In Pursuit of Effectiveness or Goodness: Journey of a School

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of education brought along peculiar shifts in managing it. The marketisation of education moved education from public to private goods, opening it to marketplace competition. The paper presents the journey of a school in a franchise model trying to satisfy different stakeholders. Based on data collected through goggle forms and group interactions with senior management, the principal, and teachers in the School, the paper presents various strategies used by senior management to standardise practices in the School. It presents challenges faced by the principal and the teachers in meeting unrealistic demands to keep the school's reputation and the Management's understanding of learning and achievement. The management has shifted its focus away from managing inputs with a tendency to micromanage administrative details to managing results. Several accounting-based accountability practices have been highlighted, leading to distrust when people feel their autonomy is undermined. The paper raises the distinction between effective and good schools, keeping the goals of education at the forefront. Sustainable improvement cannot be brought about by external agencies implanting transformative reform. Trust in educational systems can be built by raising teachers' professional status, improving school leaders' capacity, and promoting collaboration by building the school as a learning community.

Introduction

In the last few decades, the education sector has rapidly expanded globally. In most countries, disappointment with public education leads to policies variegating provisions and

creating an education market that enables parents to choose and buy education opportunities for their children. As part of a larger movement in all social sectors, marketisation moves education from a public good focused on national interest to a private good responding to consumer demands (Ball, 2003). This expansion has brought along peculiar shifts in the approach to managing it. In the name of helping parents choose desired schools and create a competitive ethos in the market- ranking system of schools came up. The intent of these rankings is to create competition and quality. The idea that reinforced that marketplace competition could rectify the education system's problems can be traced to 1950 in the United States (Friedman, 1962; Chubb and Moe, 1990).

To deal with rapid expansion, new management techniques from the corporate sector have been used to ensure the delivery of key inputs in an effective manner into the field of education. Along with audit and verification techniques exported from the private to the public sector came a system of values and goals that may or may not be suitable in the context of education (Power, 1997).

Some international organisations have been promoting such ideas. The World Bank has promoted standardisation, decentralisation and accountability since the 1990s. Accountability was mentioned twice in the Bank's 1999 education sector strategy and 32 times in the 2011 revision (Joshi & Smith, 2012) it's World Development Report 2004 emphasised the importance of public services responding to local and used advocating for greater decentralisation and local control and accountability (World Bank 2004).

In India, rapid privatisation brought along severe competition within private schools themselves. This need for survival and expansion led to the creation of brands of schools that developed franchise models. In this provision, the smaller schools apply for a franchise of an established brand. The brand lends its name to the smaller schools subject to terms and conditions of accountability. These parameters are checked regularly every year. If the school fails to adhere to these metrics, the brand strips its name away.

The ABC School (Pseudonym) is one example running under the franchise of HMV Society (pseudonym). The School is twelve years old and is located in Haryana, in a small city. This city is surrounded by villages mostly. It has 1200 students of which there are 432 girls and the rest are boys.It has 28 teachers, of whom 19 are women, and the rest are male teachers. It is a senior secondary school and has a Principal and an HM. There is a chairperson of the school who is also the owner.

The school has been witnessing drop outs and there have been very few new enrolments in the last five years. This includes the period of the Covid -19 pandemic. The researcher has been involved with the school prior to the Covid 19 pandemic as well. The situation was not different prior to the pandemic also.

To retain the franchise, the School has to maintain some quality and financial standards. The school is held accountable on the criteria. The management is unhappy because enrollment has gone down. There are metrics and standardised instruments to enable comparisons with other schools under the brand. HMV accountability policies use test scores to measure and evaluate school and teacher performance linking results to rewards and sanctions. Based on its poor results in the Board Exams, this school comes in the bottom 10 of the 200 schools under HMV group. So the HMV summoned the school team and told them to buckle up, or they would revoke permission to use their brand name. The sad truth about education: it's easier to blame someone else than fix the problems, (Sydney Morning Herald March 2017, a newspaper).The school is located in a semi-rural area. Many new schools are coming up, making the competition tough for the school.

Faced with these challenges, the Management started to look for immediate solutions and try to hold someone accountable. Accountability is a process to help individuals or institutes meet responsibilities and achieve goals. The principal of the school was held accountable and sacked. Subsequently, an erstwhile senior teacher was appointed to ensure corrective action and prevent the recurrence of earlier problems. Different stakeholders in the School are trying to make this work. The current study attempts to understand the situation from the management, principal, and teachers' perspectives, keeping the purpose of education at the forefront.

The objectives of the study are to understand:

-expectations of the HMV and the Chairperson, principal, and the teachers from each other

-challenges faced by teachers while responding to varied expectations

-how are the processes in the School supporting what the school is trying to achieve

-Is the School trying to be effective or good? How do we understand the idea of the growth of an educational institute?

Methodology

Keeping the above objectives in mind it was planned to collect data from the stakeholders. The data collection process involved designing Google forms along with interview schedules for teachers. Separate interview schedules were designed for the Chairperson, Principal and Head mistress. Key focus areas for the tools were as follows: Expectations of the Management, Chairperson, and teachers from each other; challenges faced by principal and teachers while responding to varied expectations; processes in the school that support the fulfilment of the goals set; strategies used by the teachers and promoted by the management towards the fulfillment of the goals.

Forms were supposed to be filled and submitted by teachers in a week's time. They were advised not to use their name and fill out the forms freely. The school teachers were grouped into their departments like English, Hindi, Mathematics, Science, Social Science, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, and Commerce and Economics. The Chairperson, principal, and headmistress were interviewed separately. The interviews lasted for 20 minutes,1 hour, and 40 minutes respectively. Having taken permission from the management I was asked to coordinate with the headmistress, who facilitated the interaction and other communication with different people in the School. The school did not inhibit my interaction with the teachers- at least overtly. However, later I got to know that teachers were asked not to ruin the name of the School. As the Google forms had to be filled individually, the group interactions lasted around 32-55 minutes. The data was collected in August 2022. The interviews were conducted over a week.

Conducting the interviews on school grounds may have impacted the data collected in several ways. While teachers did talk about their many professional stresses, often, in their responses would quickly change their statements with a trite remark about how much they like their job. In one instance when talking about the extent of the demand -some parents place on teachers, I was asked not to include that segment of the discussion in the transcripts. Therefore, what is included in the finding section is what teachers felt was safe.

The analysis takes into account the personal and professional aspirations of teachers and pressures teachers faced from senior management and parents. This process has brought forth the teaching strategies promoted by the management and mostly followed by teachers to facilitate students' scholastic achievement. It also tries to document strategies used by teachers to demonstrate their competence to the management and parents.

Analysis and Discussion

Expectations of the HMV

HMV expects the School to achieve the following main goals:

Students achieve high percentages in Board Exams; the school growth should be visible by increasing enrolments by at least 15% every year and ensuring admissions of students in elite institutes of higher education. The School has to uphold the name of HMV and build its reputation in the midst of an intensely competitive scenario, with multiple schools vying for the same number of students in the vicinity. The onus of meeting these expectations is laid on the School and the teachers.

Over the last several years, both, the School's Board results and enrollment have gone down. The Chairperson holds the principal and the teachers responsible for the current state of the school. The previous principal has been sacked and replaced by a new one. With the management having stated its expectations, it is important to study the personal and professional goals teachers have for themselves.

Personal and professional goals of the teachers

Only 6 teachers are permanent and the others are hired on a contractual basis.

Teachers have shared their professional goals as follows:

3 teachers clearly want to open their own coaching institutes.7 of them are looking for a government job.6 want to serve the ABS school for a long time, and most aspire to become permanent teachers. 3 want to go up the hierarchy in the School, like becoming a primary / middle level/academic coordinators. Interestingly 4 of them want to justify their position in the School. 2 teachers want to join a suitable school where they can apply their advanced skills. Some of the teachers want to work on themselves, in terms of learning new pedagogic practices, especially the use of IT, develop more skills and make the subjects they teach more interesting and easy for the students. They want a healthy relationship with their colleagues instead of a competitive one. Some teachers feel it creates stress and tension for them.

Responses collected through group interaction differed slightly from those collected from google forms. As respondents were asked not to write their names on their responses, there is a sufficient level of frankness in their individual responses.

Startling information emerged from the analysis: all they wanted from the School was "a regular salary". This information was probed further, and it was found that the teachers had

not received their salaries for the past three months. It was a regular practice and they rarely got monthly salaries or even full salaries.

The Formula for Success

The Management has shifted its focus away from managing inputs with the associated tendency to micro-manage administrative details to managing results. The HMV wants the School to become an effective school. For this purpose, they have asked the School to follow a special curriculum designed by their HR Department. This program hinges on mastery of content through repeat drills. It is a full group instruction in mathematics and science and language-particularly English. It is textbookcentered. It aims at optimising every moment in School for maximum learning. For this purpose, assembly, breaks and extra periods like sports, SUPW, hobbies, etc. are to be utilised for learning. Teachers have been handed a set of materials, including assessment sheets with a timeline. They have a system of regular reporting in which parents are also kept in the loop. This system is followed in several other schools running under the aegis of HMV.

According to the teachers, this strategy lays an atmosphere of continuous assessment and is very result oriented. According to the HMVs interschool comparisons and external board exams, this approach may improve results. The anxious parents may also feel good about the improved results. However, some teachers find it suffocating as they cannot do what they want in class and have to blindly follow the instructions. They are aware that non - compliance can cost them their job. Most teachers feel safe with this approach. They understand at what cost this "effectiveness" is coming but do not want to discuss. People are more averse to losses than they are attracted to gains. If held accountable for difficult outcomes, they tend to minimise their risk, or adjust their behaviors in unintended ways to protect themselves (Abadzi, 2017).

On the other hand, students find the new experiment /approach very tiring and boring. They are just getting pushed into mechanical slots with a threat that this is the time to make or mar their lives, so hard work is critical. The component of joyful learning is seen as a little wasteful and therefore, seriously compromised. The focus is not on learning to learn but on memorising specific information. Considering Jean Piaget(1973), the goal of intellectual education is not to know how to repeat or retain ready-made truths (a truth that is parroted is only a half-truth). It is in learning to master the truth by oneself at the risk of losing time and going through all the roundabout ways inherent in real activities.

Despite believing that the purpose of school is to provide a well-rounded, holistic education based on student's needs, the principal has asked the staff to alter lesson plans to align with examinations. Hence, students score higher the following year. Few teachers mentioned in google forms that they were "told what to teach when to teach, and how to teach. "This teaching method is interestingly at its own wavelength irrespective of students' and teachers' connection with it. The teachers report that the students have language challenges. Most of their students come from a rural background and exposure to English is limited. They have a few first-generation learners as well. The students cannot cope with the set standards. The teachers find it very difficult to hold students interest in the class. Student absenteeism is rising. Unfortunately, popularly only the physical dropout rate is considered and not the psychological and emotional resignation that many students have committed themselves to. Absenteeism is rising amongst teachers as well.

Teachers have been trained only once for implementing this program over the entire year. There is no interaction between the trainers and the teachers. They do not take feedback from teachers or help them understand the frameworks underlying the materials. So the teachers end up mechanically doing the drills. The teacher pupil ratio stands at 1:53. There are many students in each class.

Cameras to ensure teacher attendance

The Chairperson has installed cameras everywhere in the School. Teachers are told that if they are doing their work sincerely, they do not have to worry. However, many teachers feel that continuous surveillance is uncomfortable. They feel demotivated and conscious all the time.

Chairs for teachers have been removed from the classroom owing to the belief that they have to be active and should not be lazy and sloppy in class. The teachers feel that when teachers are absent, even cameras cannot help in that case. There seems to be a tacit rejection of the cameras, especially when the management tells them there is a paucity of funds for teachers' salaries but just enough for cameras. Cameras cannot reduce absenteeism in either students or teachers. However, it can push everyone to test the system. Teachers feel that they are not trusted.

As James Scott (1990) puts it any ground left unobserved from above is likely to be ground lost . In this education system the only things accountability expects teachers to do are things that can be observed and verified-which often may not essentially be the things

required to deliver quality education. Cameras create an atmosphere of surveillance. We need to think about how to improve accountability to students and parents in a way that not only addresses teacher attendance but also what happens when teachers do show up. Students need an education system with motivated and engaged teachers. Accounting-based accountability solutions divert away rather than towards an environment supportive of meaningful learning. Close monitoring systems may have a myopic improvement in the current status but will not be able to get the teachers and students to give their best in an organic and self-driven manner. Accountability should be evaluated against specific goals (Maroy&Voisin, 2017; Perie et al., 2007). Treating accountability as an end in itself suggests that good governance amounts to more accountability-fails to recognise that accountability can have both beneficial and detrimental outcomes (Bovens, 2006; Gorur, 2017).

Pressure for compliance on the teachers

The literature shows that senior administrators influence how teachers experience their workplace (Ballet et al.,2006; Klusmann et al.,2008). Teachers were tasked to fulfil the demands of various stakeholders- including parents- into policy that affects their daily work conditions (Ballet et al.,2006). ABC School manifests a similar situation where HMV tries to preserve and perpetuate the School's relatively distinguished reputation by laying unrealistic benchmarks for teachers.

Some teachers have their children studying in the same school, and this atmosphere of continuous assessment also affects their personal lives. Teachers have to abide by benchmarks set by the school not only to ensure their own job but also to guarantee that their children can continue to study at the school. Several teachers recognise that" teaching towards the test is problematic". They also understand that "continuity of the job in the school is not dependent on their innovative ideas but on teaching students in time-tested effective and rather safe modes that help them in scoring well on assessments".

According to one of the teachers, this result-oriented ethos affects how they engage with colleagues and supervisors. The pressure to show the results "sometimes is overwhelming, and the Supervisors refuse to consider their professional circumstances".

Challenges faced by the Principal

The Principal shared that the pressure comes from the Chairman and perhaps gets snow-balled down because he has to answer questions related to new enrollments and placement of students. He has to answer in Management Committee meetings questions related to

enrollment of girls getting lower than boys. He has to tell the Management Committee what strategies are being used to increase the enrollment of girls in the School. However, he attributes the lower percentage of girls compared to boys to the cultural scenario of the school's location.Parents prefer to spend less on the education of their girl child as compared to the boys. They also do not like to send their daughters too far to study. He faces a dilemma- when to get girl students into the School, he offers scholarships and free ships, and that creates a dent in the earnings of the School.

The Principal also has to respond to the questions related to language acquisition of the students, especially in spoken English, as compared to other schools under the same banner. The Principal feels these variables are not in his control as the children come from families where English is hardly spoken. Many of them are first-generation learners. To expect them to be able to communicate fluently in English is a really tough and unreasonable demand. He has to face the challenges of teacher turnover. Most teachers leave the School the moment they get a better opportunity. He is constantly having to hear from disgruntled teachers who are not getting salaries and the Chairman who does not release salaries because of poor results and sometimes his personal challenges.

These days in consumer-driven education markets, popular schools compete with one another by adopting various tactics to attract the elite clientele. This may include strategically positioning teachers within the school and crafting relatively complex admission procedures (Ayling 2019), perpetuating the idea that they can serve as mobility pathways. (Sancho,2016) by conveying that they produce pupils with the values necessary to assume socially and culturally dominant positions in society(Courtois,2018)or as in the case of ABC School, demonstrating that their students get the highest test scores.

Teachers are asked to take multiple tests prior to the board exams. They give predicted scores in these exams. So when a student gets lower predicted scores, the school pressures the parents that their child is not getting to the desired level. This also puts more pressure on the teachers, who have to work harder with these students.Interestingly, when the student's predictive scores are not good enough then they have to appear from Open School and not as students of ABC school.This is done to project a good scorecard of the school with no failures or students with low marks.

Role of Parents

Parents are seen as having a determinative effect on their children's development and future success(Faircloth,2014). This belief, in conjunction with the fear of their children's possible failure (Brantlinger, 2003; Brown,2014), drives parents to take actions that mitigate the challenges inherent in growing up within a fiercely competitive market-driven society (Sancho,2016). Like other studies that document the child-rearing practices of affluent families in the USA (e.g., Hamilton et al.,2018), in India, affluent parents not only provide educational opportunities that assure their children access to a learning environment but also guarantee economic success. Parents also keep involved throughout their children's education. On the other hand parents from marginalised backgrounds are mostly on the receiving end, they hardly have any control over the schools.

School Culture

Just like the decisions parents make for their children are seen as increasingly consequential to their outcomes (Faircloth,2014). The future accomplishments of the children can be influenced by the pedagogical choices teachers make when educating them. Most teachers are committed to developing their students as confident people who are number 1 in all situations. Somehow they are committed to the competitive ethos of ," Number 1". This seems to be ingrained in the culture of the School. No clear instances of collaborative work were visible. The specific practices that teachers use to produce high-performing students are similar. They all have to follow textbooks and frequent testing.

The School has two sections in each class for students based on their achievements. Section B is for top and average achievers, section A is for below-average and weak students. They also have different colour blazers for different marks that students achieve. According to the teachers and the principal, these colour codes motivate students to move to the next colour code. Students with higher marks are always distinguished and proud to have achieved that level. This practice of overt motivation – the carrot and stick policy can be seen as very humiliating by other children who have wear the colour of low performance every single day to School. As shared by one parent, "her child does not want to go to School. "Another parent whose child wears the highest colour shared that both she and her child are constantly under a pressure to retain the colour. She shared that her son hardly had any friends or any hobbies as there was just no time. Another parent shared that her daughter had to move to a second rung colour as her performance was not as good as the previous year. She was devastated and also did not feel like coming to School. So here we have hard-

working, committed students who do not want to come to the School due to school policies. This psychological tension adds up and blocks the capabilities of children to be creative and express themselves in any other way except the one that is measurable by the school. The capacities for critical thinking, experimentation and analysis are missing from the curricula.

The high-pressure, high-stakes, result-oriented environment shapes teachers' pedagogical techniques. The idea of external incentives and rewards for motivating behavioural change must be contested. At times the selected incentives do not align with psychological and educational theories of motivation. Sometimes this can be overly simplistic, driven by the fact that behaviour change is only possible when consequences are explicit (Braun & Kanjee,2006)

Systemic Issues

People may also be more likely to deliver if held accountable for decisions rather than outcomes beyond their control. Any outcome is a product of a complex interplay of several factors, processes, and people. Education is a shared responsibility. Single actors cannot be held accountable for successes and failures. Teaching cannot be divided into easily defined routinely performed tasks. Teachers are dependent on the actions of others and supportive systems to fulfill their responsibilities. A teacher cannot perform magic in a classroom of 56 students. She cannot be expected to be motivated in delivering some predetermined content, at a predetermined pace, in a predetermined manner, without connecting with the underlying ethos, in an environment where she is expected to justify herself to an institute that does not even give her full salary on time. The school library does not have books that excite a young student to read; the timetable does not give the children time to play. The classrooms have e-boards but the teachers don't know how to use them.

Externally imposed accountability is likely to create distrust if people feel their autonomy is undermined (NCAHE 2005; Stensaker& Harvey, 2011). No accountability approach can succeed if actors lack an enabling environment and are equipped to meet their responsibilities. A supportive environment has four essential characteristics. First, actors need clear information. They must know, understand and agree to their responsibilities and how their fulfillment will be evaluated and have access to relevant data. Most teachers of the ABC School are on a contractual basis and the turnover rate is very high, mostly they are handed over stuff to be delivered in class. Secondly, actors must have the necessary resources to complete their tasks. The management has often asked teachers to achieve targets without providing the necessary financial and technical support. Third, actors must

have the capacity to meet their responsibilities. This includes individual, group and institutional capability. Motivation includes trust in selecting the approach and its purposes and the political and personal will to complete the task at hand (Fullan, 2000; Oslen,2014). School can only be run with the actors collaborating to reach common goals. Trust and motivation are influenced when the targets are seen as achievable within the resources available. Processes at the ABC school need to be reimagined with the above paradigm.

Accountability for accountability's sake is misdirected. Systemic problems need to be addressed at the systemic level without penalising individuals who hardly have any control over their circumstances

Conclusions

The rapid expansion of education has brought about peculiar shifts in managing it. The marketisation of education moved education from public to private good, opening it to marketplace ethos and competition. Popular schools compete with one another in consumer-driven education markets by adopting relatively complex and fancy curricula to drive the notion of exclusiveness to establish themselves as more effective than the other schools .The schools sell themselves as mobility pathways for students to the parents. The paper presents the journey of a school trying to stay afloat by fulfilling the expectations of different stakeholders. It explores the professional aspirations of teachers, the pressures posed by the senior management, and the survival strategies they use to stay afloat. Understandably, the teachers choose not to apply themselves to enhance student learning but rather are pushed to follow the pedagogies that are externally and officially prescribed and therefore "safe" but may not be appropriate for students learning. Even though some teachers feel suffocated, they do not dare to raise their concerns. Student scores are used to judge teachers and also the School's effectiveness.

This brings forth a debate about what characterises a good school and an effective school. According to the management, it will be a good school when it maintains strict academic focus, the students are learning what they are taught, they have a good command over English and Mathematics along with some skills to get better jobs. Those who find it not good, claim that it is too mechanical and, too uniform. The teachers are not spontaneous or creative. They follow what they are asked to follow and play it safe to preserve their jobs. It was like a train engine that dragged people to a predetermined destination at a predetermined pace, on a predetermined track on a scheduled time. The reformers are external and the strategies have not been contextualised to the semi-rural background of the

school. Teachers are not adequately and appropriately trained. The reformers/experts narrow the focus on academic curriculum, frequent testing, instructional approach with large groups that involve reviewing, explaining, demonstrating, guiding practice checking for understanding and summarising. The model of effective teaching and effective schools is applied uniformly to all teachers and all schools under the HMV aegis, just as laws. Most researchers warn against generalising such formulas for high scores. Nevertheless, the school manages to produce desired results. That makes it "effective" and not necessarily "good".

Implications drawn from research on effective teaching and effective schools are often used to define what is desirable or good. But effectiveness is not the same as goodness in education. Sparkle of excitement in the eyes of the students, smile on their faces, openness with which students and teachers question each other and support each other, the range of activities, multiple ways of teaching and learning supported by multiple ways of judging ,the journey to the objectives may not be efficient but will certainly be more wholesome.

Academic achievement is an important goal but cannot be the only goal. We need to evaluate the cost at which these high Math, Science, and English scores are gained. This gain results from increased apportionment of time and energy than a focus on how to read and learn, a whole language approach with a focus on experimentation, creativity and critical thinking.The research on effective schools tells us how to achieve things that can be easy to observe and measure. However, neither a teacher's role nor that of the varied functions of the school be parsed into sub-parts without losing their character. It is easier to settle for quantitative indicators, but they may not reflect the impact of the processes on individuals.

Schools display evidence of being exclusive and elite through the results in Board exams that facilitate admission to prestigious higher education institutes. This way, the school provides parents with evidence and convinces them to pay more fees. Less affluent parents are left out of this opportunity. In a way it reinforces the status quo in society.(Lewis & Diamond,2015).Themarket-based approach to accountability is based on education as a consumer good differentiated by quality and price. The competitive pressure thus created further marginalises disadvantaged parents and schools. School choice approaches have led to enhanced segregation, eroding efforts towards inclusive, equitable, and quality education.

With ambitious standards, there should be a suitable supporting environment on the ground. Each school should determine its goals as a community where each member has a voice. Trust in the education system can be built by raising teachers' professional status,

improving school leader's capacity, and promoting collaboration through professional learning communities (Fullan, 2011; Sahlberg 2015). Greater clarity and transparency of roles and responsibilities can also win trust. With clear responsibilities, individuals are more likely to feel fairly treated (Cerna,2014). Transparency can uplift communication and ensure everyone has access to the same information. What we believe is worthy should mediate what we do. This can reduce the level of suspicion and anxiety and undue stress and channelise those energies to creative expression and fulfillment as professionals. It is often stated that schools must be accountable to both the community and the state, but we as educators must be accountable to ourselves too.

There is little evidence that performance-based accountability which focuses on outcomes rather than inputs and uses narrow incentives improves education systems. The carrot-and-stick approach only forces compliance. Rewards in the form of increased increments also negatively impact collaboration and create an unnecessarily competitive school culture.

Using test scores to evaluate teachers pushes teachers teaching to the test and demotivates them. It further isolates marginalised children. All of this compromises overall quality and student learning. Real investment should be made in pre and in-service teacher education, providing teachers autonomy, educating and developing schools as communities for learning.

Research should be undertaken to study the impact of parents' socio-economic background on selection of pedagogies by teachers. The impact of larger school groups on teachers' individual drive may also be studied in schools to provide a comprehensive understanding of teachers' work in an elite school.

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