Education under the municipal administration in Pakistan

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Abstract
The elementary education system in Pakistan is fragmented into state controlled, municipal, and private education. The first is over-controlled under the hierarchical structure, without any system of accountability or democratic control and is subject to political intervention. In urban areas, elementary education is totally left to the municipalities. Owing to their multi-purpose nature, lack of clarity in the local government laws, and absence of central discipline and administrative control, the real interest of education could never be guaranteed among the municipalities. The political and administrative elite are fulfilling their educational needs from private sector, which is expanding speedily under the auspices of the government. Practically, State and Municipal education is left only to the poor people, who have no say in society. In such circumstances the only option is the establishment of the “education authorities” at division, district or the local level. This step will ensure the involvement of the related interests in planning, administration and maintenance of the educational institutions. It will also enhance a sense of participation and accountability among the educational community and equip the system with local knowledge.

Introduction
Primary and secondary education is usually managed locally in most countries, either through municipalities, i.e. multipurpose urban local government institutions, or through elected local education boards as special purpose districts. The reason is that this level of education can be handled properly only with the help of local knowledge as well as a deep co-operation and involvement of the parents and the local representatives. Whatever arrangements a state prefers for the local delivery of education, it must contain three elements: the local knowledge and interest, which is essential to make the system responsive towards the local needs; representation and participation of the related interests, especially the parents to ensure the accountability in the system, which is necessary for a better output; and the general guidance and supervision from the centre which, on one hand, confines the local variations and disparities and, on the other hand, keep the local education in line with the national needs and priorities. These elements all together are helpful in making the system subject to necessary checks and balances. For a long time before partition, since the period of British India, the municipalities in the urban areas of Pakistan have been performing the responsibility of elementary education. The purpose of this article is to look into the functioning and the management of the municipal education in Pakistan with reference of the above mentioned elements, and look for the alternatives for a better delivery of education at municipal level.

This study covers only the municipalities of the Punjab, the largest province of Pakistan. The situation in the other provinces is not different because of similarities of the local government and administrative systems of all the four provinces of the country. Local government of Pakistan and municipal education, both areas of research, never could attract any attention of the researchers and writers, hence the literature in this field is very scarce. This article, therefore, is based mostly on the information collected through personal observation, official records of the municipality under study and its schools, and the interviews of the related persons by the author in connection with his PhD thesis (Choudhry, 1996).

Responsibility for education
In British India municipal authorities were given the responsibility of primary and secondary education in urban areas for a long time. In certain areas, however, local education boards, consisting of elected representatives, were established under the control of central or provincial education departments. After partition, the Government of Pakistan abolished all the local education boards and handed over responsibility to the department of education and the municipalities in rural and urban areas respectively. The rural local government in Pakistan was relieved from this responsibility. In East Pakistan and Sind elected local education boards were abolished. However, the municipalities in the urban areas continued to perform this function today.

The development of local government in Pakistan suffered badly from the political instability, high level bureaucratic-military intrigues, specific social setup and the power struggle at central and provincial level. All these factors together affected not only the local government institutions, but also the services they were providing. As a result local government institutions could never get recognition and earn respect as public service delivery bodies. Rather, they are known as political instruments of non-representative regimes for providing them legitimacy and political support. The central
control over local authorities remained focused on administrative and political aspects, and never bothered about the quality of the services they provided. Short-term political and representative regimes never could show any soft corner towards the local government institutions because of their centralist tendencies and weak party organizations at the local levels. The development of local government has been very uneven and uncertain. During the half century of independence in Pakistan, there are only 27 years (1959 to 1968, 1979 to 1993, and 1997 to 1998) during which the local bodies worked under the elected councils. In the remaining period these institutions were run by the centrally appointed administrators without elected councils. Local government was an additional assignment of these administrators with heavy responsibilities of law and order and revenue collection. These administrators had always been subject to frequent transfers, hence could never get attached with the area and equip with the knowledge of local problems. As a result they could hardly pay any attention to the municipal services to be delivered to the public at a local level. In the absence of representative and genuinely local leadership it was hard to assess the local needs and respond accordingly.

Vaguely defined functions of multi-functional local authorities made the state of affairs at local level worse. Various local government Acts have been operative in Punjab and other provinces at different times. All of them contain provisions assigning elementary education as a compulsory function of the municipalities in the urban areas. However, none of them contains any such provision which could make it compulsory for the councils to give due attention to the vital functions like education.

Such a situation was not conducive to generating genuine interest among the councillors towards education. The elected municipal committees or councils preferred to discuss other matters in their meetings. A lack of interest among the chairman and the elected municipal councillors was found during a study of the official record of the meetings of the Municipal Committee, Mian Channu. The average number of meetings per year during the period 1990 to 1993 was ten. This includes all the three type of meetings, i.e. emergency, special, and ordinary[1]. The maximum duration of these meetings was found to be about one hour and 25 minutes, while the average number of the members attending meetings was 18 out of 25 members. The main issues raised by the opposition in the House during these meetings were found to be the construction of roads, streets, allocation of contracts for the developmental and construction work. The reason for this priority is probably because such matters have immediate impact on the electoral support for the councillors in their respective constituencies. Performance in the policy area of education does not yield any tangible political benefits for them. No councillor in the area was found who had any personal interest in elementary education, as they mainly depended on private education. Hence, educational issues were seldom touched on by the members. An education committee does not even exist in most of the municipalities because there is no such binding requirement imposed by the existing local government laws. In such a situation, the municipal education system runs without any proper planning or control. No check is made by the government or the local representatives. As a result, the allocation of resources to the schools does not coincide with their needs. Table I indicates the lack of balance between the needs and the available facilities in the schools.

Within a small town of 90,000 population and having only 12 primary schools, such a variation in the pupil/teacher ratio and lack of balance between the needs and resources suggest the height of mismanagement and lack of planning. One of the municipal primary schools, situated very close to the Town Hall and falling in the electoral constituency of the then Chief Minister Punjab, when visited, was found with only a single toilet in common use by both teachers and pupils. The headteacher of the school reported that if the municipal committee had taken an interest in the school’s affairs, they could have get the toilets built free of cost by the municipal contractors for construction[2]. The situation in other municipal schools was not found to be different. Such a situation shows lack of knowledge of, as well as lack of interest in, this policy sector of maximum public expenditure.

Another reason for lack of interest among the councillors and other officials of the local authorities is the fact that most of them have opted totally for private education for their children. The physical conditions, structure, as well as the educational standard of the private institutions is far better than those maintained by the government or municipalities. Hence people usually feel proud to send their children to these schools, if their financial resources allow them. During this study a survey was conducted among the staff of Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan and found that almost 100 per cent of the academic staff and administrative officers...
send their children of primary-school age to private schools. This percentage, however, comes down to 90 per cent at secondary education level. During this research it was found that all the officers in the Education Department of the Government of the Punjab from district to the provincial level, and all the councillors of the Municipal Committee Mian-Channu had also chosen private schools for their children[3]. The boom in private educational institutions has diminished state education only for poor people. They have neither the capacity to adopt private education, nor any potential to reform the present deteriorating system of state education. Influential persons, who have the capacity or power to influence and advocate the improvement of state education have opted totally for private education. Here the question arises as to what the government is going to do with state education. It is certainly not possible to totally replace state institutions with private institutions, as the socio-economic condition of the general public does not allow this step. At the moment, state education is left to only poor people. Its condition could be improved by the involvement of people with a direct personal interest in this area.

**Direct personal interest**

Other essential factors for a viable and effective system of delivery of education at elementary level is the involvement of parents and other related interests in the management of schools. In pre-partition India, such efforts are seen only in a few areas which were the main business centres of the British people living over there. In Madras, for example, a separate body called District Education Council, was established for each district. This body, which consists of a few nominees of the governor-in-council and a majority elected by school managements and by local bodies (UK Government, 1929), presents a basic form of the school districts or local education authorities. Similarly, in Maharashtra elected municipal education boards and district education boards manage the primary education in urban and rural areas respectively (Bhattacharya, 1972).

After the creation of Pakistan various enquiry commissions and committees on education formulated by the Government had proposed democratizing the education system by giving representation to the concerned persons and groups but no concrete effort could be made in this regard. Most of these recommendations were incomplete as well as ineffective. In 1958 the government constituted a “Commission on national education”. Submitting its report in 1959, it recommended establishing education committees at district levels and “Primary education committees” at union level but without any meaningful representation to the parents or teachers.

Between 1969 to 1979 there was a ten year period when, without elected local councils, the urban and rural local government units functioned under the appointed administrators. In the municipalities the primary and secondary schools continued their functioning. There was not any visible change in the local government structure. It was a transitional period of the military government determined to hold the first general elections of the country. During this government, Air Marshal Nur Khan took over the portfolio of education and floated proposals for a new education policy in 1969. His main emphases were to integrate primary and middle schools into elementary education, decentralize educational administration and establish governing bodies in all educational institutions, with representation of the parents and the teachers in these bodies. All appointments of teachers should be made, and their terms of service and accelerated increments be decided by these bodies (Government of Pakistan, 1969).

The most important and innovative idea for decentralization and democratization of educational administration was to establish autonomous “District school authorities” in every district with a well represented membership of the community, managerial and technical interests, derived from parents, teachers, laymen, and governmental officials. Full financial powers were recommended for such bodies (Government of Pakistan, 1969). The authorities were proposed to consist of three to five members, including a chairman

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Number of pupils</th>
<th>Number of teachers</th>
<th>Pupils per teacher</th>
<th>Number of rooms</th>
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<td>650</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
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<td>550</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>MC Primary, Faisal Town</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>MC Primary, Saudabad</td>
<td>556</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC Primary School No.3</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC Primary, Mahabad</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Official record of the municipal committee Mian Channu and personal observation
"appointed" by the provincial government and the representatives of the headmasters, elected among themselves. For guidance and feedback to these authorities, there was to be a standing “advisory body”, comprised of the senior officers of the district, the representatives of the parents, teachers, and other respectable citizens interested in education, to be nominated by the government. The powers of these bodies were explicitly mentioned by their authors. These were:

- preparation of development plans;
- administration of all schools which at that time were being administered privately or by local bodies;
- grant of recognition and financial assistance to the private schools;
- appointment of headmasters and administration of district education fund, to which all receipts from fees, government grants, contribution from local bodies and donations from public were to be credited.

At the provincial level, it was proposed to establish a separate directorate of school education, headed by a director general. In addition there was to be an Inspectorate at provincial level, without any direct administrative control over the schools. They should carry out periodic inspection and report their findings to the district school authorities.

Nur Khan’s proposals could have been a good start towards the democratization and decentralization of the system if they had been adopted properly. Being a blend of central guidance and local autonomy it was very close to the British system of education. These proposals were different from those which were given earlier by “The high powered committee on the delegation of more powers to basic democracies” in 1967 or National Education Commission 1959 in the following respects.

- No role of deputy commissioners was proposed in such authorities. Hence, they were free from the domination of the bureaucracy. Even the educational service structure was asked to be separated from the general administrative hierarchy by creating an independent structure.
- In the initial stage, the appointed chairman was a full-time job. However, it could have been replaced at some later time by an elected one, if those bodies were to mature.
- These committees were also isolated from local politics because no representation was given to the local bodies.
- These bodies were proposed to be “statutory”, with autonomous powers, established through a piece of legislation, whose draft was also included in the document.
- The inspectorate proposed was to be without any administrative control, directly responsible to the provincial government, and to submit their findings to the district education authorities. Under this arrangement, it was more conducive for them to work independently.
- The proposed authorities were more powerful than those suggested earlier. They were supplemented by the governing bodies of the individual institutions (with authority to appoint the teaching staff) to share the responsibilities with them.

These proposals were challenging to the existing structure of the education system, inherited from British India, under the monopoly of bureaucrats in collaboration with professionals and technocrats of the education department of the government. Such proposals were not initiated from the existing hierarchy of the department, neither had they any political support from the outside. Hence they could not get essential backing for implementation.

Shortly after these proposals had been framed and circulated to the educationists of the country to enlist their views, Nur Khan was removed from the centre and asked to take over as the Governor of the Punjab. On his removal from the centre, the enthusiasm for revising and framing a new education policy also died (Iqbal, 1981). However, on the basis of these proposals the government issued “The new education policy” in March 1970 (Government of Pakistan, 1970). It contains some of the proposals made by Nur Khan but as implementation was left at the discretion of the provinces, it failed to be adopted properly. The main hindrance was again a turmoil in national politics due to the general elections held in April 1970 which resulted in the civil war in the East wing of the country and in turn led to the separation of East Pakistan.

The All Pakistan Local Bodies Commission, formulated in 1981 to reform the local government system, suggested the establishment of the “competent education authority” at district level. It was proposed that “the chairman of the district council and the district education officer respectively may be the president and the secretary of the authority” (Government of Pakistan, 1982). Local councillors and parents were recommended to be included in the authority. However no concrete administrative powers were recommended for such an authority. Had it been established, it would have been
more like an advisory body than an executive authority.

The idea of establishing a District Education Authority in each district is given in the present government as National Education Policy 1998-2010 (Government of Pakistan, 1998) but it seems ridiculous that these authorities are to be chaired by the deputy commissioners of the districts, the bureaucrats already overburdened by their regulatory responsibilities of revenue collection and keeping law and order situation in their respective districts. On the other hand the chairmen of the district councils (elected) are just to be the members of such authorities. The major field work will be undertaken by the district education officers (DEOs), male and female at the district level (Government of Pakistan, 1998, p. 149). No role for parents is specified in such bodies. It is not clear whether the schools under municipal committees/corporations will fall under the jurisdiction of these committees. Government is also planning to establish “School management Committees” in the schools. Each committee is to be composed of five supervisors, two retired government servants, a headmaster, one teacher, and one experienced lady teacher. The parents of the enrolled students of the concerned schools are given the right of vote (The Daily Jang, 1999). All the associations of the teachers strongly oppose this very idea, pretending that it amounts to handing over the management of schools to illiterate or semi-literate people, having no skill or interest in the education system. They express fear that these committees will make the schools centres of political activities (The Daily Jang, 1999; the Daily Din, 1999a). However, the Minister of Education of the Punjab Mr Dhillon expressed determination to establish the management committees in the educational institutions despite the opposition of the teachers (Daily Din, 1999b). However, the composition and functions and powers of these committees are not very clear. Neither are they given any protection through any act of legislation. Hence their future is very uncertain. These proposals of such authorities or committees seem like echoes of the similar proposals previously floated by various governments in 1959, 1969, 1970, 1972, etc. Absence of any role of the parents and teachers in the management of educational system under municipalities has left the state of affairs at the mercy of councillors or a few clerks sitting in the town halls. None of them have any personal interest or attachment with these unfortunate schools. The only remedy left is the command of the central or provincial departments to ensure quality control in the municipal schools.

### Central/provincial developments and quality control

To run such an important national service effectively at local level, the importance of central guidance and supervision cannot be denied. Historical background of local government system in sub-continent India Pakistan indicates that education was handed over to it at very initial stage. At that stage, both education and local government system were in very primitive form. Local bodies in rural and urban areas were given the responsibility of delivery of elementary education on the recommendation of various enquiry commissions. However, total control and guidance from the central government remained dominated in the early period. The educational budget of local bodies was to be approved by the department of education of the government (UK Government, 1908). Through a gradual process of Indianization, the provincial autonomy was enhanced and the representative institutions gained powers, especially after the constitutional reforms of 1919. This resulted in the loss of central government’s interest in the subject of education while it could hardly be improved under local and provincial control. Despite the expansion of educational institutions, the quality and efficiency of the education system remained extremely poor. The main reason for this, as highlighted by Nurullah and Naik (1964) and Simon Commission Report (UK Government, 1908a), was the sudden cessation of financial and technical assistance from the central government. Tinker (1968) and Saqib (1983) comment that district boards and municipalities, with their atmosphere of local personalities, were probably not the right units for managing this vital service. Some alternative form of authority, able to command the services of the persons qualified to understand the problems of education had yet to be found. The Hartog Committee was also of the opinion that, in the interests of primary education, it was absolutely essential to strengthen the position of the department and to transfer some of the powers that had been devolved to local authorities in recent years (UK Government, 1930b).

Control from the central or provincial capital can be of different types. One way of control of the delivery of services at municipal authorities is that the rules of the business and the quality of the services to be provided should be defined very clearly and
with all the details, as is the case of UK (Choudhry, 1996). In this connection detailed legislation for the provision of the services by the local government authorities is needed. Such legislation would definitely reduce the discretion of the bureaucratic officers as well as the negligence of the elected local representatives towards vital national services such as education.

The Local Government Ordinances implemented in Pakistan mention the education service (like other services) in a very general way without giving the details and laying down procedural matters. On the other hand, in the British system of local government, the minute details regarding the functioning of the system are provided. For example, in the case of education, the county councils are categorically declared as Local Education Authorities. Each of the counties is bound to formulate different subject committees, including the education committee. The composition of the education committee, like other committees, is also defined in the Local Government Act. Though such detailed bindings for the local authorities in the UK have always been subject to the criticism of various authors (Griffith, 1966; Regan, 1977), they played an important role in the provision of various services to the community throughout the country maintaining a uniform standard determined by the central government.

The other level for control and supervision of the municipal services in the country is establishment of effective liaison between the local authorities and the service departments at national or provincial level. Such a relationship can be a channel to keep the local authorities accountable and responsible in performance of their duties.

Official communications between the municipal committees and the departments of provincial government (Table II) indicate the scarcity of policy or programme oriented links between the two levels. Most of the letters and circulars received from the government were of a very general nature, dealing only with the financial or administrative matters, or the terms and conditions of the employees of the municipal committee, although one or two circulars were related to some financial grant (a very small amount) for education in the municipality, or the duties of the teachers at municipal schools on polling stations during the National Elections. Nothing is found in these circulars related to the quality of education or about the facilities required to be available in the schools.

As far as direct links between the municipal schools and the department of education are concerned, no significant communication is found. Apparently, the locally stationed assistant education officer (AEO), who is the government servant, has the duty to look after the municipal schools, in addition to his/her primary duty to supervise the administration of government schools of the area. However, he is not bound to submit any report regarding the performance of these schools. The headteachers, when interviewed, maintained that the AEO had a very nominal role in the municipal schools. Most of the schools reported that the AEO had never visited them. The AEO, while confirming this fact, said that his superiors are not very concerned about the municipal schools. As they had no authority over these schools, it was useless for them to make any inspection or interference. Hence in practice, the municipal schools do not fall within the jurisdiction of the education department’s field officers. Under the present circumstances it seems that the educational institutions under municipalities are running without any mechanism of quality control. The interesting point is that each municipality is bound to be inspected at least once in a year by officers appointed by the government (Government of Punjab, 1979). During a study of those inspection reports, nothing was found suggesting any improvement in the quality of the services (Choudhry, 1996).

The education system of Pakistan, especially elementary education, is horizontally fragmented into private, government and municipal schools. The intensity of the hierarchical control over these segments of the system varies significantly. The state system of education in “government elementary schools” is under tight administrative control, but without any public accountability. However, this state of affairs gives way to interference from influential political elements (4). The education system in the municipalities seems to be totally ignored by the responsible persons in this field and is detached from the system in the rest of the country. This system apparently provides some sort of public accountability through the local elected representatives, responsible

| Table II |
| Communication between the government and the municipal committee of Mian Channu (Punjab, Pakistan) |

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<td>405</td>
<td>473</td>
<td>463</td>
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<tr>
<td>Circulars related to education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Circulars from the department of education</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
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Sources: Official documents of the municipal committee of Mian-Channu
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...to the public. However, despite intensive efforts of the pre-partition regime, a strong tradition of acting as local education authorities in the local government, which is the British tradition, has persisted but could not be strengthened. The reason is that local government could not attain stability and the level of maturity necessary to handle such a vital function as education. The success of British local government in the provision of education and in establishing its influence as local education authorities is mainly due to the central control and guidance, which is unknown in the case of Pakistan’s local government.

Conclusion

Pakistan has been subject to various experiments in the field of education in the past. Despite all the efforts made during the period of British India and that of post independence, a literacy rate could not be achieved beyond 30 per cent. Along with quantity, the quality of education is not encouraging. Earlier, efforts had been made to make the local government responsible for the provision of primary education on the pattern of British system. But during this period, neither education system was developed enough to be handled by the local authorities, nor were the local authorities mature enough to perform this sensitive responsibility. Different frustrated efforts made in this direction failed to yield any positive results.

It seems that the idea of devolution of powers was premature at that time. Political changes in the country caused the transfer of responsibility for education down towards provinces and the local bodies, which in turn deprived the education system of the central control, guidance and support, essential for its development. Concentration of the political leadership on the high politics of independence badly affected not only local government, but the delivery of services assigned to these institutions as well.

After independence, primary education in Punjab remained under such a local government which was totally controlled by the bureaucracy (generalists). The professionals had hardly any role in this system. Whenever efforts were made to reform the system, resistance came from the bureaucracy. Different commissions of enquiry were formulated from time to time but their reports were never implemented by the government sincerely. The real initiating force behind all of the changes were political objectives. Most of the moves by the government were taken hurriedly, without any consultation, and outside of the proper forum, i.e. Parliament.

The elementary education system in the Punjab is actually fragmented into state controlled, municipal, and private education. The first is over-controlled under the hierarchical structure, without any system of accountability or democratic control and is subject to political intervention. This intervention results in the form of political transfers, appointments, and promotions. This feature is so deeply rooted in society, and accepted by the political parties, that it is difficult to eradicate it without developing any effective mechanism against it. In urban areas, elementary education is totally left to the discretion of the municipalities. Due to their multi-purpose nature, lack of clarity in the local government laws, and absence of central discipline and administrative control, the real interest of education could never be guaranteed among the municipalities. The political and administrative elite are fulfilling their educational needs from private sector, which is expanding speedily under the auspices of the government. Practically, state and municipal education is left to the poor people, who have no say in society.

In such circumstances, there are different options facing the government. Handing over the elementary education to the local government, as desired by the government from time to time, is impracticable because of overwhelming opposition from the concerned community and the record of previous failures. Merging municipal schools into the state system of schools does not offer any solution as the department of education already is subject to political interventions. This sector shows an even worse performance. The third option is the establishment of the “education authorities” at division, district or local level. This option is also not problem free. The teaching community and other related interests express their doubts about its success. However, if the necessary measures are taken, this experiment can be successful. The essential issue is to ensure the involvement of related interests in the planning, administration and maintenance of the educational institutions. Without creating a sense of participation and accountability, no system can be successful. One of the reasons for the failure of the state and municipal education system is the lack of personal interest among the persons responsible for running it.

Notes

1 Special meetings are those which are convened for some specific purpose. In such
meetings, no other issue can be raised. Hence the “ordinary meetings” provide maximum scope for the members to raise all those issues which they feel important.

2 In Pakistan all the construction work in the governmental institutions, including local government, is contracted out to the private contractors.

3 However, for college education the priorities are totally for the public sector institutions because private college education is still very rare. Government colleges are considered better than private because most of the prestigious private colleges, run by foreign missionaries, were nationalised by the Bhutto government in 1972.

4 However, such interference remains confined to the appointments, transfers, and promotions of the staff. They are never concerned about the quality of the standards of the institutions.

References


