

Decentralization of Education: Interrogating its feasibility within the Zimbabwean context

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Abstract: Decentralization has been suggested as one of the solutions to the problems affecting developing countries. It was expected to bring with it benefits such as accountability, efficiency, empowerment and reducing bottlenecks. These benefits were expected to spread to sectors such as education. The paper discusses different forms of decentralization within the context of education. The different forms discussed include deconcentration, devolution, delegation and de facto decentralization. The paper discusses decentralization of education within the Zimbabwean context. The paper observes that local authorities in Zimbabwe demonstrated lack of capacity to manage education. On the other hand, the use of School Development Committees in schools has created a burden on parents in their efforts to provide for the schools. The paper argues that attempts to decentralize have not had the desired results. As such, decentralization of education cannot be the panacea to the challenges in education in most developing countries. In some instances, decentralization has resulted in the transfer of national problems to local levels. In that regard, the major issues in education are not premised on whether to centralize or to decentralize our education system, but on having a holistic approach that includes the creation of stable economies, improved political and social conditions.

Keywords: Decentralization; devolution; deconcentration; devolution; delegation; reform policy; decentralization by default.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

There have been attempts to decentralise education in different parts of the world. This has had varied effects on the outcome of education. In all cases the reasons for decentralization vary from country to country. As such, decentralization as a concept has been found to be very complex. Much of this complexity emanates from the history of decentralization and the various meanings and connotations derived from such history [1]. This concern for improvement of the quality of education has contributed to countries experimenting with different models of education decentralization. Some of the challenges that affect the desire to decentralise education are to do with the often asked question: Can education be decentralised in a political arrangement that is not decentralised? One of the major reasons for the call for decentralisation of education has to do with the issues of power. Power is very much related to the politics of the day. Issues to do with lack of fiscal efficiency, and administrative deficiencies in handling educational matters have contributed to making decentralization a viable and valuable option to centralisation of education.

Decentralization in education is expected to address the following key areas: accountability mechanisms; the role of local governments and local structures within the Ministry of Education; distribution of both material and human resources; the role of parents in education; and the provision of technical assistance and skills in education, the transfer of responsibilities with the financial resources that go with them and the concerns for quality in education. In that regard we cannot focus on decentralisation without addressing the issues of empowerment. The question is perhaps who is to be empowered by whom? When it becomes a power game, we cannot expect those who do not want to lose the power to empower those below them. In other words if local authorities and local communities are to be empowered, the central authority is most likely to lose some of its powers and influence. That being the case, to what extent could we expect the central authority to empower local authorities? An examination of the definition of decentralization could help us come up with an answer. Decentralization aims at empowering those at the local level. These are at the stage services are delivered. Within the context of education, we are looking at the teachers, the students,

the parents, the community and the local council and the extent to which they play their roles in education.

In addition, decentralization indicates to us who does what and where, the functions of the different structures within the decentralization structure should be clear. It should be clear in terms of teacher recruitment and compensation, determination of the curriculum, school funding and construction. Furthermore, there is the problem of measuring decentralization.

Measurement of decentralization of education takes a variety of forms depending on whether you are an economist or a politician. The Education Encyclopedia-StateUniversity.com[32] observes that economists consider at least two indicators that can be used to measure education decentralization. These are the amount of educational revenue that comes from local sources and the control that is exercised by local government. Other indicators of decentralization in education include who makes the political decisions on the allocation and provision of education, organization of teaching and learning, management of personnel and resources (ibid). In trying to conceptualise the measurement of educational decentralization as indicated above we are most likely to encounter a number of challenges. One of these has to do with the extent to which the local level is free to exercise autonomy on issues to do with the education curriculum. There is an argument that the school curriculum, if it is to be of benefit to the nation, it should operate beyond the local community. It has to prepare the individual with skills that should be able to equip the individual with skills that enable him/her to address the global issues that are of concern today. These include lack of development, poverty, unemployment, discrimination, lack of skills and hunger. In other words, education has to go beyond the local boundaries in order to contribute to the exchange of ideas. Secondly, the relevance of educational qualifications goes beyond political boundaries as there is need to learn about other people's cultures and their technology.

In Zimbabwe the President set up a The Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training in 1998. Among other terms of reference, the Commission which was later referred to as the Nziramasanga Commission was charged among other terms of reference with the task of collecting evidence on decentralization of education on the appropriate framework for organising and managing Education and Training within the context of the role of local authorities and communities [2]. As observed in The Sunday Mail, 7 September 2014, Vision 2020 viewed decentralisation as an essential process for development.

The rationale and basis for decentralisation differ from country to country. The type and form of decentralisation in education is influenced by a variety of factors. Fiske [20] observed that the objectives for decentralisation include political, educational, economic, political, economic, and financial objectives. Other arguments for decentralisation in education were its contribution to an increase of the local community's participation in education programmes affecting them and their children. As noted by McGinn and Welsh [37] it can be argued that decentralisation in education legitimates governance of education by persons who have been selected through a political process that permits groups in society to express their preferences. The other argument has been related to the concerns for improving technical and social efficiency and accountability [31]. In addition to the above, there have been arguments that decentralisation would address concerns about inputs to schooling, quality issues, curriculum relevance and learning outcomes.

Decentralisation: Conceptual/ Theoretical Perspectives

In the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training in Zimbabwe Report (1999) a number of concerns were expressed about the concept decentralisation. The Sunday Mail, 7 September 2014, decentralisation became a central issue in that people were not clear on the different forms of decentralisation which are delegation, devolution, de-concentration, deregulation and privatisation of education. Within the context of this paper, it is important that these different forms of decentralisation are clarified. The other issue is on the distinction between decentralisation in education and decentralisation of education. There are other questions that are also related to whether there can be successful implementation of decentralisation in education without political decentralisation of authority, thus whether we can have efficient decentralisation in education in a unitary political system.

World Bank[33]; defines decentralization as the transfer of authority and responsibility for public functions from the central government to subordinates or quasi-independent government organisations and /or the private sector. Bangura and Larbi [3] add another dimension of the definition of decentralisation. They remind us that decentralisation goes beyond the transfer of authority from central government to lower levels, but involves the deliberate and planned transfer of resources from central authority to peripheral institutions. Such institutions include district councils, local government, schools and other organisations such as churches.

Apart from the focus on transfer of power, authority and resources, there are attempts to explain decentralization in terms of the purpose it serves, and its forms and practices. The types of decentralisation are

determined by the objectives of decentralization. The types of decentralization include political decentralisation, administrative decentralisation, fiscal decentralisation and economical decentralisation and fiscal decentralisation. On administrative decentralisation, the focus is to achieve administrative objectives in order to achieve administrative convenience [4]. Administrative decentralisation transfers political problems, the financial burden and reduces corruption at national level but at the same time transferring of national problems such as corruption to local levels [4,5]. Apart from transferring responsibilities as noted above, administrative decentralisation involves the cascading of responsibilities such as planning, financing, coordinating and managing functions to local level.

The other type of decentralisation is political decentralisation. Political decentralisation is a power game. Within the context of political decentralisation power and decision making authority are spread to local authorities. These local authorities include local government, and district authorities. Within the same context, political decentralisation has the objectives of achieving political goals to enhance participation and decision making on issues of governance [6]. As noted by the World Bank [34]: political decentralisation gives local communities more power in public decision-making. It is supported by constitutional reforms and creation of local political units (ibid). Political decentralisation is viewed as having an empowering effect to local communities. However, political decentralisation has been characterised by a number of issues. These include the envisaged empowering effect of political decentralisation being characterised by challenges emanating from gender, social class and culture, and at times the unwillingness of the centre to share power. The fear comes from the assumption that assigning power to local levels may render the central government weaker as it shares power with lower institutions. Political decentralisation has to deal with the fear attributed to a zero-sum power game, in which local actors are perceived to gain at the expense of the centre, rather than a positive-sum power game which result in both the local and centre gaining over time [6]. There are two other pertinent issues that have to be addressed. These are political legitimacy and professional expertise. McGinn and Welsh [37] raise equally pertinent questions on whether political legitimacy and professional expertise always converge and whether education can be the right forum to exercise political rights. Lack of convergence between political legitimacy and professional expertise may lead to “negative-sum” tendencies among groups that have to work together.

With economic decentralisation, the focus is on the private sector taking over the functions of central government. One example of economic decentralisation

was the introduction of structural economic adjustment programme in Zimbabwe in 1991. This came about as an economic strategy advocated by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, which was meant to reduce government expenditure and the central government had to privatise, and outsource government functions. This resulted in some government owned companies deregulating and privatising. This type of decentralisation is at times referred to as market decentralisation. The shifting of responsibilities from government to the private sector, within this context, is characterised by privatisation and deregulation. The two terms that feature the most in economic decentralisation literature are privatisation and deregulation. As noted by the World Bank, privatisation can refer to at least four aspects. These include the following; liberalising the economy and removing government monopolies so as to allow private enterprises to perform functions that had previously been performed by government; contracting or sub-contracting infrastructure; participation of private organisations in the capital market; and transfer of provision of services from public sector to private sector (ibid). On the other hand within the same context of economic decentralisation, deregulation allows competition as it removes regulatory monopolies. The objectives of economic decentralisation are premised on at least two assumptions. The first assumption being that local units are more conducive to both formulation and implementation because of the close proximity of the people they are supposed to serve. The second assumption being that citizens are more likely to be more willing to contribute financially in support of local programmes and that there will be competition and choice at the same time [7]. The assumption that citizens are willing to contribute financially appears to ignore economies of scale. In essence, where the community is poor we would not expect much in terms of financial contribution from the community.

Within the same context of financing education, there is fiscal decentralisation. Fiscal decentralisation focuses on financing of programmes and monetary contributions. The World Bank [34] ; observes that fiscal decentralisation can take at least five forms. These include the use of user charges for cost recovery; user participation in providing services and infrastructure through monetary and labour contributions; the use of sales tax and indirect charges; the shifting of revenue from central government to local government for specific purposes; and the authorization of borrowing powers of local authorities such as councils and municipalities (ibid). There are concerns about this type of decentralisation in Africa. As noted earlier, the passing on of responsibilities are in most of the cases not accompanied by the requisite revenue that should support the implementation of the intended programmes at local level. It is also noted with concern, that the economic base of the local community to a very

large extent determines the nature of programmes to be implemented.

Forms of decentralisation

The types of decentralisation discussed above are very much determined by the goals of decentralisation. Decentralisation has to change, both the structure and culture of the organisation [8, 9]. Such attempts to reform organisations either structurally or culturally or both seem to have contributed to the emergence of different forms and practices of decentralisation. These forms of decentralisation have been classified in terms of how power, responsibilities and resources are distributed. These include deconcentration, devolution, delegation and de facto decentralization among others.

Decentralization as deconcentration

Decentralisation has tended to focus on what form really constitutes decentralisation. The arguments have been between deconcentration, devolution, delegation and even privatisation. Some scholars have referred to decentralisation in terms of the purpose it serves as already noted in the discussion of decentralisation objectives. At the same time, some scholars have referred to decentralisation in terms of its form and degree of power.

Deconcentration involves greater geographical decentralisation of state authority and results in the transfer of more authority to such lower levels as regional and local officials for them to take initiative for new activity, to budget and to recruit and deploy staff [4]. It has also been noted that in deconcentration, central government retains authority, but allocates responsibilities to the lower levels of government [10]. Hyden [11] also notes that the transfer of authority to lower levels alone was not enough to constitute decentralisation, but the authority transferred should be adequate to enable them to carry out specific functions. Deconcentration entails the movement of authority from the centre to the periphery within the same organisation. Such transfer of authority from central ministries and their agencies to those who are situated outside the national headquarters becomes an intra-organisational pattern of power relations [11]. It is intra-organisation because the transfer of power and authority is occurring within the ministries and agencies. The focus is on sharing responsibilities within the organisation, but the overall decision remains with the central ministry. As noted earlier, the responsibilities that can be decentralised through the deconcentration form include management of resources, budgeting, recruitment and deployment of staff.

The arguments against decentralisation in the form of deconcentration are at least three-fold. First, instead of cutting costs, deconcentration incurs higher running costs than a centralised system. Second, some

areas are underdeveloped and such areas can feel marginalised. Third, decentralisation in the form of deconcentration has been blamed for perpetuating inequalities among communities [12]. Deconcentration has also been criticised for failing to transfer real authority between government departments, as it may involve only a shift of responsibilities from central government to those in districts and provinces [13]. In that regard, there is no real power transfer, but rather decongestion of the central authority which may be based in the capital.

In the paradigm of decentralisation as given by Smith [14] the advantages of decentralisation are closer links with people, democratization, participation, accountability, more transparency, more efficiency, better services, more willingness to repay, more costs recovered and less cost to government. Fritzen and Lim [15] describe the continuum of deconcentration. According to them, deconcentration progresses through three different levels. These are the lower, middle (where a degree of systemic change is required) and the higher level. The lower level focuses on the administrative aspect which is concerned with programme effectiveness and breaking through bureaucracy. The middle level which focuses on the degree of systematic change required is concerned with the fiscal objectives which are concerned with efficiency and responsiveness to local preference. Political objectives promote ethnic harmony; enable democratization and empowering civil society. The third stage according to Fritzen and Lim [15] is the focus on market objectives which entails bypassing the state in economic activities.

DECENTRALISATION AS DEVOLUTION

Another form of decentralisation that has received advocacy for some decades is devolution. Devolution as a form of decentralisation involves the transfer of legally defined elements of political power to lower units of government [16]. It shares similarities with deconcentration in terms of relegating power and authority to lower levels, but it allocates authority and resources to other organisations outside. In that respect, devolution maintains inter-organisational transfer of power from the centre units outside the normal command structure of central government [11]. What appears to stand out is the issue of power and how and by whom it is exercised in both forms of decentralisation. Whilst in deconcentration, power is retained by the centre, in the case of devolution there is the exercise of power by the lower levels. In that respect, with devolution, policy decisions and political power are distributed to the lower levels [16].

Naidoo [17] brings in important elements about deconcentration and devolution. Devolution is much to do with “the distribution of authority to make decisions and to take action by local governments or

local communities independently of central administrative oversight”[17]. This appears to suggest at least two important variables in the devolution discourse. These are the link between functions decentralised and political power and secondly, the existence of some autonomy in the exercise of the same power. The dilemma that education finds itself in is that devolution as a political tool can automatically decentralise education functions on the basis of regions and geographical disposition. On the same note, Naidoo [17] makes a number of observations about devolution in comparison with deconcentration. He observes that devolution appears to occur much less frequently than deconcentration, and that there is lack of independence in deconcentration and that deconcentration involves local entities acting largely as the agents of central governments, managing personnel, and expending resources allocated to them by central government authorities [17]. The central issues in both forms of decentralisation are to do with decision making process, resources and consequentially power. The presence of a complete independent authority in devolution makes education benefit if such transfer of power and authority is accompanied by the allocation of resources and/or utilisation of local resources. This arrangement fails to address the differences in the distribution of resources that can occur in the different regions. The argument is that the resources in the country belong to all citizens and it is the responsibility of central government to equitably distribute resources. The independent decision making authority exhibited in the devolution arrangement may work against this equitable distribution of national resources.

Decentralisation as delegation

Gaspar [18] argues for another aspect of decentralisation, delegation. According to Gaspar [18] there should be a transfer of managerial responsibilities and specified functions from central government to public corporations or parastatals which normally lie outside the regular bureaucratic structure. This argument appears to place emphasis, not only on the issues of authority and power, but brings in the pertinent issue of managerial responsibilities. In that respect, decentralisation through delegation performs a management function. Within the context of education, delegation can take different forms. These include granting lower levels of the managerial strata the necessary authority to carry out work that should have been done by the top management [19]. These lower strata could be provincial, district and school levels, but the central authority has to retain accountability. In other words, with delegation the central authority does not surrender power and authority to lower levels. In view of this, it may be argued that delegation in that respect does not qualify to be a form of decentralisation, since it focuses on the managerial function, and not political power and authority which are major

characteristics of the devolution form of decentralisation.

However, Fiske [20] makes a number of observations about delegation as a form of decentralisation. First he observes that delegation is a more extensive approach to decentralisation. Second Fiske [20] notes that delegation can result in semi-autonomous organisations such as churches and schools getting authority to run institutions. Third the authority is delegated with the understanding that it can be withdrawn at any time and with no explanation required. In that respect delegation as a form of decentralisation gives limited powers to the lower levels.

This is done with the understanding that the authority can be withdrawn [20]. Taking Fiske’s [20] concept of delegation as decentralization, the attempt by the government of Zimbabwe to directly deal with the School Development Committees and School Development Associations appears to indicate decentralization in the form of delegation in Zimbabwe. This decision was taken through the enactment of Education statutory instruments 87 of 1992 and 70 of 1993 which established School Development Committees and School Development Associations in schools in Zimbabwe. This came about as a result of the Ministry of Education’s desire to deal with schools directly instead of them dealing with them through local district councils. The position by Fiske [20] which suggests that decentralisation in Zimbabwe was of the delegation type appears to contradict Naidoo’s [17] argument about decentralization in Zimbabwe. Whilst Naidoo [17] describes decentralization in Zimbabwe as in the form of deconcentration, Fiske’s [20] description of the same points to the delegation form of decentralization.

There appears to be not much of a difference when one looks at what is involved in both forms of decentralization; deconcentration and delegation. One source of difference could be in terms of how they deploy power. Fiske [20] tended to view decentralization in terms of the purpose it serves, thus political decentralization and administrative decentralization. Political decentralization involves the assignment of power to make decisions about education to citizens or to other representatives at lower levels of government, whereas administrative decentralization is a management strategy [20]. In that respect, decentralization in education in Zimbabwe falls essentially within a management strategy as noted above [20]. Similarly, the use of different concepts to describe decentralization in Zimbabwe appears to indicate the thin line between the different forms of decentralization alluded to above; much depends on theory espoused and the policy guiding the implementation process [17].

Naidoo [17] notes that despite the form decentralization can take; there should be a framework for analyzing decentralization experiences. For him, the framework should include at least five categories. These include the environment and context in which the decentralization is to take place, rationale, form of decentralization, level of implementation, stage and outcomes of implementation. Naidoo [17] further notes that within the environment and context stage, decentralization has to look at the national context including economic, political, and social influences.

Another stage of the decentralization analysis is the rationale for the decentralization. There should be clear motives and reasons for educational decentralization; there should be organization structure and design to support the process of decentralization; the level of implementation should also be clear, for example, whether it is the provincial, state, district or school level at which implementation is to take place and the function of each of the levels should be equally clear [17]. Lastly, the agencies have to progress with the implementation of the policy of decentralization and there should be mechanisms to check the same progress [17].

Naidoo's [17] framework of analysis provides a conceptual framework on how to view decentralization in education. It appears to enhance our understanding of decentralization not only in education but the wider spectrum as well. However, there have been arguments that the implementation of decentralization as presented by Naidoo tended to present a typology or continuum pattern in the decentralization matrix which seems to suggest that the clear definition of the stages as indicated in the analysis would be a guarantee for successful implementation of decentralization in education. Saito [5] for example, points out that the concept of decentralization is wide and as such, for meaningful analyses, outcomes had to be negotiated and bargained over how political power and material benefits are shared and contested. According to Saito [5], for meaningful analyses to take place, there is need to decompose the impact of decentralization.

Naidoo [17] and Saito's [5] views tend to agree that decentralization involves the issues of functions by the different levels of the implementing agencies and power. Explicit in these are that resources and benefits are spread within the institutions.

De facto decentralization or "decentralization by default"

The forms of decentralisation discussed so far are based on at least one fundamental assumption. The assumption is that decentralisation is a planned form of change. This can be far from the truth. Deconcentration,

devolution and delegation as forms of decentralisation tend to ignore another aspect of decentralisation which is a manifestation of the government's failure to provide services that they are expected to provide. In that case, citizens go out of their way to fill the gap left by the state.

As noted earlier, decentralization as a reform policy can be supported by legislation to facilitate its implementation as was the case with Ghana [21] and South Africa in the case of South Africa Schools Act (SASA)[12]. One such example is Zimbabwe which later legislated for the creation of School Development Committees (SDCs) and School Development Associations (SDAs) as organs of decentralization through the Education Amendment Act of 1991 [22]. In other cases, decentralization could be by ad-hoc presidential decrees and directives as was the case in Chile and Zimbabwe in 1984 [23, 24] as noted earlier. In both cases, functions of the lower levels of governance can be clearly defined with the role of the stakeholders clearly stated.

There have been instances where central government has failed to perform its function despite the promise to do the same [25]. This has resulted in communities taking over the responsibilities of central government [3]. In some cases the central government remains silent about the provision of certain resources, and in others it fails to provide the basic resources for its citizens. The citizens have to make important decisions to provide for themselves. This becomes decentralization of functions by de facto than de jure [25]. Cases where citizens are forced by circumstances to provide services where state institutions had failed are common in developing countries. Bangura and Larbi [3] attribute such practices to a number of factors which include the propensity of African governments to design decentralization policies on the basis of ideological arguments than on the analysis of the empirical reality on what exists on the ground. As a result, this has contributed to "decentralization by default" as noted above [3].

Decentralization as a reform policy

Central governments throughout the world have always adopted reforms in administration, be they fiscal or political [4]. Education as a sector has also been entangled in between the reform processes. The reforms have at times resulted in the deliberate and planned transfer of resources away from the central state institutions and also in national governments sharing some of their powers with other groups, particularly those that are either geographically dispersed, or are responsible for specific functions [3]. The motives to distribute power and responsibilities in a way, have led to governments adopting different policies and strategies within the decentralization framework [4].

Policy in this sense is used to refer to the direction and strategies that the state chooses to employ to accomplish set goals, thus what governments choose to do or not to do [26]. Policy is about intent, which can also be supported by law [27]. National policy in this sense refers to a declaration of intent and as such, it is legislation that should contain elements such as: firstly, specific objectives which address a specific societal problem or need, secondly, it provides certain provisions or needs, and thirdly, within the confines of decentralization policy, legislation powers are conferred on subordinate institutions (ibid). Of note is that regulations and instructions provide guidelines to implementing agencies. Van Nierkerk et. al, [27] appear to stress the importance of legislation and regulations to support the implementation of policy. The question is therefore on the extent to which the government of Zimbabwe has come up with legislation to enforce decentralisation of education and the decentralisation in education itself.

Decentralisation of education within the Zimbabwean context

Such legislation can be explained in terms of the attempt to involve parents and communities in the governance of schools in Zimbabwe. This was done through the enacting of Education statutory instrument 87 of 1992 and Education Statutory instrument 70 of 1993. These established School Development Committees and School Development Associations respectively. Studies by Samkange [28] have shown that the statutory instruments in their present form had not empowered the communities; they had in fact disempowered them in that the committees were still dominated by school heads. On one hand, decentralisation through this model had not had the desired results. In that respect, the attempt to reform the education system through the enactment of legislation raises a number of questions when viewed in relation to the objectives of decentralisation. Decentralisation of education in Zimbabwe is one example of sectoral decentralisation. Conyers [29] observed that whilst the creation of the School Development Committees (SDCs) in Binga District of Zimbabwe had resulted in more involvement and participation of communities in schools, committee members were not well prepared for their responsibilities, at the same time poverty limited their financial contribution, and there appeared to be mistrust between the SDCs and the District Council.

The enactment of the above statutory instruments was an attempt to involve parents and communities in school governance and management of educational institutions. This was followed by the establishment of recruitment committees which were established at every school in Zimbabwe. These were mandated with the responsibilities of recruiting new teachers. This development was viewed as a

development that demonstrated the government's commitment to decentralise some of its functions in education, such as selection and recruitment of teachers. The selection committees were dissolved, because of allegations of nepotism and favouritism in the selection process. This development demonstrated the failure to make decentralisation of education functions work in that regard. This therefore gave credence to the argument that the autonomy granted to different levels in the decentralisation of education may be abused by those in positions of authority at the expense of the general populace, which therefore negates the whole essence of decentralisation and democracy [5]. In addition, decentralisation appears to transfer not only responsibilities, but national problems such as corruption.

Up to 1987, there were at least two categories of teachers in Zimbabwe. There were teachers who belonged to the Unified Teaching Service (UTS) and a few who belonged to the Public Service Commission (PSC). The teachers who were under the UTS were directly employed by the District Councils. These district councils in return received salary grants for the teachers from the Ministry of Education. This was an example of decentralisation of education functions. The district councils had the power to employ and deploy teachers to schools in their districts. They also had the power to promote teachers. All this was reversed in 1987 and the authority that had been exercised by the District Councils was recentralised with all teachers falling under the Public Service Commission and being entitled to the same conditions of service. As noted by Stewart, Klugman and Helmsing [24], the recentralisation of education in this regard, was attributed to the lack of discretion in local expenditure and a fragmented system of accounts demonstrated by the district councils. With the introduction of SDCs and SDAs the role of district councils seemed to diminish. This in some cases has been done deliberately, as a way of avoiding the responsibilities that go with being the responsible authorities for rural and district council schools. On the other hand this diminished role was as a result of the Ministry of Education arrangement to deal directly with SDCs and SDAs instead of responsible authorities such as rural and district councils.

On the other hand to examine the level of decentralisation of education it may be necessary to look at the power structures within the Ministry of primary and secondary education in Zimbabwe. The Minister of primary and secondary education is at the helm of the ministry. The minister wields political power and has to represent the interests of the ministry by coming up with policies that are in line with ideological inclination of the party in power. The permanent secretary is the technocrat in the ministry who should come up with policies, with the assistance of the deputy permanent secretaries. Whilst the minister

is a political appointment, from the position of permanent secretary to the lowest levels in the structure are professionals who are appointed on the basis of their professional qualifications, experience and skills competencies. As such, they are all employees of the Civil Service Commission.

The Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education has similar structures at the top, but there are differences on how institutions exercise their authority. The ministry is responsible for universities, polytechnics and colleges. All state universities operate as parastatals. They are semi-autonomous. They are run through councils and boards. Within the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, below the Permanent Secretary there is the Director of University Education, Director of Standards Development and Quality Assurance, Director of Manpower Planning and Institutional Development, Director of Finance and Administration and Secretary General of the Zimbabwe National Commission for UNESCO [35]. There are deputy directors below the directors.

There are a number of factors that stand out in the form of how the two ministries exercise their authority in Zimbabwe. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education demonstrates a resemblance of decentralisation of authority as characterised by the different district and provincial structures, the same cannot be said about the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education. In the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, the schools deal with districts and provincial officers. There is decentralisation of power in the deployment of teachers, approval of fees, and teacher appraisal and promotions. The same cannot be said about the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education. The Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education does not have both district offices and provincial offices. Authority within the Ministry is highly centralised. According Ruzivo Trust [36] as of 2013, tertiary education had 13 universities, 13 teachers' colleges, 16 polytechnic colleges, 4 industrial training centres and 797 registered colleges. All the tertiary institutions have to report directly to the head office of the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education. Thus further demonstrating the extent to which functions remain centralised despite the attempts to decentralise.

CONCLUSIONS

A number of observations can be made about decentralisation of education in Zimbabwe. When compared with other countries like South Africa and Nigeria that have provincial councils and federal governments respectively. The political and administrative decentralization in these countries has cascaded to such sectors as education. This may be so as the provincial councils and federal states have some autonomy to run the affairs of the provinces and federal

states. In addition to defining decentralisation in terms of how education is run in the different provinces, as noted by Sayed [12] within the South African context, decentralisation has to include School Governing Bodies (SGBs). These share similarities with School Development Committees and School Development Associations in Zimbabwe. In the case of other African countries such as Ghana, Osei and Brock [21] noted that students, parents and teachers remained disconnected from the centres of power and as such the balance of power had always been skewed in favour of the state. Whilst decentralisation of education has been used as a means to bring about reform in education, in most of the cases that has not been the case. It has been a case of political symbolism and rhetoric. Even the legal instruments that are meant to champion the cause for decentralisation of education have not achieved the desired results in some instances. As noted by Gaynor [30] decentralisation alone cannot carry the burden of reforming a system, as reform is a continuous process which has to respond to the needs of particular countries and the effort of educational practitioners. Gaynor [30] observed that the hiring of teachers has remained centralised in most countries despite demands by communities to be more involved in their hiring. Some of the issues that remain integral in the decentralisation of education is teacher deployment.

Whilst decentralisation has been credited with increasing efficiency in service delivery, reducing bottlenecks, and enhancing public accountability, there are challenges that it has failed to address. Decentralisation was also viewed as a way to improve technical and social efficiency and as a reform strategy for addressing issues of quality, equity, and accountability [31, 20]. In reality, local authorities in the case of Zimbabwe have demonstrated lack of capacity to manage education. This was demonstrated in the 1980s when district councils in Zimbabwe failed to manage education grants that were meant for teachers and education administration. Studies by Samkange [28] on decentralisation of education functions in Zimbabwe have indicated a dearth in the role of local authorities and responsible authorities in the development of their schools. Through the School Development Committees and School Development Associations parents were bearing the burden of providing for the schools. As such, the general poverty levels in the communities had ripple effects on the development and management of the schools.

In most of the cases decentralisation has not improved accountability. Empowering local communities in terms of regulations without the supporting resources cannot bring about improvement and quality in education. There has not been transfer of finances to support the decentralisation reform process. On the other hand decentralisation has failed to address problems such as corruption, nepotism, favouritism and

the incompetence levels in some countries. In some instances decentralisation has tended to localise national problems.

It may be concluded that decentralisation cannot be the panacea to the problems and challenges affecting education. We acknowledge that different countries have different experiences with their education systems. Some problems in education are country specific and the best solutions can be found within these countries. At the same time localised decisions may not serve national interests. We conclude that the debate on whether to centralise or decentralise the education system has not come up with contributions that have improved education.

There are many questions that can be raised about education in developing countries today. Some of the major questions are: What are the major challenges facing education in developing countries? To what extent can these be addressed by decentralisation of education? How can issues of quality, efficiency and accountability be improved? It may be concluded that there is need for a holistic approach to the improvement of education. Such improvements include the creation of stable economies and an improvement of political, social and economic conditions, otherwise decentralisation alone does not improve our education.

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