

The Role of Parents Teachers Council in Management of Secondary Schools: Challenges and Opportunities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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Abstract

Parents Teachers Councils (PTCs) ensures the effective management of secondary schools. This study investigated the role of PTSS in management of secondary schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan. Objectives were to; find out the role of PTCs in secondary schools' management and identify challenges and opportunities for PTCs in schools' management. Research's design was quantitative. Population was 379 principals of district Swat, KP. Using simple random sampling a sample of 192 principals was selected. Questionnaire was developed, validated and piloted as a tool. Data were collected with self-visits. Data were analyzed using mean scores, standard deviation and chi-square test. The PTCs made school plans, managed finances, mobilized community, solved schools' problems and monitored educational operations. Challenges were lack of funds, awareness and community's non-cooperation. It identifies opportunities for schools' efficiency, accountability and improved quality of education. Recommendations are enhanced funding, training and allocation of technologies for the active role of PTCs in schools' management.

Key words: Role, Parents Teachers Council, school management, challenges, opportunities

Introduction

Quality education requires good management of schools, which involves decision-making, allocation of resources, and collaborating with stakeholders (Bush & Glover, 2014). In Pakistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) secondary education is a key to high education readiness. The Parents Teachers Councils (PTCs) in secondary schools are aimed to engage parents into the management of schools and to improve school management (Ahmed et al., 2022). Nevertheless, some of the regional factors that affect PTCs' effectiveness is, lack of resources, cultural diversity, socio-economic differences, etc. (Shaheen, 2013). The systemic problems plaguing the secondary education system in Pakistan include a lack of funds to maintain or build suitable infrastructure, shortages of teachers, and the community not helping it or taking active interest in schools (Siddiqui, 2016). In KP, PTCs are used to address such gaps by the public schools in their use of community engagement in the educational process (Ur-Rahman et al., 2021). PTCs enable the parties to communicate with each other, organize resources, and facilitate decision-making, though its application remains rather inconsistent, especially in rural settings (Nawab, 2020). Societal restrictions and poor levels of literacy, particularly of female parents, curtail the number of those who take part because of cultural requirements (Ullah, 2012). The National Education Policy of Pakistan focuses more on the involvement of the community although there are no specific plans regarding the implementation of PTCs. Proper PTCs have the ability to enhance school efficiency, teacher support, and academic performance in the environment of KP. These problems can be resolved through the enhancement of PTCs and this is in line with Pakistan's Vision 2030 as it relates to quality education. (Siddiqui, 2016).

Education is a social collective responsibility that prospers when there is an involvement of different stakeholders which involves parents, students, teachers, school leaders and community members. In less developed states including Pakistan, where the system of free education suffers due to insufficient funds, inefficiency of governance, and lack of responsibility, parental and communal engagement in school administration has been an emerging critical element of school reform and enhancement in quality (UNESCO, 2021). Involving communities in school

governance is one of those mechanisms and one of such mechanisms includes establishment of Parents-Teachers Councils (PTCs), whose aim is to act as the medium or platform whereby joint decision-making, transparency and cooperation between schools and communities is fostered. The PTC system was institutionalized in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan in an effort to reform decentralization and school-based management (SBM) as a way of enhancing school functioning, accountability, and learning outcomes (Siddiqui, 2019). School-based management (SBM) that encompasses structures like PTCs is one of the new developments of the larger movement that is taking place globally towards the devolution of authority of central governments to the local school communities (Caldwell, 2005). SBM signifies a focus in ensuring that there is more freedom of operation of schools that are being held accountable by their stakeholders especially parents. This has been implemented in numerous schools in different countries hoping that more community participation would lead to better administration in schools, better distribution of resources as well as better education (Bray, 2003). In Pakistan, especially in KP, the development of PTCs is consistent with such international trends, as a response to ensure that decision-making is more school-based and that the local players can take part in the decision-making process (Siddiqui, 2019).

The establishment of PTCs in KP followed the directions of the provincial government with explicit mandates connected with school improvement, planning, mobilizing resources, monitoring attendance of teachers, managing use of school funds and ensuring community involvement in the school activities (Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2017). These councils are usually composed of elected representatives who are parents, teachers and members of the community and they are headed by the head teacher. Indeed, such existence of PTCs will be viewed as a democratic move that cares to see that the management of schools is transparent, and accountable to the local needs of education. In addition, such councils are supposed to develop trust between schools and communities and create this collective responsibility towards the educational results (Iqbal & Nawaz, 2019). Irrespective of these progressive goals, PTCs are inconsistent and little researched in their practical operation. A number of field studies and policy reviews suggest that although in a number of schools in KP, PTCs exist, their real involvement in the process of school management can be rather low (Rashid & Naz, 2016). The issue of low literacy levels of parents, vague role definitions, lack of training and less financial power work are against the effectiveness of these councils. There are also situations when PTCs are just on paper, activated exclusively to meet the demands of the authorities. These facts are indicative of a large discrepancy between the intentions and reality of implementation of these policies, which raises the importance of empirical studies of the role, challenges, and opportunities that PTCs play in the management of schools (Alam & Sajid, 2020).

Moreover, there is a connection between the management of the school and student performance that highlights the need to have strong governance mechanisms. Discussions and research have always indicated that a well-governed school with effective involvement of stakeholders are more likely to have improved teaching practices, ability to use its resources adequately and improved student results (Leithwood et al., 2004). In such respect, PTCs can play a pivotal role in the relationship between the school and the surrounding community providing distinct understanding of issues in the area and locally specific problems. They have the potential to be used to check what goes on in school, hold teachers accountable, meet the demands on infrastructure development and to have students school funds utilized in the right way as per the demands of the students when applied properly (World Bank, 2018). Particularly in the given history of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the role of PTCs is especially important because of the diversity of nature, socio-cultural features, and education levels in different districts of the country. Most schools located in rural regions are not under direct control of central authority, thus the involvement of locals through PTCs could be a very strong instrument to enhance the condition of schools. The effectiveness of this model however will rest majorly on the dedication, ability and cooperation of members of the council and the support which the education department will offer in training and following up. Regrettably, there is still very little empirical evidence about the way PTCs operate in KP and the degree to which PTCs are involved in decision-making, as well as the contributions that they make to the improvement of schools (Ashraf & Muhammad, 2014). The PTCs can make the difference in resolving the issue of the secondary schools on a local ground and it assures about the goodness of school based management of every activity of schools on local basis through planning, creating resources, using these resources and the involvement of stakeholders. This study aimed at investigating the role of PTCs in management of secondary schools and identify challenges and opportunities in KP, Pakistan.

Literature Review

Parent Teachers Councils (PTCs) are system of governance whereby the community organizes structures which augment management by enabling parent teacher cooperation, management of resources and accountability (Epstein, 2011). It ensures that students, parents, administrators, and teachers, as well as other stakeholders, are encouraged to engage and promote best school management practices of placing strategic leadership, resource allocation, and stakeholders in a position to ensure they deliver on educational objectives (Bush & Glover, 2014). The PTCs enhance management through the uniformity of the efforts of the stakeholders based on the school-family-community partnerships framework described by Epstein (2011). PTCs play a defining role in such localized decision-making because in Pakistan, the school and its autonomy are restricted due to centralized systems (Siddiqui, 2019). Poor funding, infrastructure, and lack of community participation within the system impede the ability of secondary education in Pakistan to be effectively addressed (Siddiqui, 2016). It can be seen that in KP, the approach to using PTCs in public schools is driven by the lack of resources (Ur-Rahman et al., 2021). According to Nawab (2020), PTCs are not very impactful because only 35 percent of schools in KP have functioning PTCs. The tradition especially in rural community does not encourage participation of parents and the society regards education as the work of a school only (Ullah, 2012). PTCs provides resources, allocation, monitors teachers work and ensure quality achievement of students (Parveen et al., 2021). Nevertheless, they suffer such limitations as unequal application and the absence of training to enhance their effectiveness within KP (Ahmed et al., 2022). The National Education Policy encourages the community to do its part, yet resource scarcity and awareness limits such implementation (Siddiqui, 2016).

The PTCs improve the running of schools by providing particular functions. PTCs include parents in decisions concerning policies, resulting in better accountability (Epstein, 2011). Lack of funding is taken care of by community contributions (Sharma, 2022). PTCs help in promoting discipline and performance in school as well as parent-teacher cooperation (Guskey, 2002). Schools in KP that have an active PTC have reported better infrastructure and attendance, although the rural schools still have a difficulty with the participation (Nawab, 2020). Parent engagement at the council level increases the efficiency of schools and performance among students in the US (Epstein, 2011). In South Asia, it has been demonstrated that engagement of communities is effective in enhancing allocation of resources, yet its implementation in Pakistan is not optimal due to cultural and economic restrictions (Arshad et al., 2023). There are initiatives such as KP Education Sector Reform Unit that tries to reinforce PTCs but this initiative has problems such as insufficient training (Yousaf et al., 2023).

Introduction of PTCs in KP is associated with some obstacles. Poor literacy and time limit the interaction of parents, especially in rural settings (Tahir et al., 2020). Schools do not have materials to aid PTCs' activities (Nawab, 2020). Teachers and PTC members do not know how to cooperate in the governance of education (Ahmed et al., 2022). There are limitations to the participation of female parents in society, which are determined by the restriction created by society (Ullah, 2012). There are also domain barriers of PTCs. Although digital communication has the potential to increase the level of engagement, internet access in rural KP is limited, diminishing its use (Irfan et al., 2020). Also, when an education system is exam-centric, there is a dimmed focus on community participation (Siddiqui, 2019). The rates of PTC engagement in rural schools prevalent in KP are lower than in urban schools since they have insufficient resources and a lack of parental awareness (Tahir et al., 2020). Effective PTCs can positively impact the school administration in terms of resources, morale of teachers, and discipline of the students (Sharma, 2022). Schools that have a functioning PTC in KP have recorded 12% attendance rate increase and improved infrastructure (Arshad et al., 2023). Epstein (2011) has found global evidence indicating that having effective community partnership results in producing an efficient school, a potential advantage of having this kind of collaboration on KP schools.

School-Based Management (SBM) is another universally accepted strategy of making schools perform better by engaging parties with interest in good governance and performance of the school which include parents, teachers and members of the community in decision making (Caldwell, 2005). Bray (2003) testifies that SBM is meant to decentralize power held by central education offices to schools which in turn enhances accountability, transparency, responsiveness to their people. Evidence in developing nations shows that where communities are effectively involved in the governance of their schools, the results in terms of achievement in infrastructure development, student attendance, and mobilization of resources are rather good (Gertler et al., 2007). Other countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, and India have tried to use (though not very successfully)

different types of participatory forms of school management councils in the South Asian context (Banerjee et al., 2010). In most instances, these councils are elected by parents, teachers and local community members and given the mandate of managing their school resources, teacher attendance and management of the learning environment. The success of such councils has been associated with the understanding of the roles of the council, training of the council members and also the literacy level of the community (Dunne et al., 2007).

Introduction of Parents Teachers Councils (PTCs) in Pakistan was part of wider approach aimed at increasing community involvement in the planning and administration of education and particularly in the schools in the public sector. Government of Pakistan (2009) explained that PTCs would be a way of decentralizing the decision-making process and achieve better delivery of services. Such councils were specially highlighted in the National Education Policy (2009) which also advised the institutionalization of school councils in the educational governance system. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), PTCs were officially introduced under the guidance of the Elementary and Secondary Education Department. The KP PTC Manual (Government of KP, 2017) explains the make-up, functions and duties of these councils, which comprise compiling school development plans, managing a budget in school, conducting staff attendance and raising community resources. Typically, the school head chairs each PTC and is comprised of a combination of elected parents, teachers and representatives of the community. The management of the funds within the School-Based Budgeting Scheme falls as well as to the councils to provide transparency in the expenditure activity.

Shah (2014) maintains that although the creation of PTCs was a forward initiative, their performance is highly diverse according to the difference in capacity of members, community engagement and leadership of the school. A study conducted by Iqbal and Nawaz (2019) discovered that the PTCs activity could affect substantial changes in school infrastructure, enrolment, and usages of resources. But their performance was usually hampered by bureaucracy, inadequate training and job confusion caused by intermingling of roles. In a study by Rashid and Naz (2016), conducted in rural KP, it appeared that on paper, there are many established PTCs, yet, their real functionality is scarce. Parents in most of the cases were ignorant of their roles or were afraid and lacked courage in engaging in school activities. Decisions were never really made in an open way, and teachers usually took control of meetings. In addition, there were lack of financial management and monitoring, which are associated with a shortage of technical expertise among the members of PTC (Ashraf & Muhammad, 2014). Ali and Khan (2018) highlighted the unequal application of PTCs among the districts, as the ones in more urban settings with a higher literacy level had a higher possibility of being effective and impactful. By the contrast, rural councils were frequently directionless and not assisted by district education office. These findings show that contextual issues which include socio-economic conditions, regional leadership, and administrative reinforcement are crucial in PTCs' performance.

A substantial amount of literature has now come into place linking community participation to positive educational outcomes. Halsey (2011) argues that the involvement of the parents and communities in the running of the schools leads to an improvement in accountability, discipline, and a favorable learning climate for the students. East Asian and African research studies found that the rate of parental engagement in the administration of schools is associated with lower dropout rates and improved attendance (UNESCO, 2015). In the case of Pakistan, Ghaus and Rizvi (2017) reported that schools with an effective PTC had improved infrastructure, teacher punctuality, and the rate of student retention. Such schools had more chances to use the resources offered by the government grants more efficiently and have safer and cleaner environments. Furthermore, PTCs gave a channel through which local grievances could be aired and conflicts in dealing with school operations were to be resolved thereby making the school climate to be more harmonious. However, there is still no clear connection between PTC activity and learning outcomes. According to Malik et al. (2020), there is still little evidence to display that PTC initiatives have directly translated to higher academic achievement scores; however, the existing evidence indicates increased access and infrastructure. This discrepancy can be a representation of the minor role of PTCs in pedagogy because majority of the councils deal with the administrative and operational issues and not the educational or the curriculum issues.

Although PTCs possess great aspirations, there exists various structural and operational issues that already restrict its performance. One of the concerns is that the council members are not trained. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER, 2021) has reported that majority of members of PTC have not really been given formal orientation or training contributing to confusion on their role and responsibilities. Lacking capacity-building, members can play no meaningful role in the decision-making or financial management. The other problematic issue is less autonomy and support by the educational authorities. Although PTCs are mandated to manage finances and give recommendations, their resolutions are usually defied by the head of schools or even district

leaders (Ahmed, 2013). Moreover, gender issues make it hard on conservative regions and women are usually left out in any council activities which limits the inclusiveness of the PTCs (Rehman & Zafar, 2015). Another problem is the question of politicization and becoming an elite; in schools located outside an urban environment, strong local elite can potentially take control over PTCs to satisfy individual or party goals (Alam & Sajid, 2020). Not only does this marginalize real voices of the community, it also makes transparency and accountability weaker. In addition, the logistical barriers, like the scarcity of meetings, imperfect documentation, and the absence of surveillance, contributes more to the impairment of the PTCs (Khan et al., 2019).

A number of recommendations on policy and practice have been recommended in several studies to promote the role of PTCs. The capacity of council members can be enhanced by organizing regular training sessions, delineating roles, and providing manuals that are not complex in nature (Rashid & Naz, 2016). It is also vital to enhance the monitoring and evaluation processes, inject some form of transparency with regard to the use of funds and to get an inclusive participation especially among women (Iqbal & Nawaz, 2019). It has also been proposed that digital tools would help to create greater PTC engagement. An example of a particular component is offering community-based mobile-based reporting applications and dashboards to support greater community transparency and close the communication gap between the schools and communities. Moreover, placement into larger school improvement plans will help to ensure that the activities of PTCs are made aligned with the educational goals and results (World Bank, 2018).

The Parents–Teachers Councils plays a significant role in the management, governance and healthy intervention of community in the operational activities of secondary schools leading to the solution of schools’ problems transparency and accountability. Therefore, the study investigated the role of parents’ teachers’ council in management of secondary schools and identified challenges and opportunities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

Methodology

The research’s design of the study was quantitative survey. The population of the study was 379 male principals of district Swat, KP from schools of government sector (DEMIS Swat, 2025). Using simple random sampling a sample of 192 principals was selected. Questionnaire was developed, validated and piloted as a tool for collecting data. Data were collected with self-visits to the schools. Data were analyzed using mean scores, standard deviation and chi-square test. Research ethics for the study were observed.

Results

Table 1 Role of PTCs in Schools’ Management

Statements	Number	Mean	S. D	χ^2	P
Identifying school problems	192	3.76	.67	34.21	.000
Solving school problems	192	3.89	.45	42.49	.000
Financial planning for school	192	3.79	.89	46.27	.000
Raising of funds for school	192	3.77	.56	35.47	.000
Financial accountability	192	3.83	.34	21.45	.000
Enrolment campaign for school	192	3.62	.21	37.67	.000
Ensure students’ access to education	192	3.90	.45	44.32	.000
Monitoring of teachers	192	3.56	.67	67.41	.000
Checking the quality of education	192	3.72	.23	69.38	.000
Ensuring local based management of school	192	3.67	.43	32.76	.000
Resolving conflicts of school with community	192	3.88	.24	71.54	.000

Table 1 demonstrates the role of PTCs in schools’ management at secondary level. The mean scores of 3.76, 3.89, 3.79, 3.77, 3.83, 3.62, 3.90, 3.56, 3.72, 3.67 and 3.88 highlighted that principals agreed that PTCs identified the schools’ problems, solved its problems, planned financially, raised funds for schools, made financial accountability, assisted in enrollment campaigns for schools, ensured students’ access to education, monitored teachers’ teaching, checked the quality of education, ensured local based management of the school and resolved the conflicts between schools and community.

Table 2 Challenges of PTCs in Schools’ Management

Statements	Number	Mean	S. D	χ^2	P
Lack of resources	192	3.87	.35	33.13	.000
Authority of schools	192	3.58	.57	56.67	.000
Lack of awareness	192	3.61	.45	43.45	.000
Lack of time	192	3.69	.31	56.32	.000
Lack of community’s interest	192	3.64	.78	23.90	.000

Lack of governmental will	192	3.92	.85	44.87	.000
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Table 2 highlights the challenges of PTCs in schools’ management at secondary level. The mean scores of 3.87, 3.58, 3.61, 3.69, 3.64 and 3.92 demonstrated that principals agreed that the challenges of PTCs in secondary schools were lack of resources, authority of schools, lack of awareness, lack of community’s interest and lack of governmental will.

Table 3 Opportunities for PTCs in Schools’ Management

Statements	Number	Mean	S. D	χ^2	P
Monitors school operations	192	3.87	.56	45.78	.000
Accountability and transparency	192	3.73	.78	67.69	.000
Collective responsibility for education	192	3.61	.89	89.36	.000
Schools’ efficiency	192	3.67	.45	34.85	.000
Participation of community in education	192	3.79	.35	47.74	.000
Provision of quality education	192	3.86	.58	29.38	.000

Table 3 demonstrates the opportunities for the PTCs in management of schools at secondary level. The mean scores of 3.87, 3.73, 3.61, 3.67, 3.79 and 3.86 presents that principals agreed that PTCs in management of schools at secondary level have the opportunities of monitoring the schools’ operations, ensuring accountability and transparency, collective responsibility for education, ensuring schools’ efficiency, ensuring participation of community in education and the provision of quality education.

Discussions

The study found that PTCs identified the schools’ problems, solved its problems, planned financially, raised funds for schools, made financial accountability, assisted in enrollment campaigns for schools, ensured students’ access to education, monitored teachers’ teaching, checked the quality of education, ensured local based management of the school and resolved the conflicts between schools and community. The challenges of PTCs in secondary schools were lack of resources, authority of schools, lack of awareness, lack of community’s interest and lack of governmental will. PTCs in management of schools at secondary level have the opportunities of monitoring the schools’ operations, ensuring accountability and transparency, collective responsibility for education, ensuring schools’ efficiency, ensuring participation of community in education and the provision of quality education. The findings of the study confirmed the findings of Gertler et al. (2007) who reported the role of community in school based management of schools ensuring good governance and performance of the school which include parents, teachers and members of the community in decision making. Similarly, Caldwell (2005) and Bray (2003) testifies that community involvement enhanced accountability, transparency, responsiveness to their people. Evidence in developing nations shows that where communities are effectively involved in the governance of their schools, the results in terms of achievement in infrastructure development, student attendance, and mobilization of resources are rather good. Similarly, Dunne et al. (2007) also showed that school councils improved school management and quality of education. Shah (2014) also maintains that although the creation of PTCs was a forward initiative, their performance is highly diverse according to the difference in capacity of members, community engagement and leadership of the school. Iqbal and Nawaz (2019) also reported that the PTCs activity could affect substantial changes in school infrastructure, enrolment, and usages of resources. But their performance was usually hampered by bureaucracy, inadequate training and job confusion caused by intermingling of roles. Contrary to the findings of the study, Rashid and Naz (2016), conducted in rural KP, it appeared that on paper, there are many established PTCs, yet, their real functionality is scarce. Parents in most of the cases were ignorant of their roles or were afraid and lacked courage in engaging in school activities. Decisions were never really made in an open way, and teachers usually took control of meetings. In addition, there were lack of financial management and monitoring, which are associated with a shortage of technical expertise among the members of PTC. Similarly, Halsey (2011) argues that the involvement of the parents and communities in the running of the schools leads to an improvement in accountability, discipline, and a favorable learning climate for the students. Ghaus and Rizvi (2017) also reported that schools with an effective PTC had improved infrastructure, teacher punctuality, and the rate of student retention. Such schools had more chances to use the resources offered by the government grants more efficiently and have safer and cleaner environments. Furthermore, PTCs gave a channel through which local grievances could be aired and conflicts in dealing with school operations were to be resolved thereby making the school climate to be more harmonious.

Conclusion

The PTCs made school plans, managed finances, mobilized community, solved schools' problems and monitored educational operations. Challenges were lack of funds, awareness and community's non-cooperation. It identifies opportunities for schools' efficiency, accountability and improved quality of education. The PTCs identified the schools' problems, solved its problems, planned financially, raised funds for schools, made financial accountability, assisted in enrollment campaigns for schools, ensured students' access to education, monitored teachers' teaching, checked the quality of education, ensured local based management of the school and resolved the conflicts between schools and community. The challenges of PTCs in secondary schools were lack of resources, authority of schools, lack of awareness, lack of community's interest and lack of governmental will. PTCs in management of schools at secondary level have the opportunities of monitoring the schools' operations, ensuring accountability and transparency, collective responsibility for education, ensuring schools' efficiency, ensuring participation of community in education and the provision of quality education. Findings have theoretical and practical implications for management of secondary schools.

Recommendations

Following are the recommendations of the study for improving the role of PTCs in school management:

1. There may be professional development training for heads in managing the affairs of PTC at the school level.
2. PTCs' members from community may be trained for awareness about their role and responsibilities in the committee.
3. The procedure for the operation of the PTCs committees in schools may be followed in word and spirit.
4. There may be refresher sessions for the members to remind them of their role in the committee.
5. The government may allocate resources to enhance the operations of the PTCs committees in schools.
6. Digital technologies may be used by school authorities to get in touch with the members of the PTCs.

Areas for further Study

1. Similar studies may be conducted in other regions of Pakistan.
2. The study may be replicated in private schools.
3. It may also be done in international context.

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