

# Dynamics of Educational Decentralisation on Effective Management of Primary Schools: Lessons for Cameroon

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this indicative comparative analysis is an initial identification of key issues for the education sector that arise from its implementation of government decentralization policies. The system of education management is being gradually decentralised and de-concentrated on the basis of the subsidiarity principle, as decentralisation is seen as one of the key strategies for reforming and reshaping educational institutions. The present paper tackles the questions about how the interaction of education decentralisation, what changes occur in the process of school management with the increase of school autonomy and what are the conditions for the process of effective school autonomisation. Despite decentralization of education functions through delegation and deconcentration of functions, there are still concerns of ineffectiveness in service delivery especially at the local level. The importance and the impact of raising education quality gives added weight to the question, "Can education decentralization raise quality?" Education decentralization policies are prevalent around the world. The objectives of such policies especially those increasing school autonomy and local governance may include improving service delivery, but more commonly involve shifting political power or funding responsibilities. Whatever motivation for education decentralization, such policies may lead to improvements in the quality of education. This paper examines the potential of education decentralization to improve management and performance, as reflected in educational outcomes and changes in the determinants of those outcomes in three parts: The conceptual arguments for such a relationship • The empirical evidence of the impacts of education decentralization, Better design and implementation of decentralization policy to leverage its impact on quality management.

**KEYWORDS:** Dynamics of Educational Decentralisation, Effective Management and Primary Schools

## INTRODUCTION

Decentralization is a common theme in discussions concerning political, social, and economic reforms. Nonetheless, although often characterized as essential to strengthening democratization, cultural and indigenous rights, local accountability, and local governance, decentralization does not necessarily result in greater efficiencies, empowerment, transparency, civic engagement, or poverty reduction (World Bank, 2011).

Decentralization has become popular in the education sector because many governments have experienced problems providing centralized education services, including financial inefficiencies, inadequate management capacity, lack of transparent decision making, and poor quality and access to education services (King and Cordeiro-Guerra, 2005). The hope is that decentralization will result in educational improvements. While the promises surrounding early decentralization efforts were enticing—better and more efficient education reflecting local priorities the reality of implementation has been uneven in terms of benefits. Nonetheless, while it is known that decentralization does not necessarily lead to improved quality of education and learning outcomes for children, it remains an important tool

for education reform in developing and industrialized countries because it can:

- Accelerate economic development by modernizing institutions;
- Increase management efficiency at central, regional and local levels;
- Reallocate financial responsibility from the centre to the regions;
- Promote democratization;
- Increase local control;
- Control and/or balance power centres, such as teachers' unions and political parties; and
- Enhance quality of services.

There are three generally recognized forms of decentralization: deconcentration, devolution, and delegation of authority and resources. Education systems typically lie somewhere along a "decentralization continuum" and may encompass elements of all three forms of decentralization depending upon the choices governments make, what governments choose to decentralize, and what the goals are for decentralization.

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Globalization has brought about an increased flow of technology, skills, ideas and information across national borders. The result has been an increasing demand for a change in the structure and content of education as well as the role of educational planning to meet the demands of this new world order which is characterised by innovation and flexibility. Among the strategies that have characterized globalisation is decentralization more specifically in the area of education.

Decentralized education provision promises to be more efficient, better reflect local priorities, encourage participation, and, eventually, improve coverage and quality. In particular, governments with severe fiscal constraints are enticed by the potential of decentralization to increase efficiency. Beneficiary cost recovery schemes such as community financing have emerged as means for central governments to off-load some of the fiscal burden of education service provision.

Educational Decentralization refers to the process of transferring educational decision making power, responsibility, and tasks from higher to lower organisational levels. The motives of shifting educational authority and management responsibilities to local levels are a) to enhance democracy in decision making, b) to promote the effective and efficient use of resources in education, c) to make public education more responsive to local needs, d) to reduce the central government's and increase local groups' financial responsibility for schooling provision, and e) to enable schools and teachers to exercise greater professional autonomy.

The advocates of decentralisation assume that shifting authority and management responsibilities to local levels will promote effectiveness and efficiency in the use of resources in education and make public education more responsive to local needs, and enable teachers and schools to exercise greater professional autonomy. In addition, a decentralised system would annul the vices of public sector service delivery, namely bureaucracy, administrative inefficiencies, fiscal wastefulness, and initiate a system that results in greater transparency, accountability and responsiveness. However, critics have questioned these claims by drawing attention to the national and local circumstances that impede successful implementation

Conceptually, school autonomy should run in tandem with local participation. Indeed, historically this principle of school management is strongly linked to the demand for teaching freedom by local stakeholders (school managers, parents, etc.). However, since the 1980s in Europe, these reforms are largely laid down under national legal frameworks which demonstrate a top-down model of decision-making process without any identifiable driving force coming from schools themselves. The analysis of education decentralisation process reveals the parallels with public management concepts, which, depending on the period, influenced education management changes: the 1970s are associated with political trends, oriented towards "democratic participation", and emphasising the need for schools to be more open to their local communities. The 1980s were associated with more effective management of resources for schools, forming a market for educational services. Education management reforms became strongly

linked to a dual movement towards political decentralisation and implementing the "New Public Management" agenda. New Public Management seeks to apply private sector principles to the management of public services. Decentralising responsibilities to local communities and school autonomy are therefore linked in order to increase the efficiency of school management – it is taken for granted that decisions made at the level closest to operations will guarantee the best use of public resources.

### **Conceptual Arguments for the Relationship between Education Decentralization and Quality management**

Decentralization does not need or always have a positive influence on education quality. To the extent education finance is decentralized, differences in fiscal capacity at the local level may generate increased disparities in spending and educational outcomes. To the extent decentralization reduces the power of central education ministries, centrally-run information systems that feed education policy decisions may collapse. Decentralization can also lead to confusion over education management, causing conflicting decisions or failure to carry out functions, with adverse effects on quality and efficiency. A number of other variables affect the impact of decentralization, as well:

- Whether elected school committees reflect their communities or are dominated by political elites.
- Whether newly empowered decentralized units have the capacity to carry out their new functions.
- Whether central education ministries provide the technical and information support necessary for good governance and accountability'

However, if designed and implemented well, decentralization has the potential to improve service delivery and education quality. This paper, therefore, focuses on the potential for decentralization to strengthen accountability in public education and, thus, provide strong incentives for better performance to lead to improvements in variables that are determinants of student achievement.

### **Accountability Framework**

The 2004 World Development Report provides a framework for determining how decentralization may affect accountability. the framework, as adapted by Crouch, illustrates how any publicly provided good or service is delivered within a centralized education system. Citizens lack the private market's direct relationship between customer and provider and between consumer demand and provider supply. Thus, the citizen expresses demand for education by voting for politicians who determine how much education and education quality to provide and who direct the education ministry to operate schools and deliver services to the voter's children. The ministry does this by establishing policies, specifying standards, and transferring resources to schools. Finally, the education service provider—the school and the teacher—delivers instruction to the citizens' children.

The problems with the centralized, public provision of education are well-known: citizens may lack adequate voice in making their preferences known to politicians, political leaders may pass ambiguous legislation and give unclear mandates to the education ministry, the education ministry may be unable to translate policy and program objectives into the necessary resources and capacities, and the service

provider may have weak incentives to directly respond to parental pressure. Additionally, most developing countries lack the following information mechanisms required to ensure accountability:

- Schools may fail to provide information to the ministry on the extent to which their performance meets ministry standards and expectations.
- The ministry may fail to inform elected leaders of its success in meeting legislative goals and objectives.
- The elected government may fail to inform citizens about its success in providing the services demanded by voters.
- Parent-citizens may lack a mechanism to give feedback to the school on its performance, and the school may not inform parents and citizens of its successes and failures in educating children

## REFORMS ACCOMPANYING DECENTRALIZATION IN EDUCATION

Decentralization is not a panacea for improving educational quality and outcomes and, as noted in the introduction, these factors may not even be driving decentralization efforts. No matter the underlying reasons, a number of specific reforms typically accompany education decentralization. These include creating an enabling political and legal framework, downsizing the central education ministry, strengthening sub-national government capacity, establishing local financing, supporting stakeholder participation, and balancing autonomy with accountability.

- A. Enabling political and legal framework. The efficient division of responsibilities among different levels of government requires explicit and transparent rules defining who has authority and who will be held accountable. Legislation needs to describe the role and tasks at each level of government; set limits on the authority and responsibilities at each level; and specify coordination mechanisms among the different levels to facilitate decentralized decision making.
- B. Downsizing the central education administration. An important element of education decentralization is downsizing the central education administration to eliminate extra layers of bureaucracy by moving decision making and resources to local governments and/or schools. Hand in hand with the reduced size of the central government is a change in its role from implementer to facilitator, providing timely support (targeted technical assistance, data analysis, strategic planning, etc.) to local governments and schools.
- C. Strengthening sub-national government capacity. Managers at the sub-national levels (provincial, regional, etc.), need the skills to plan, implement, manage, and evaluate education policies, strategies, and programs. Simply transferring authority and financial resources to these levels to implement decentralized initiatives will not have the desired impact unless lower-level managers also have the human and physical capacity to do the work. Improving managerial capacity and systems can be facilitated through a combination of personnel development, information technology, and modified organizational structures that fit local conditions.
- D. Local financing. Another common element of decentralization is increased local financing. Adequate funding for sub-national levels of government is essential for decentralization efforts to be successful.

Some countries retain tight financial control at the central ministry while others do not. Depending on government decisions and local management capacity, financial packages can be tailored to local capacity and may include a combination of sources such as direct government funds, competitive grants, and fundraising. It is critical that decentralized financing systems develop financial control and monitoring mechanisms for transparency and accountability.

- E. Supporting stakeholder participation. There is widespread agreement that stakeholder buy-in and participation are essential elements of decentralization. This is sometimes achieved by introducing school-based management (SBM). SBM results in greater school autonomy and shifts decision making to teachers, parents, and communities. The rationale for SBM is that the key to improved education systems is the engagement of those most directly affected by management and financing decisions. In any case, a community that is actively engaged with the education system improves the likelihood that decentralization efforts will be successful.
- F. Balancing autonomy with accountability. Maintaining transparency and accountability is another element essential to improving the performance of decentralized education systems. For education decentralization to work, each level of the system must be accountable to those who fund its programs and activities and to those who benefit from them. In other words, there must be a reliable system of accountability at each decentralized level for all stakeholders. Political and legal oversight is key to promoting accountability.

## How Can Decentralization Affect Accountability and Service Delivery?

Education decentralization takes three principal forms. The first, deconcentration, is the reallocation of decision making within the education ministry and bureaucracy—deconcentration is not discussed in this paper. The second, devolution, is the permanent transfer of decision-making responsibilities in education from the central government to lower levels of government: provinces, municipalities, or districts. The third, delegation, or school autonomy, is the administrative or legal transfer of responsibilities to elected or appointed school governing bodies such as school councils, school management committees, and school governing boards. Devolution not only shortens the distance between the citizenparent and policymaker but also shortens the distance between policymaker and the school. The former arguably increases the voice of parents, who can more effectively demand better education in return for the taxes they pay. Shortening the distance between the policymaker, who is responsible for managing the educational system, and the school, which is responsible for directly delivering instructional services, arguably strengthens education system management through easier communication and less evasion by schools of policymaker directives. The extent to which devolution increases accountability greatly depends on the ability of the political system to respond to voters and the capacity of local officials to manage the delivery of educational services.

Delegation, at least in its most common form of empowering elected local governing boards, shortens the distances. In addition to responding to voters, school councils periodically



meet with and, thus, give voice to participating parents. Council members who fail to respond to their clients' interests are likely to be voted out of office. School councils also work directly with school directors on planning and budget issues, creating a strong link between the two entities. Delegation can, in principle, strongly increase accountability for those functions and responsibilities delegated to the school. However, under delegation, many important functions and responsibilities usually remain with higher levels of government, including decisions on per-pupil spending, teacher salaries, and teacher training. Thus, while delegation increases the orientation of schools to their clients, important decisions remain at the higher levels. Decentralization policies that strengthen accountability for performance are often accompanied by other policies that improve quality by strengthening voice, improving information, or contributing additional resources.

Voice can be further strengthened through participatory budgeting and the creation of elected sub-national education councils. The information required by voters to hold schools accountable can be improved by producing and disseminating school report cards, such as those highlighted in Don Winkler's 2005 study of Parana, Brazil's, report cards that include budget and performance data. Additional resources often accompany education decentralization in the form of special school grants to fund school development plans prepared by the school community. Improved governance and accountability may lead to higher efficiency in the use of resources, which contributes to improved school performance. However, they do not inherently lead to the changes in school organization and teaching practices that are necessary for significant learning improvements. Are there reasons to believe these characteristics of schools may change with decentralization?

### How Can Decentralization Affect the Characteristics of Effective Schools?

The variables that affect quality are usually classified as system and community factors, which are not discussed here, and school and classroom factors. In the school and the classroom, the ways a school is organized, teachers teach, and parents interact with the school all affect education quality. In a number of studies across several countries and two decades, education researchers have identified the school that highly effective schools have in common as illustrated in the following box. Several of these characteristics are influenced by decentralization policies. In particular, decentralization that gives schools autonomy and responsibility for their performance appears to generate the characteristics of highly effective schools.

Perhaps this is best stated by Raczynski and Munoz, who summarize their study titled "Effective Schools in Poverty Areas in Chile: Keys and Challenges" as follows: Educational policy has to recognize that effective schools are schools that are responsible for their own future. Their development is affected by external actions and resources, but policy has to assure that the school internalizes and makes endogenous what it receives from the outside. External support facilitates change, but change will only occur when agents within the school champion it.

**Table 1: Characteristics of Effective Schools**

➤	<i>Achievement, orientation, high expectations</i>
➤	<i>Educational leadership</i>
➤	<i>Consensus and cohesion among staff</i>
➤	<i>Curriculum quality/opportunity to learn</i>
➤	<i>School climate</i>
➤	<i>Orderly atmosphere</i>
➤	<i>Effective orientation and good internal relationship</i>
➤	<i>Evaluative potential</i>
➤	<i>Parental involvement</i>
➤	<i>Classroom climate</i>
➤	<i>Effective learning time</i>

Decentralization, especially manifested through school autonomy, has the potential to affect several of the characteristics of effective schools:

- A. High expectations: By empowering parents and giving them information about the school's performance relative to national standards or benchmarks, decentralization may increase parents' participation in school governance, raise their expectations of school performance, and lead to increased pressure on teachers and schools to perform.
- B. Educational leadership: School autonomy gives headmasters and school administrators the tools and the responsibility to effectively lead the school. Headmasters can encourage school-based reform when they display good leadership and receive sufficient training to lead and manage the school community and, especially, the teacher corps.
- C. Consensus and cohesion: School level decentralization is often accompanied by policies requiring teachers, parents, and administrators to jointly prepare school improvement plans, with grant funding provided on a competitive basis by the education ministry. The joint preparation of school improvement plans can create a shared commitment to raise quality as well as incentives to work together to implement it. Teachers who shirk this duty may face disapproval from their colleagues. In addition, the increased power given to headmasters under decentralization gives them the opportunity, if not the obligation, to develop a vision and mission for the school that is shared by both the faculty and the community. Under school autonomy, headmasters often acquire increased management powers to recruit, select, monitor, evaluate, and train teachers and to use the school's discretionary monies to fund that training. This combination of new powers allows headmasters to select teachers who share values and a common vision for the school's development. They also provide incentives for teachers to improve their classroom performance.
- D. Parental involvement: Decentralization often promotes both the formal and informal participation of parents in the school. Formally, parents participate in meetings to select their representatives on the school management committee. Informally, parents are encouraged to donate money to the school, gaining a stronger interest in monitoring its finances and becoming more involved in their children's education. Involving parents more directly in the education of their children may also lead

to changed behavior in the home, resulting in parents more closely monitoring their children's study habits.

- E. Effective learning time: Decentralization is unlikely to have a large impact on how teachers use classroom time, but it can have an important effect on teacher attendance. Teachers may be pressured by parents to reduce their absenteeism from the classroom and parents may play a role in monitoring teacher attendance. The potential gains from reducing teacher absenteeism are given in Figure 4, which shows the absenteeism rates found in seven public expenditure tracking surveys.

### Defining and Measuring Education Decentralization

The literature on the decentralization of education presents a variety of definitions and ways that power is transferred via decentralization. Strictly speaking, we refer to decentralization in education as the devolution of authority from a higher to a lower level of authority. Devolution, which is often considered the strongest form of decentralization, is the permanent transfer of authority over financial, administrative, or pedagogical matters from higher to lower levels of government. Four possible levels of authority are considered in this dissertation: the central government; the intermediate level of government (provincial, state or regional governing bodies); local government (municipal, county or district governments); and schools.

Other definitions of education decentralization that the literature presents are deconcentration and delegation. Deconcentration is a process where there is a shift in management responsibilities to lower levels of government but central government is in control. This is the weakest form of decentralization. On the other hand, delegation is a more general approach to decentralization where the central

government lends authority to lower levels of government or organizational units, with the understanding that the delegated authority can be withdrawn.<sup>11</sup> The literature recognizes that given decentralization's multidimensional nature, measuring any decentralization policy is a difficult task. The fact has been commonly discussed in the fiscal decentralization literature, although at a much less extent in the education decentralization literature. Just as fiscal decentralization is generally measured in the literature as the sub-national share of total government spending, education decentralization may also be measured in its fiscal dimension as the subnational education spending share of total government spending in education. While this approach ignores the importance of measuring the level of decision making at which functions in education take place, given the lack of data to perform cross-country studies, the fiscal dimension measure of education decentralization may be the only proxy that would be consistent for a wider set of countries.

Education decentralization has been measured in different ways based on the variety of labels and strategies that it has taken. Differences in measuring education decentralization in the literature may explain the conflicting results in evaluations of education decentralization policies. The variety of education decentralization strategies include policies of community and parental participation, school autonomy, school choice and voucher programs, charter schools, and sub-national and local resource management. In this approach, education decentralization has been generally measured as dummy variables representing whether a school may be autonomous, or a chartered school, or a community school, or presence of de jure autonomy and decentralization, and so forth. This dummy variable approach is generally found in country case studies.

**Table 2. Types of decisions in education that may be decentralized**

<b>Organization of Instruction</b>	Select School attended by student. Set instruction time. Choose textbooks. Define curriculum content. Determine teaching methods.
<b>Personnel Management</b>	Hire and fire school director. Recruit and hire teachers. Set or augment teacher pay scale. Assign teaching responsibilities. Determine provision of in-service training.
<b>Planning and Structures</b>	Create or close a school. Selection of programs offered in a school. Definition of course content. Set examinations to monitor school performance.
<b>Resources</b>	Develop school improvement plan. Allocate personnel budget. Allocate non-personnel budget. Allocate resources for in-service teacher training.

Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (1998)

**Table 3: Principles of Good Practice in Decentralisation**

<b>Key Elements of Decentralisation</b>	<b>Principles of Good Practice</b>
Governance & Democracy at the Local Level	Representative and Participatory Democracy – How do citizens participate in election of leaders/ representatives to the LGs? How democratic is the electoral system? What extent have historical (country specific) issues/factors influenced system of governance? Local officials and the exercise of their office – Are their roles and responsibilities clearly outlined for purposes of accountability and performance management?
Power and Responsibilities of Local Authorities	Subsidiarity – Does a defined legislative framework exist? Are partnerships (relationships) between different spheres of Government well defined? Incremental Action – to what extent are functions devolved top-down. What is the balance between allocated functions and capacity of LGs to deliver on their mandates?
Administrative Relations between Local Authorities and other spheres of Government	Legislative Action – Are the LG structures entrenched in national legislation (Constitution or Act of Parliament)? Empowerment – how freely do LGs exercise their powers within provisions of relevant laws? To what extent during policy and legislative reforms, are LGs and LGAs consulted? Supervision and Oversight – Do we have any statutory provisions on appointment, suspension or dismissal of LG executives and officials? Is the reporting structure clear? What performance management measures/ systems have LGs implemented?

Financial and Human Resources of Local Authorities	Capacities and HR of LGs – what is the role of the CG, LGAs, private firms, institutions and development collaborates in capacity development? Financial Resources of LGs – what is the extent of financial autonomy of LGs? How reliable and adequate are available (current and potential) revenue sources? What is the mix between local revenues (taxes, levies) and other revenues (CG transfers, borrowings, donors, etc)
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Source: Adapted from (UNDP 2011)

**Table 4: General and Education Decentralisation Matrix**

Education/General	Administrative	Fiscal	Political
<b>Deconcentration to Regional Government Offices and Regional MOE Offices</b>	Move managerial decisions and managerial accountability to regional offices of central government and MOE.	Give regional managers greater authority to allocate and reallocate budgets.	Create regional, elected bodies to advise regional managers.
<b>Devolution to regional or local governments</b>	Education sector managers are appointed by elected officials at local or regional level.	Give subnational governments power to allocate education spending and, in some cases, to determine spending levels (i.e., through raising revenues).	Elected regional or local officials of general purpose governments are ultimately accountable both to voters and to sources of finance for the delivery of schooling.
<b>Delegation to schools and/or school councils</b>	School principals and/or school councils empowered to make personnel, curriculum, and some spending decisions.	School principals and/or school councils receive government funding and can allocate spending and raise revenues.	School councils are elected or appointed, often with power to name school principals.
<b>Implicit delegation to community schools</b>	School principals and/or community school councils make all decisions.	Self-financing with some government subsidies, especially in remote areas where public schools are not present.	School councils are often popularly elected.

Most decentralisation typologies begin with the requisite references to deconcentration, devolution, delegation, and privatization. This is particularly true when education decentralization is part of general government decentralization—often also part of a public sector reform effort to improve democracy and the legitimacy of the state. Recently, attention has focused equally if not more on decentralization to schools and school management committees (commonly called school autonomy and school-based management, SBM) as opposed to decentralization to (or of) governments. These discussions include privatization, but more commonly the transfer of real decision-making power over budgeting, finance, curriculum and administration to public school sites. Such education decentralization reforms are likely to be motivated by specific concerns about improving access and student performance.

### Rationale for decentralisation

The rationale for education decentralisation involves improving efficiency, effectiveness and democracy. Improved equity, too, is a rationale for decentralisation, although it is also often acknowledged that because decentralisation makes localities more reliant upon their economic and social endowments, some aspects of equity may suffer in the absence of adequate compensatory mechanisms. There is no silver bullet: what is equitable may not be efficient, what is efficient may not be democratic, what is democratic may not be equitable. In practice, reform strategies must attempt to optimize the sometimes inevitable trade-offs between efficiency, equity, and democracy while seeking to improve on all three.

### Organization of Instructions and School Effectiveness Management

It has been argued that devolution of decision making to local and school levels and greater market orientation make schools and teachers more accountable to children and parents, more sensitive to input costs, and more efficient, thereby increasing their effectiveness. But basic questions remain regarding whether such outcomes depend on parental or local community capabilities in influencing and

judging the extent of value added in schools. If parental/community capabilities are lacking, for example, due to parents' lack of education or economic resources, what can be done about it? Designing incentive structures for schools and teachers that increase their levels of professionalism in the face of limited parental and local capabilities is a critical challenge for education policy today. Meeting this challenge may require the development of supporting mechanisms that collect and disseminate information on value added by schools. How might this be accomplished?

### Importance of Decentralised Educational Planning

Decentralised educational planning is essential for resource utilization. It ensures efficient and effective resource management and also strengthens local governance. Additionally it provides advice on the allocation of resources among different components of the educational system (general buildings, equipment, scholarships, textbooks and the like). Decentralised educational planning thus allows for efficient performance of education. To achieve the national educational delivery goals there is the need to strengthen decentralised educational planning and resource



deployment to improve the quality of teaching and learning, management efficiency, increased access to and participation in education delivery at the district or local levels. A strong knowledge base at the local level enables people to take informed decision and choices. It is believed that active community participation could contribute to effective needs assessment and facilitate proper planning and improved educational delivery

### THEORISING EDUCATIONAL DESCENTRALISATION AND SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

There is currently a global trend towards the decentralizing of education systems. Most countries are experimenting or contemplating some form of decentralization. Proponents of education decentralization claim that "reorganization will improve the quality of teaching and learning by locating decisions closer to the point at which they must be carried out and be energizing teachers and administrators to do a better job" (Fiske 1996). Although the impact of education decentralization has been analyzed in the literature for nearly fifteen years, there is still no consensus on whether these policies positively impact education output and schooling. Given that primary and secondary education are often considered a national priority both on efficiency and equity grounds, central government involvement in the financing and regulation of education (including determining curricula and setting educational standards) is generally universal, especially in developing countries.

Nonetheless, in accordance with the subsidiarity principle, the actual provision or delivery of basic education is often characterized by decentralized provision, where local governments are responsible for assuring the actual provision of education. While there is no simple rule to follow when it comes to decentralizing education; the issue becomes one of finding a balance between degrees of centralized and decentralized decision-making of functions in education across different levels of government, given the education system objectives.

Assuming that the correct institutions are in place, the potential gains in the framework of decentralized education service delivery found in the literature can be summarized as follows:

- A. Better information and targeting. Local governments have a more institutionalized linkage with beneficiary communities, improved information, and the incentive to use this information; therefore, local governments are better placed to identify the needs, to respect local social identities, and to respond more efficiently to local variations in conditions, tastes, standards, affordability, location requirements and so on for services or infrastructure. Community participation can improve the information flow leading to improved project performance and better targeting. Local governments are better informed not only about local preferences and politics but also about local variations and costs, so they can potentially allocate resources more efficiently than the central government.
- B. Innovation and creative approaches. Having many suppliers of education can lead to a wide variety of experiences and innovation through competition among subnational governments. It also encourages providers to act to satisfy the wishes of the local community. Additionally, demand side inducements and choice, if

well designed, can be very valuable for education improvement.

- C. Cost/service link. Improved efficiency levels of service provision are achieved when there is a link between costs and benefits. When local governments have autonomy to levy fees and local taxes, there is not only a great potential for improved revenue mobilization and increased resources available for redistribution and allocation of programs, but this also reinforces local accountability.
- D. Improved efficiency. This deals with how educational resources are used. It is argued that decentralization leads to more efficiency by eliminating bureaucratic procedures and motivating local officials to be accountable to citizens for resource allocation. In a centralized system, decisions are mostly made outside and far away from where the actual issue is located. Assuming that local government units are more informed about the specific needs of their communities, then allowing local governments to decide on resource allocation will result in better efficiency.
- E. Greater voice and participation. Decentralization empowers citizens through the creation of institutions that promote greater voice and participation, and giving citizens a greater management role. The assumption is that decentralization works by enhancing citizen's political voice in a way that results in improved education services, however, this could go either way on both theoretical and empirical grounds. Although decentralization is no panacea, if correct institutions are in place, it can be very promising. While direct parental participation is considered a weak link to affect service delivery when there is no local autonomy to make changes, providing direct parent and community participation in schools can be a promising strategy for school improvement.
- F. Strengthened accountability relationships. Accountability relationships between local authorities, citizens, providers and the center are strengthened, as there is greater voice, information, responsiveness and monitoring.

### Soufflé Theory of Decentralisation by Parker (1995)

In the Parker Soufflé Theory of Decentralisation, he advocates three major elements of decentralisation: administrative, fiscal, and political decentralisation. In this theory, Decentralisation involves the shifting of fiscal, political and administrative responsibilities from higher to lower levels of government. To characterize decentralisation, one must consider political, fiscal, and administrative issues. All these components must complement each other to produce more responsive local governments that will deliver effective, efficient and sustainable services and maintain fiscal discipline.

The Administrative decentralisation seeks to redistribute authority, responsibility and financial resources for providing services among different levels of government (Hossain, 2000). The central government transfers some of its responsibilities for planning, financing and management to the local level authorities in this case educational decentralization. This enables the central government to give the local authorities administrative autonomy to respond effectively to the local needs as postulated by World Bank, (2008). The local authorities can therefore make changes and

enforce regulatory decisions to govern various systems at local offices such as the procurement system and human resources management including recruitment and performance management.

Fiscal decentralisation gives local government authority and power to generate revenues and decide on expenditures. It also transfers some funds from central government to local governments so that the local governments can deliver decentralised function (Ghazia, 2009). Fiscal decentralization takes many forms like cost recovery through user charges and expansion of local revenues through property or sales taxes, or indirect charges. Nevertheless there should be fiscal policies and procedures to govern the practices of local officials; checks and balances must also be built into the system (Kerr, 1998).

Political decentralisation transfers policy and legislative powers from central government to elected local authorities (Azfar, 1999). This implies that local representatives can make detailed decisions within policy guidelines formulated by the centre and the legal framework is improved to show clearly the division of responsibilities between the centre and the local authorities. However, the allocation of the power of decision making to local authorities is not enough to create successful decentralisation if local officials are not accountable to the local population (Elsageer & Mbawambo, 2004). Local accountability might be promoted through various mechanisms such as third party monitoring by media and NGOs, extensive participation and central government oversight of local governments.

In the adaption of the this theory to the context of Cameroon, the division of the Ministry of National Education in Cameroon to the Ministry of Basic Education, Ministry of Secondary Education and Ministry of Higher Education engender the administrative decentralization process in Cameroon, however, most of the decisions are still at the central level with regards to policies, resources and decision making. In the 2004 Law on decentralisation, the state operates at the Central, Regional and Local Levels to meet her objectives and goals for each financial year. These are indicators that administratively, Cameroon has absorbed the decentralization policy as one of the strategies for good governance that will bring about economic growth and development in the country.

In Cameroon, the Minister in-charge of Basic Education is determine by an order latest 30<sup>th</sup> April of each year and within the purview of the following school year, the nature and fix the composition of the school materials and supplies to be granted to nursery and primary schools and preschool establishments by councils in the form of minimum packet. This is further confirmed by the Finance Law of the State where each year, resources necessary for the exercise of the decentralisation process needs to be transferred to the Councils. The financial resources transferred shall be recorded in the council budget and management shall respect the budgetary accounting principles in force.

## EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Various researchers have studied on the concept of decentralization with the intention of answering the questions about the effects and other related questions on its implementation. The following is a brief review of empirical

studies on the impact of education decentralization in some of the countries among many in the world that this study has referred. This section highlights the growing body of empirical evidence that explores the effects of education decentralisation on Effective Management in low and, in some cases, middle income school contexts. Whilst there is an increasing amount of empirical work in sub-Saharan Africa, decentralisation studies from Latin America continue to predominate (Leithwood and Menzies 1998; Barrera-Osorio et al. 2009). Given the focus of this thesis, attention is directed towards empirical studies that consider school-based management and school grant reforms, drawing on both qualitative and quantitative studies.

## Decentralisation of Organization of Instructions and Effective Management of Public Primary Schools

In a recent systematic review of the effects of school-based decision making on educational outcomes in low and middle-income contexts, Carr-Hill et al. (2015) identified twenty-six impact studies that met a narrow set of eligibility criteria, including a low to medium risk of bias within the identified causal estimates of each study. The studies covered seventeen interventions across thirteen countries of which four were in sub-Saharan Africa. This study utilized a survey research design with a sample of 452 respondents. The results of the meta-analysis suggest that devolving decision-making to the school level contributes to relatively small but significant positive effects on dropout and repetition. Effects on tests scores are larger and more robust. Further analysis across the studies suggests that these estimates are driven by the results from middle-income countries (including Kenya) (Carr-Hill et al. 2015). Overall, the results suggest that school-based decision-making reforms appear to be less effective in disadvantaged communities, particularly if parents and community members have low levels of education and low status relative to school personnel. Furthermore, school-based management appears to be ineffective when communities choose not to actively participate in decision-making processes.

Carr-Hill et al. 2015 recommend a need for further robust analysis of the impacts of large-scale school-based decision-making reforms, as well as analysis of the conditions that mediate their impact (Carr-Hill et al. 2015). Although many titles were identified in their initial search, the small number of impact studies included in the meta-analysis represents limited geographic diversity and a small number of discrete interventions. Saharan Africa: The Gambia (Blimpo and Evans 2011) and a (Das et al. 2011). The McEwan (2014) review confirms that the body of evidence looking at the relationship between school grants and education quality as measured by test scores is limited. In a more recent experimental study in Niger, a school grant programme reports a positive effect on parents' contributions in schools both in terms of contributing more money as well as going to meetings and managing school supplies (Beasley and Huillery 2016).

Where the community has more power (measured by the level of education of community committee members), they make more contributions. It is also these communities with more authority that are more likely to take charge of monitoring teacher attendance or sanctioning teachers for absenteeism in response to the grant. There are no observed effects on student test scores (Beasley and Huillery 2016).



Although school-based management reforms assume that community members know what should be done to improve educational outcomes, the evidence suggests that this is not always the case (Beasley and Huillery 2016). In their study, Beasley and Huillery (2016) find that school management committees frequently opted to spend their grants on agricultural projects, instead of school materials, teacher incentives or other initiatives likely to affect educational outcomes. The crowding in of community effort runs contrary to findings in India and Zambia where households were found to be more likely to decrease their private spending on educational inputs (including uniform, books, teaching and learning materials) if the school grants are anticipated and substitute these investments (Das et al. 2011).

In a study conducted by De Grauwe (2004), on a Reviewing experiences in a range of sub-Saharan African contexts, suggests a concern that school-based management can exacerbate inequalities with the most functional schools able to take advantage of it and the less functional schools potentially getting worse. This study utilized a descriptive survey research design with a sample size of 612 respondents. This echoes the finding from an experimental study in The Gambia where the authors suggest a required literacy threshold in the community to enable the school to benefit from the school grant and training intervention (Blimpo and Evans 2011).

In a study conducted by Pont, B., Nusche, D., & Moorman, H. (2008), on the use of school autonomy in practice internationally, and, subsequently, its impact on outcomes, a classification is needed to capture the full range of school interventions. The used a phenomenological research designs with a sample size of 367 respondents. An extensive literature review revealed that existing classifications are inadequate for these purposes. This study presents the mixed-methods construction and validation of an empirically based classification of school interventions that allows for the identification, analysis, and comparison of the actual use of school autonomy.

To capture the range of school autonomy in practice, a school intervention was broadly defined as a planned action intended to cause change in the school. That definition was not confined to innovative interventions and did not rule out any school decision-making areas. An open-response questionnaire was employed for the same purpose. Because of the high level of school autonomy in the Dutch education system, the study was carried out among secondary-education school leaders in the Netherlands. School leaders with the ultimate process responsibility for their school were regarded as decision-making executives at the school level. To ensure the face and content validation of the classification, school-level decision-making representatives were actively involved at all stages of the process.

In a study of decisional location and process, Chikoko (2008) considers the state of education decentralisation in Malawi and Zimbabwe. Based on a one district decentralisation pilot in Malawi, the author alludes to the challenges of an entrenched work culture in a context of low salaries, reluctance to take on delegated work, and confused lines of accountability between staff. He concludes by suggesting that change brought about through the pilot was structural

change on paper rather than a change in behaviour and work ethic. This builds on the findings of a qualitative study of the same district by Davies et al. (2003).

In another study by Suzuki (2002) which explores parental participation and accountability in the context of decentralised service provision in Uganda. In a qualitative study in eight primary schools, she finds that the use of 'exit' (i.e. the transferring of children to another school) is rarely effective and 'voice' is therefore the only potential sanction measure. This too is limited leading to a weak accountability framework which renders the head teacher *responsible* rather than *accountable* to the community. Her findings echo a study of local government in Uganda and Kenya that suggests that the 'assumption that decentralisation of decision-making will automatically result in decisions that reflect the needs and priorities of local citizens is naïve' (Devas and Grant 2003).

### Implications for school management

The evidence to date on the impact of decentralization suggests that simply changing the organization of education creating school councils or moving responsibilities to sub-national governments—has little, if any, impact on the delivery of education. It is the exercise of new responsibilities that has an impact.

The effective exercise of those responsibilities may be dependent on the training and existing capacity of school personnel. There is consistent evidence of the positive impacts of giving schools budget authority and of involving parents in school governance. The magnitude of the impact, however, depends on the details: the scope of budget authority, the type of training to manage funds, and the degree of parental involvement.

There is also evidence that central government education ministries have important new roles to play in decentralized systems: setting standards, managing national examinations, and disseminating information to beneficiaries, which are positively related to school performance.

Does decentralization lead to improvements in quality, fairness, or efficiency in the delivery of instruction? This question is foremost in the minds of educators. The evidence to date provides few answers to this question. One reason for this lack of resolution may be the political nature of decentralization reforms. The proponents of reform want them adopted and implemented but not necessarily evaluated. Thus, even when a developed country like New Zealand adopts decentralization reform policy, the policy change is not accompanied by any systematic effort to evaluate its effects. Another reason lies in the comprehensive nature of decentralization reforms, especially with regard to devolution. When a reform is implemented everywhere simultaneously, there is no possibility of adopting a rigorous evaluation research design.

Clearly, there is a need for a more serious evaluation of education decentralization that focuses less on the question of whether decentralization is a good thing and more on the challenges of how decentralization should be designed and implemented to yield the best results and the conditions and supporting environment under which decentralization yields positive results. For new research to add value, it should

focus on questions of the details of design and implementation. For example, what is required to transform a headmaster with limited management responsibilities into an effective leader of the school? Under what conditions do teachers become motivated to learn from each other and to improve their collective school performance? What is needed to increase citizens' demand for quality education such that they pressure schools to improve and increase their support for learning at home? Parker and Leithwood provide an example of this kind of detailed investigative work in their evaluation of school councils.

The evidence to date suggests that decentralization and, especially, school autonomy can improve the delivery of schooling, with some risk of increased inequality of outcomes. However, not enough is known about how to best realize this positive potential of decentralization, especially in poor countries and for poor clients.

### LESSONS FOR CAMEROON AND WAY FORWARD

Education decentralization is an increasingly important element in the delivery of education services in client countries. Yet, there is a lack of knowledge about how to conceptualize and design sustainable decentralization programs. The final section of this paper provides practical guidance on how to effectively conceive of and design programs and projects that include decentralization as one element for improved education. It does not provide tips on how to design discrete project activities, but rather focuses on preparing successful requests for proposals for education programs that are demand driven, educationally sound, and socially and politically viable.

Several elements have been identified as crucial to the design of an education decentralization project that meets the stated objectives (Hanson, 1997; USAID, 2011). It is important to note that because countries vary in their political, economic, and social makeup, the impact of a decentralization strategy introduced in one country is not necessarily predictive of what will happen in another; and lessons learned from implementing decentralization will vary depending on what is driving the decision to decentralize (Hanson, 1997). Generally speaking, decentralization programs will be more effective if the following features are incorporated into the program design:

- A. Devote time to analyze the current system and to define the responsibilities of all stakeholders. When designing a reform strategy and the subsequent education decentralization program, it is critical to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the existing system and to address them in program conceptualization and design. Some areas where assessments should be carried out include management efficiency, evaluation capacity, effectiveness of information systems and budgeting, research productivity, the adequacy of the curriculum, the quality of classroom teaching and learning, and community involvement. Once the analyses are complete, responsibilities and authority should be outlined and essential training should be incorporated into the design to create the capacity to implement the financial and technical aspects of decentralization.
- B. Understand the driving force behind decentralization. If a program is to have the desired impact on the reform effort, it must distinguish between stated and unstated goals as well as recognize the importance of each goal to

stakeholders. Developing an effective decentralized education program in an environment of differing stakeholder missions and goals and varying public opinion, can be a challenge. Understanding the interests driving decentralization and planning the program accordingly are keys to successfully integrating these disparate goals and achieving meaningful and measurable results.

- C. Create a common vision for reform. This is essential if collaboration, rather than conflict, is to become the driving force behind decentralization actions. For Education Ministries and schools that have not had a history of working collaboratively, developing a common vision for decentralization may serve as the foundation for a collaborative culture. To this end, it is important to initiate an open flow of ideas and information and engage key actors in program design and implementation from the beginning.
- D. Develop a clear and realistic plan for implementation. The program's decentralization plan should specify the crucial and sometimes difficult preliminary steps before authority is transferred. These steps include training regional and local leadership; modifying and defining lines of authority and decision-making roles; and developing financing mechanisms at the national, regional, and local levels so that each actor can effectively and efficiently carry out assigned tasks, such as curriculum development and school maintenance.
- E. Successful decentralization requires that national and sub-national levels of government be restructured and that they be willing to share power. Even with changes in laws and regulations, some central ministry of education officials may be reluctant to relinquish their authority to sub-national officials and schools. "While power sharing rarely poses a challenge to implementation, it does require a culture change at the center from one of control to one of facilitation and support. Furthermore, while decentralization to sub national governments does not in itself empower parents, decentralization of real decision making power to schools or school councils can significantly increase parental participation in schools which is linked to improved school performance" (USAID, 2011). Therefore, during the design phase, consultation with all levels of government is essential to foster buy-in and ensure sustainability.
- F. Decentralization is a long, evolutionary process that can take a decade or longer to fully implement. Furthermore, the shortterm impact may be difficult to measure. Decentralization often begins with a legal step—a new law or decree—that outlines the reform followed by implementation regulations and the transfer of authority to sub-national levels, communities, and schools. The speed with which this process occurs depends on political will and capacity at the different levels. Some regions may be better prepared to take on the responsibilities of decentralization while others may need more extensive support and time to fully implement initiatives.

### Conclusions

Decentralisation of education causes changes in the coordination of the subjects of education system which determine the increase of school responsibility. The main elements of school autonomy are the decrease of the role of

governmental management and the increase of school responsibility. Such factors as the school leader's leadership competence, participation and support of the school community, national policy support and trust are essential for school autonomisation. The coordination of all of these factors is based on the formation of trust culture in the school. The competence of the school leader determines whether he or she will be able to share the increased responsibility at school and whether he or she will be trusted by the school community members and whether they will agree to accept part of the responsibility. In other words, certain level of trust has to be developed at school, so that each school community member could feel individual responsibility for the school activity

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