severely affecting the governance performances, like service delivery, literacy and primary healthcare, overcoming dropout children, equitable distribution of resources through services and public sector development in the department of education and health department in Balochistan. The study results and discussion also have a link with the theoretical framework of consociationalism, specifically its aspect of grand coalition and elite consensus in the ethnically diverse province of Balochistan. It is because the centralisation of powers in ethnically Balochistan not only impacts the governance in the education and health departments but also damages the social trust and social cohesion in the province.

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