A Review of Characteristics and Experiences of Decentralization of Education

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Abstract

This paper scrutinizes decentralization of education with reference to some countries around the world. We consider discussion on decentralization to be complex, critical and broad question in the contemporary education planning, administration and politics of education reforms. Even though the debate on and implementation of decentralization education can result from differences in ideological and philosophical backgrounds (McGinn & Welsh, 1999), in this scrutiny we begin by theorizing the concept, provides dimensions and goals of decentralization and demonstrate how decentralization has been implemented in some countries. Finally, conclusion is assumed in this debate as a summary and a conduit to further discussion and investigation of educational decentralization.

Keywords: education decentralization, devolution, delegation, deconcentration, school management, school financial management, school committee

1. Introduction

Decentralization of education has been implemented in many countries besides its complexities in conceptualizing the terminology. Different authors define decentralization in various ways, but typically the term refers to "increased autonomy and responsibilities to the lower level entities in one dimension or another" (Rodden, Eskeland & Litvack, 2003, p.5). Rodden and others' conventional explanation of the concept appears to be general of all characteristics and organizations. However, regarding education decentralization, two definitions of the education decentralization are offered in this section followed by some explanations in the subsequent sections. First, Winkler and Yeo (2007) describe decentralization of education in terms of decision making powers and responsibility being transferred from central government education ministries to local government and schools. Decentralization of education can correspondingly be referred to as "shift in the location of those who govern, about transfer of authority from those in one location or level vis-à-vis education organization to those on another level" (McGinn & Welch, 1999, p.17). These definitions render two underlying concepts: one is location of power and authority and the second is the movement of the power and authority to other levels. That is, they explain about transference of decisions, powers, authority and responsibilities from higher educational bodies such as ministry to local levels and schools. Thus, decentralization in education emphasizes school as the "locus" of decision making (Brown, 1990, p.130) that will result to "improvement in the quality of education" (Bjork, 2006, p.44).

2. Conceptualization and Rationale

There is a wide range of aspects, degree of authorities and powers in the discussions of education decentralization. To delineate the wide-ranging and diversified explanations, this discussion briefly adopts Rondinelli, Nellis, and Cheema (1983) categorization of decentralization. Under their general perspective of decentralization, Rondinelli et al. (1983) characterized four types of decentralization that have been implemented in different countries all over the world. These types are commonly termed as: deconcentration, delegation, devolution and privatization. However, in this paper more details are given to deconcentration, delegation and devolution as dimensions in education decentralization, privatization of education in this case is rather considered as a peculiar and broad characteristic that would demand somewhat a separate discussion.

2.1 Deconcentration

Deconcentration has been particularly one of important term which is closely linked to education decentralization. It refers to relocation of authority from main dominant authorities to lower level in public education agencies (Winkler, 1989). A typical deconcentration in education is associated with the processes or actions by central government or its agencies such as ministries to give or increase power to local agencies such as schools. However, in schools, processes of deconcentration may not necessary mean a shift of power to school, but generally schools are merely given the roles of executing decisions that have previously been done at higher authorities (Lauglo, 1995).

As momentarily theorized, deconcentration is considered as a weak form of decentralization since it does not give opportunity for schools to exercise a great deal of discretion in decision making. (Rondinelli, 1999). Deconcentration recommends involvement of stakeholders at local levels, particularly primary schools with regards to management of financial and other resources. Certainly, deconcentration has been adopted in education at various countries and levels, but the style and magnitude of participation at local levels is unlikely different and diverges from one country to another as articulated by advocates of conventional decentralization. Although it is difficult to measure how deconcentration functions or how real decision making power is distributed as applied in different countries or even education institutions in the same country, there are some indicators which can be stated in the form of five questions:

    i.   Who would determine marginal changes in teachers' compensation?
    ii.   Who would make decision to recruit and transfer a teacher to a specific school?
    iii.   Who would select the headmaster (*headteacher*)?
    iv.   Does the school community or local government partly finance the school?
    v.   Who decides how to allocate school's annual budget? (Gershberg & Winkler, 2004, p. 326).

The main concern is how relevant are answers to these questions in different countries. Decision makers would argue on two comparable questions: Why should a country decentralize its decision making processes? Which specific decisions should be decentralize? For example, if schools are to manage their own resources such as finance, then the most relevant questions to management of school finance are: whether school community and local government finance education, and who decides how to allocate school's annual budget? These questions are critical for two reasons: First, in public schools' context, budgeting involves planning in advance the amount of money needed to run daily activities of a school (McGinn & Welsh, 1999). The second reason is the application of the budget in terms of procurement and payments which is required to be made for acquisition of educational material and other recurrent expenditure. But then, deconcentration is the "weakest form which is no more than the shifting of management responsibility from the central to regional or other lower levels in such a way that the central ministry remains firmly in control" (Fiske, 1996, p.10). Deconcentration for this reason does not involve representation of full autonomy and power for lower levels or agencies to make decisions leave alone a substantial differences in implementation (McGinn & Welsh, 1999).

2.2 Devolution

Explanations for devolution in general and devolution in education come in different forms, although there seems to be some relationships. For example a general meaning of devolution entails transfer of managerial responsibility for specifically defined functions to organizations that are outside the regular bureaucratic structure which are indirectly controlled by the central government (Rondinelli et al., 1983, p.19). In education decentralization, devolution is explained as the most influential form of transformation by which transfer of authority over financial, administrative or pedagogical matters is permanently and cannot be repealed at the unusual and unexplained wish of central offices (Fiske, 1996). In this case both arguments imply that the central government or dominant administrative office transfers powers to representative lower levels stated functions and responsibilities, which the representatives have extensive decision to carry out. However, final responsibility remains with the sovereign authority (Rondinelli et al., 1983).

According to the Australian Education Union (AEU), in the context of education, devolution occurs in different terms such as school based decision making/management, school autonomy, self-managing schools, and autonomy for the local schools or site based management (AEU, 2012, p.2). Altogether, any terminology given and linked to devolution in educational context, refers to the distribution of power and funding between central authorities and lower level - schools. Primarily, the goal is to increase school efficiency by having closer observation and immediate participatory decision making on the use of school resources predominantly the school funds. On the other hand another point to bear in mind as Fiske (1996, p.10) suggests is that "true devolution of power requires widespread support from various affected stakeholder."

There is also some evidence in Europe particularly from England, Wales and Canada on the way devolution enables schools to become conscious for more effective, purposeful management with the importance of the role of the headteacher (Dimmock, 1993). Additionally, empirical evidence has revealed that the principals feel more responsible for the destiny of the schools than any other stakeholders (Dimmock, 1993, p.136). It is significant to note from Dimmock's findings of principals' feelings of purpose which influences their practices. It is probably right to argue that when school funds are devolved to school principals, they would have an impression of becoming more accountable and responsible of their roles.

In Africa a typical example can be drawn from one of Sub-Saharan countries like Tanzania. Tanzania is one of the countries in Africa which has undergone some educational reforms. One of the features of these reforms is management of the schools by the respective local communities. Through School Committees, the communities generally manage school resources particularly the monetary resource. Funds are distributed to school directly by the

central government through respective local government authorities. Literature indicate that the change is greatly associated to Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP) of which public primary schools have to offer space for major participation in the planning and monitoring of education process (Makongo & Mbilinyi, 2003). This process occurs under the general framework of decentralization of education whereby the local government authorities under the Prime Minister's Office-Regional Administration and Local Government PMO-RALG take responsibilities. Therefore, public primary schools have in view of that, have been empowered to manage the devolved funds as explained in Primary Education Programme (PEDP) document. Makongo and Rajani (2003) pointed out that the emphasis is on community participation through democratically elected school committees' members who have responsibility for planning implementation and supervision of school development activities.

In principle, the management of funds at school levels has to be controlled in accordance with PEDP Financial Management and Accounting Manual and the report from the utilization of the school money are supposed to be prepared by headteachers and the headteachers are sub-warrant-holder being responsible for keeping records of all financial transactions (Manara & Mwombela, 2012, Mmari, 2005). This suggests that headteachers are more responsible and accountable for school funds delivered to public primary schools. In addition to management and administrative roles, a headteacher is the advisor to the school committee who is also responsible for keeping records and minutes of school meetings (Mmari, 2005). In this regard, it is assumed that public primary schools' headteachers have more understandings in managing school money and would provide detailed information of the phenomena.

2.3 Delegation

Delegation is a fundamental component of decentralization for effective management of tasks in schools. However, it is argued that delegation is a very complex process that headteachers would sometimes feel not completely confident how to proceed (Webb, 2002). It is probable because of the implication to law embedded in delegation that lead to headteachers to be hesitant (Mbatha, Gorber & Loock, 2006). According to Bell and Rhodes (1996, p.157) delegation entails "transfer of tasks or set of tasks and resources (including funds) and responsibility to carry out the work from one person to another with appropriate professional support". Two important features are apparent in the definition provided by Bell and Rhodes: First, the distribution of tasks and responsibilities among staff members *and the second is to provide skills and capabilities to those who have been assigned set of tasks in order to positively influence their performance. In this case, the second feature can be viewed as the most important feature in contemporary school management.* Hence, delegation can be considered as a tool and source of authority for taking responsibilities when supported with sufficient training and resources.

Literature suggest that education delegation as reversible assignment by the central government, regional government, and local government, ministry of education or municipal department of education to public school principals / headteachers (Gershberg & Winker, 2004). It implies that delegation in education takes place at different levels and the power delegated to officials varies consistent with level of decentralized authority. In this regard, the discussion of delegation focuses the lower divisions or school levels with reference to headteachers or principals of public schools.

Several countries such Hong Kong, China, and Singapore have experimented and delegated powers to principals/headteachers and school committees (APRBE, 2012). The reforms have presented increased autonomy in management and administration of schools. The main argument behind delegation of power is that "the school is by itself a sovereign structure with which the principal or the headteacher has to exercise discretionary powers" (Mbatha, et al, 2006, p.3). In that, not only the head of a school has power to make decision, but the head has also power to delegate responsibilities to other staff members. Gershberg and Winker on their part summarized the forms and goal of general and education decentralization. As pointed out earlier, there are generally four forms of decentralization. But then again, the most relevant to education and which are linked to decentralization of education are: deconcentration, devolution and delegation (Fiske, 1996). The following table highlights the three forms in the form of matrix in relation to goals of decentralization which are discussed briefly ahead in this paper:

Table 1. Matrix Summary of General and Education Decentralization

General/Education	Administrative	Fiscal/Financial	Political
Deconcentration to government offices and regional MOE offices.	Managerial decisions and managerial accountability are moved to regional offices of central government and MOE	Regional managers are given greater authority to allocate and reallocate budget.	Regional elected bodies are created to advice regional managers.
Devolution to regional or local government	Educational sector managers are appointed by elected officials at local regional level.	Sub-government nationals are given the power to allocate education spending and in some cases to determine spending levels (that is raising revenues)	Elected local or regional officials of general purpose government are ultimately accountable both to the voters and to sources of finance for the delivery of schooling.
Delegation to schools and/or school councils	School principals (headteachers) and school	School principals (headteachers) and school	School councils are elected or appointed

councils (committees) empowered to make personnel, curriculum and some spending decisions.	councils (committees) receive government spending and can allocate spending and raise revenues.	sometimes with power to name principal/ headteacher of school.
Implicitly delegation to community school	School principals (headteachers) and school councils (committees) make all decisions.	Self-financing is used with some government subsidies especially in the remote areas where public school are not present.	School councils/committees are popularly elected

Source: (Gershberg and Winker, 2004, p.327)

3. Education Decentralization around the World.

Numerous studies have appraised the implementation of the decentralization and school based management with different frameworks in different countries all over the world. In Canada for example, Ouchi (2006) reviewed studies on decentralization and compared the power of principals in three districts and discovered that the districts achieved a high level of principal authority among others in school budgets, staffing and teaching methods. According to Ouchi, the focus of the studies in three districts was unrelated in terms of circumstances which led to the interventions. For that reason, it was revealed that in Edmonton the goal was to empower the principal, in Seattle and Houston the goal was to improve student achievement (Ouchi, 2006). Yet, Mexico adopted a different model of decentralization called "federalization" which followed moderate positions in its implementation (Ornelas, 2000, p. 3). According to Ornelas, the aims of decentralization in Mexico using federalization framework were among others to improve the quality of education and offer more chances for poor people to afford education. Ornelas (2000) argued that offering worthy education to the masses was one of the targets of Mexican government, in that additional explanation was required to substantiate reasons for decentralization in Mexico.

Decentralization of education in some Asian countries such as Japan and China was to some extent different. In Japan for instance, decentralization of education was generally emphasized by Decentralization Law of 1999 which offered mandation to establishment of boards of schools for management of schools and implementation of policies in different fields related to education (Muta, 2000). The established boards in Japan are independent of the head of the municipality aiming at preserving impartiality of educational administration. Similarly, China which was once a highly centralized system underwent educational decentralization in different aspects (Hawkins, 2000). However, Hawkins (2000) identified "fiscal reform and management of schools and the other area of curriculum reforms" (p.446) as two extensive aspects that are critical to reforms which have happened in China. One key feature of educational decentralization in china was the reduction of subsidizations for local schools, thus schools had to find some other sources to fund educational activities (Qi, 2011; Hawkins, 2000). Most importantly educational decentralization in China like other countries occurred in exclusively political principles and broader reorganization of economic and political spheres. But, the uniqueness of decentralization of education in China is its tendency to "remain superficially" (Qi, 2011, p.35). With all education reforms, apparently decentralization is seen as unworkable political agenda due to the role and the influence of the centrally determined guidelines and requirements.

Research on decentralization in Africa have not been explored extensively and compared to many different countries owing to its diversity of the continent. The most influential survey on decentralization, however, included six Sub Saharan countries: Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, Tanzania Uganda and Zimbabwe (Naidoo, 2002). The survey revealed that in all six countries necessary education decisions about curriculum, routine school management, and organizational matters were narrowly ever decentralized so as to reassure local community involvement in decision making (Naidoo, 2002). These findings suggest that there is lack of suitable structures and frameworks necessary for supporting a thorough education decentralization. Conversely, current studies have exposed improvement in decentralization processes especially in community participation in education delivery through School Management Committee (SMC) or School Committee (SC) (Bashasha, Magheni and Nkonya, 2011; Sasaoka and Nishimura, 2010). Although decentralization lead to school reforms and call attention for community participation in school governance and administration, the available evidence does not support the contention (Suzuki, 2002).

4. Goals of Decentralization of Education

While there are different techniques for implementing decentralization, corresponding numbers of goals for education decentralization are characterized (Fiske, 1996; Husain, 2005; Naidoo, 2005). By its nature decentralization has numerous motives yet interrelated at different levels in different countries. Goals are at the core of decentralization initiative and subsequently form strategies to implement decentralization at different levels (Bjor, 2006). In public schools goals of decentralization are equally more important for stakeholders to be conscious of the operations. The most fundamental questions everyone needs to scrutinize according to Fiske (1996) in relation to goals of decentralization in school context are: "Why school decentralization is being undertaken? What do its backers hope to gain from it both for themselves and others? What public vision is used to build support for decentralization? What are hidden agenda? (p.12). However, although goals and motives are disparate and contradictory, they range between a mix

of political, administrative and fiscal or financial dimensions (Fiske, 1996; Husain, 2005; Naidoo, 2005). Accordingly, subsequent sections highlight these major motives (*political, administrative and financial*) in relation to education decentralization.

4.1 Political Goal

Fiske (1996) has documented a comprehensive detail regarding political goal of educational decentralization and provided four reasons for education being political. The reasons are: education is an *embodiment of national values*, *a source of political power, a source for exercising political power and education systems are political weapons*. Thus, political decentralization or democratic decentralization encompasses allocating power to make decisions about education to local stakeholders or their representative lower levels of administration (Fiske, 1996). Whether symbolic or real, this shift of authority is predetermined to include stakeholders outside the institutions such as schools. It comprises either an extensive shift or at minimum stakeholders' awareness of reform on decision making power. On the other hand, by its nature decentralization of education is an outcome of the process of political democratization. Education is the largest industry and critical source of political support in many nations in terms of annual government budget and expenditure (Fiske, 1996; McGinn & Welch, 1999). Therefore, decentralization of education institutions is as well and to a great extent political process, of which institutions are used as instruments for "enhancing political influence and for carrying out programme and objectives of those in power" (Fiske, 1996, p.v).

In many cases one will find political power residing at the higher level of government institutions, but the accountability and power for planning, finance and other activities are assigned to lower levels such as schools. To Fiske, this circumstance brings to mind two consequence; failure or success of programme and projects related to education and schools decentralization. Either of the attributions is, therefore, directly connected to "*politics*" rather than "*technical*" designs (Fiske, 1996; Hanson, 1998). Although on the surface, the argument seems to consider and suggest political motive of education decentralization as significant to school achievement or adversity, but practically the technical part in implementing education programmes and project is equally important. Because, over emphasis of political motives on education decentralization can create a tension or fail to adhere to what Sack and Saidi (1997) termed as emphasis on knowledge, skills, aptitude and experience relevant to implementation of education decentralization. These qualities are the underpinnings of "technical design" and are critical at determining how successful implementation of school decentralization programmes are.

4.2 Administrative Goal

Administrative goal of education decentralization has its origin in 1980s and 1990s which was the foundation for decentralization of education. The fundamental assumption behind education decentralization is that administration in a centralized system which unnecessary, extensive, elaborate and slow working (Karlsen, 2000). Yet again, argument for decentralization of education is founded on the bureaucratic and wastefulness of centralized systems (Fiske, 1996). The administrative goal from this position is seen as an effort to escape from weaknesses of centralized mode of administration. Another argument consistent with aim decentralization is that empowering lower levels such as local authorities and schools will lead to a more close well-organized and effective systems of education. It, therefore, reduces and eventually eradicates delays of bureaucratic procedure and makes education system more dynamic.

Additionally, there are other perspectives that look at administrative decentralization from public administration point of view. Such perspectives argue that success in education decentralization is evaluated by the degree to which education services is more effective as a result of decentralization of authority and power (Karlsen, 2000; Sayed, 2002). It is maintained that getting the administration closer to school communities, through administrative decentralization will speed up adaptation to demographic and social transformation and deliver a more open environment for the introduction and improvements in methods of teaching and administrative practices. However, a number of authors are unconvinced and discontented as to whether decentralization stimulates an actual and existent handover of power to respective levels (Bray, 2000; Sayed, 1999).

For instance, recent studies in six Asian countries reveal variations in strategies towards administrative decentralization of education and many countries have been relaxed and in some circumstances very little have changed at local level (Kandasamy and Blaton, 2004). In developing countries including Tanzania there has been shortage of data regarding the size, efficiency and performance for administrative system responsible for management of education. Moreover, while there is little substantiation to support the efficiency disagreement, the sign for empowerment and democratization is often partial, weak and dependent on the appropriateness of the methodology rather than on proof of outcomes (Cleaver, 1999). All together, administrative decentralization can function efficiently when there is practical existence of reasonable and efficient machinery in education institutions (Bordia, 1980).

4.3 Financial Goal

One of the special characteristic and procedure to education decentralization is management of school funds or school financial management. It is a conventional model for Education decentralization to include the transfer of financial resources to subnational, governments or schools (Gershberg and Winkler, 2004, p.330). As such, this strategy of devolution is assumed to have a robust consequence on both efficiency and equity (Gershberg and Winkler, 2004), Yet, positive outcomes can only be materialized with a condition that everything is put in place as planned or to put it in economist's terminology *ceteris paribus* – everything is constant. Decentralization of finance has revealed wide-ranging scale from several countries around the world (Fiske, 1996). Fiske provides evidence from different countries such Argentina where financial responsibility was shifted from central government to regional and local bodies. In all-

purpose, Argentina to some extent was successful because the governors were consulted though some were hesitant to take financial burden of schools (Fiske, 1996).

At this point, it is important to emphasize that all motives of education decentralization are equally important; however, the discussion underscores financial decentralization as the most important with particular reference to public school funding- the reason is finance is important to reforming schools (Grubb and Allen, 2011). There might be different levels of government formula funding; but the most appropriate is public school funding as part of decentralization processes and arrangements (Levacic and Downes, 2004). Public school funding is an effort to guarantee every public primary school in a country gets an equal amount of money to serve specific purposes in local schools. It is an established rule to allocate finance resources to functioning units such as schools and apply to all schools in a specified education local authority (Levacic and Downes, 2004; Ross and Levacic, 1999).

A review of literature shows that there are a number of formulas funding that exists and have been applied in different countries (Fazekas, 2012; Levacic, 2008; Heneveld and Graig, 1996). Although there might be a number of comparative studies, in most cases debate on formula funding is contextual, relative and country specific (Fazekas, 2012). For example, in Europe, countries such as Finland, Hungary and Netherlands funding formula has been applied in different methods (Levacic, 2008). While the experience in Asian countries has been a combination of methods of which basic education is financed and provided by central government on the one hand, but, on the other hand, a system of privately funded and managed schools exists (Asian- Pacific Regional Bureau for Education-APRBE, 2012). In Africa, for example in Sub-Saharan Africa, there has been growth in funding and provision of primary education (Heneveld and Graig, 1996). The funding in many African countries particularly in Sub Saharan Africa has been a result of lending programme to support long term primary education development programmes (World bank, 1990, p.51).

Yet again, this paper briefly demonstrates the case of Tanzania. In 2001 Tanzanian government introduced Primary Education Development Programme in partnership (PEDP) with donors and the World Bank as an effort to increase primary education enrollment and boost the quality of education (United Republic of Tanzania-URT, 2006; URT, 2001). Thus, to facilitate PEPD implementation at central level there have been three sources of PEPD funding; the Government of Tanzania, pooled fund by different donors and the World Bank (URT, 2006). Under PEDP the Government of Tanzania introduced formula based on enrollment as a criterion to fund non-salary expenses at school level (Mbelle, 2008, URT, 2001). In Tanzania, PEDP is considered as an extraordinary reform as it has signaled improvement in enrollment, provision of teaching and learning material and the construction of classroom.

However, for the purpose of this paper one critical aspect of transformation during PEDP is direct distribution of funds to schools which demands school to manage the funds based on centrally determined procedures. Nevertheless, there is a general agreement that the importance of headteachers has increased with financial delegation (Abu-Duhou, 1999). Therefore, it implies that the headteachers have more power and authority on financial decision making or to use school funds. For example, study by Levacic and Marren (1991) of 11 schools in a local authority in England revealed that each individual school was observed to have opposing decisions about different aspects of expenditure such as maintenance and improvement of school premises as well as acquisition of teaching and learning materials. It was also revealed that these variations were caused by factors such as the personality and the value of the principals.

Conventionally, financial delegation to schools has a habit to be associated with wider participation and reduced autocracy (Abu-Duhou, 1999). However, in examining the perception of stakeholders on the functions of school governing bodies in South Africa it was revealed that revealed that lack of collaboration among stakeholders and those principals assumed great control in general management of schools and considered as their "sole domain" Mestry (2006, p.33). It was further revealed that there were no guiding principles among the schools which were involved in the study, such that every school had unique ways of managing their school funds (Mestry, 2006, p.33).

5. Conclusion

While most researches in the context of decentralization acknowledge the importance of headteachers and participation of school governing bodies, School Committees and other stakeholders, these researches have not clarified the extent to which school funds are managed from headteachers' perspective. Thus, this paper might provide an opening to a more extensive discussion that would require an in-depth exploration to unveil the practices of resources management at schools levels in the era of decentralization. Generally, findings and experience have revealed that it is simple to design decentralization policies in Africa and in other places in the world, but frequently very hard to implement the policies (Gershberg and Winkler, 2004). There is also evidence even in individual countries such as Tanzania where there have been limited achievements in implementing education decentralization policies (Gershberg and Winkler, 2004). Gershberg and Winkler (2004) maintained that for decentralization at school level to be efficacious, heads of schools need to get innovative skills in leadership and management about school financial issues, of teachers and with the communities that schools belong.

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