A Study on the Governance of Church-Operated Educational Institutions in East Khasi Hills District, Meghalaya

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Executive summary

Background and Objectives

Towards the end of the twentieth century, governance has gained the attention of private and public agencies. Good governance in education system is critical to promote effective delivery of educational services, and achieve optimal institutional performances. There have been reports of poor or weak governance of educational institutions in Meghalaya state, which till recently has had no education policy of its own, adopting the archaic rules and regulations of Assam. Consequently, there appears to be some disparity and non-uniformity in the functioning of the Governing Boards (GBs) and Managing Committees (MCs) of educational institutions in the state. In an exploratory study done by the researcher in some of the church-operated educational institutions (COEIs) in the East Khasi Hills District, Meghalaya, there seemed to be a casual approach in the decision making process, untimely preparation of financial and other administrative reports, which acted as barriers to efficient functioning and planning strategies of the institutions.

In spite of the increase in number of the educational institutions, the youth in Meghalaya state seem to still move to other places for education, reflecting on the poor quality of education and by implication, the poor governance of these institutions. There has been a need for accountability in the education sector because of decreasing state funding, increasing personal cost to students and their families on account of unaffordable increase in tuition fees. Most of these problems are not systematically and completely documented.
Hence there is an urgent need to carry out a proper study on governance of the COEIs with the following objectives:

1. To analyse the structure of Governing Boards / Managing Committees of church-operated educational institutions

2. To examine the governance practices in terms of responsiveness to ground level realities, problems faced, efficiency, effectiveness and accountability, etc

3. To identify improvements that could make the functioning of Governing Boards/Managing Committees more effective.

Several research hypotheses will be tested: Effective governance leads to good institutions; the composition and functioning of the GBs/MCs will determine how well the educational institutions perform; Good governance is practiced in all educational institutions; and governance in church-operated educational institutions is better than that of Other educational institutions.

**Materials & Methods**

After an extensive review of the historical background of the church-operated educational institutions in the state, and identifying relevant reports on studies done on governance of educational institutions in India and other countries, it was decided to carry out an indepth, cross-sectional epidemiological study, on a carefully chosen representative random sample of church-operated educational institutions. Lists of educational institutions in the East Khasi Hills District area including Shillong, operated by the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches and Others were prepared, and a stratified random sample of institutions were chosen from the Catholic and Protestant institutions with probability proportional to size. From the Others, a matched control was randomly selected. Thus, 11 Catholic, 13 Protestant,
and 12 Others were finally chosen as the sample. It was decided to interview in depth two members from the governing boards/managing committees (the president/chairperson and one other member) and two members from the institution, (the CEO/head of the educational institution and one other staff member) to collect the primary data on governance structure and functioning, as well as to collect the basic data on the institutional profile and on the GBs/MCs membership. Research proformae to collect the needed data were designed in consultation with some members of GB/MC and institutions, field tested, and finalised to be used as interview checklists, and made computerizable. In all, 4 research proformae were used for each institution. In addition, a 25-item summary checklist was developed for the GBs/MCs and for the institution, and scored as good, fair or poor for each parameter and for total. After seeking permission and informed consent, the researcher established good rapport with each respondent and personally collected the data after intensive interviews. Data collected were screened for errors or incompleteness, coded where needed, and routinely entered on to Microsoft excel sheets. Data were collected during April to July 2010 and periodically monitored for quality and completeness. Statistical analyses were done using SPSS version 15.0. Descriptive and inferential statistics were computed, and the analyses presented by church affiliation, viz., Catholic, Protestant or Others. Percentages were compared using the z-test or chi-square, and means by t-test or ANOVA. Scatter diagrams were drawn to study the relationship between the governance scores and institutional performance. Correlation and regression coefficients were calculated for individual predictor variables, and then combined in the multiple regression analysis. Figures were drawn for selected findings for better visualization of the differences and associations by church affiliation and as compared to controls. The individual interviews were supplemented by 3 well organized focus group discussions.

**Findings**
The sample consisted of 5 colleges and 31 schools, which had primary, secondary and higher secondary sections. The number of pupils varied from less than 300 to more than 3000; and the teachers numbered less than 20 to more than 100 in each institution. All institutions had varied non-teaching staff. The institutions had varied infrastructure, basic amenities and facilities. About half of the institutions had hostels attached. Both the academic and non-academic performances were generally good, and were in the top 25% of the institutions in the area. The public rating of the institutions was excellent or good. The size of GBs/MCs was around 12, with differing ages, gender and skills. They had fairly regular meetings and sometimes special meetings. The quorum was generally good, and there was usually a reasonable notice period. The average attendance was generally above 75% and the meetings lasted 1-2 hours.

The feedback on governance by the GBs/MCs members was good or excellent, and they accepted that there were difficulties in governance at times, mostly in terms of managing human resources and finance. In contrast, the institutional respondents were quite vocal in pointing out several deficiencies and lacunae in governance. Although a majority felt that the GBs/MCs was quite helpful in solving their problems, almost 90% felt that governance can be improved, and should be on an urgent basis. They pointed out the need for qualified members, more women and younger members, restricting the tenure to allow fresh ideas. Better interaction of the board with all the stakeholders, more effective leadership role of the president/chairpersons, educational workshops to distinguish clearly governance from administration, preventing conflict in the role of key members of the GBs/MCs, and a better style of functioning. The respondents felt that the critical issues and ground realities in terms of proper infrastructure and amenities, salaries of teachers and other staff, financial planning was lacking or ignored. The analyses were carried out in each of these specific parameters.
and conclusions drawn. The focus group discussions confirmed much of the evaluation of individual interviews.

Regardless of these deficiencies, in general, the governance had a statistically significant positive relationship to institutional outcomes. This was true for all the groups, but more so in church-operated educational institutions. It was gratifying to note that the respondents, both from the GBs/MCs and the institutions were highly cooperative and frank in their opinions and suggestions for improving the governance.

All these findings were interpreted in relation to internal consistency, and with external experiences. A thorough discussion on the experiences in India, USA, England, South Africa and New Zealand on educational governance was done to formulate appropriate recommendations to improve the governance. Confusing governance with routine administration was a common pitfall in the effectiveness of governance in most of the scientific studies published. It was so in this research also. Likewise, as elsewhere, often, the imbalances in the profile of membership in terms of diversity of skills, ages and gender acted as a stumbling block to good governance. The styles of functioning and the close interaction of the board members with the stakeholders, mainly the teachers and parents were also responsible. Many suggestions were made on almost every parameter studied in this research that adds strength to the methods of enhancing governance in Meghalaya educational system. The discussion also centered on the experiences in the corporate sector, and the advantages of e-governance, use of modern IT, computer software, and methods to enhance communication between the GBs/MCs members and the stakeholders. There were no studies reported or published similar to this research to make comparisons, and this research therefore constitutes a unique contribution to the subject of educational governance. In the light of the research findings as compared to experiences in general elsewhere, a set of recommendations are made. It is hoped that suitable mechanisms will be contemplated and implemented to make
the governance more effective to improve the education of our children in Meghalaya and elsewhere.

**Recommendations**

There should be a clear distinction in understanding ‘Governance’ and ‘Administration’, and the complementary nature of the two words. A workshop may be organised.

Well formulated written policies should be framed by the boards delegating specific responsibility to the administration, directions for translating policies into practice and methods of implementing board’s decision.

Suitable guidelines on how the board members can best work together should be formulated taking into cognisance the role of the institutions, sponsoring bodies and other stakeholders.

Appropriate criteria and guidelines be made and followed in the selection of board members to ensure that it is composed of qualified members representing various skills, gender and age. The tenure and rules for re-election should be strictly enforced.

There should be proper orientation for the board members, and if necessary training in strategic planning and management as well as policy development. There should also be a mechanism for more interaction of the board members with the various stakeholders should as teachers, parents, well wishers etc.

The roles of the office-bearers of the governing boards must be clarified in terms of specific jobs descriptions. The chairperson should also be made aware of his/her leadership roles.

With the advancement of IT and other technology, E-Governance could be considered for better efficiency and effectiveness. Computerisation of office records might help in faster data processing and preparation of reports. Alternate methods of meetings such as video
conferences and skype may be tried. While current governance seemed quite effective, it could be improved further by more careful consideration of more institutional strengthening.

The findings from this research may be widely disseminated so that necessary implementation can be done for better governance of the church-operated educational institutions. Various meetings and workshops could be organised for considering follow up studies and evaluations after suitable changes based on the recommendations of this research.