

Decentralization: A Lever of School Governance in Cameroon

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Abstract: Decentralization: A Lever of School Governance in Cameroon. According to Hood (2009), Moving towards greater integration of the diverse stakeholders present in education systems, it is worthwhile to consider new approaches to governance, particularly good governance. Good governance approaches involve shifting towards less coercive and less tightly controlled, audited and sanctioned governance mechanisms (Hood and Margretts, 2009). specific research questions guided the study. To what extent does Effective Decentralization Influence School Governance in Cameroon, what are the current Governance practices in the Education sector? How is Governance affecting Decentralization in the Education sector? The statement problem according to observation states that decentralization is practices in most secondary schools in Cameroon, the situation is concerning, particularly in the South-West region, where governance is affected. Despite efforts by the government and international organizations to improve effective school governance and decentralization, statistics show that majority of the schools still do not practice school governance and also practice a high lever of centralize form of governance in the school administration with unequal treatment, in terms of the school achievement, among students with different ethnic background and status. A mixed-methods approach was used, with a sample of 180 teachers. Data was collected using questionnaires and interviews, and analysed using simple linear regression. This study was conducted in Buea sub-division, in the South-West Region of Cameroon The results show that factors such as centralized administration, bad governance, and lack of family support are significant obstacles to school governance. Reason the researcher is interest to investigate decentralization, A lever of school governance in Cameroon.

Key-words: Decentralization, School Governance, Education, Cameroon.

INTRODUCTION

In education governance, the central lever is held accountable for ensuring that the system provides high quality, efficient and equitable education. At the same time, decentralized decision-making processes – introduced to enable better steering at the local lever – make it important to ensure that the various elements of the system work toward achieving common goals. The need to incorporate more and increasingly diverse stakeholders, to base decisions on empirical evidence and to cope with system complexity also presents challenges with respect to maintaining a system-wide focus on common goals. The priorities of teachers, students and other (local) stakeholders may not always be in line with the regulatory demands of the central lever, which can create tensions if stakeholders are to be integrated into accountability and governance processes (Hooge et al., 2012).

In today's education systems, decision making powers can be distributed across multiple governance levers. Decision-making powers can sit with the national government and with state governments, with provincial and regional governments, with sub-regional, inter-municipal and local authorities as well as with schools or school boards or committees (OECD 2012a). Across OECD member counters, education decisions are substantially distributed across up to four levers of governance in the most devolved systems. In the most centralized, only two levers of governance share the main decision making power in education (Lassnigg, 2016). In order to capture education systems' diverse governance set-ups in a single research framework, governance levers are defined

in relative rather than absolute terms. The concepts of “central” and “decentralized” levers take the place of the common distinctions such as “national”, “regional” and “local” levers. For example, across the OECD the most decentralized lever of governance may refer to local governments while in others it may imply school boards or individual schools themselves.

The concept of governance has received various definitions depending on authors and contexts. Demmers, Jolle, Jilberto, A. E. Fernandez and Hogenboom, Barbara (2003) According to the Center for Good Governance of Affiliated Network of Social Accountability - a joint venture between the World Bank and the Human Sciences Research Council - “governance refers broadly to how power is exercised through a country’s economic, social, and political institutions to use the country’s resources for socio-economic development. The process of governance encompasses the political, social and economic aspects of life, which have an impact on each individual, household, village, region or the nation. Governance involves. Barbara (2003) the State, which is responsible for creating a political, legal and economic environment conducive for building individual capabilities and encouraging private initiative; (2) the civil society, which facilitates the mobilization of public opinion and people’s participation in economic, social and political activities, and (3) the market, which is expected to create opportunities for people. Governance includes therefore the sum of procedures, actions, and entities available to citizens (in order to enable them to conduct numerous operations, such as communicating their concerns, applying their rights, satisfying their duties, and arbitrating their disputes”. Access to education is a fundamental right for all children, but vulnerable students face significant obstacles in accessing quality education.

There are numerous definitions of governance. One, provided by Pierre and Peters (2005), refers specifically to four key activities of the school: (1) articulating a common set of priorities for society; (2) providing coherence; (3) steering; and (4) accountability. Although the state has been the dominant actor in these activities for some time, it does not act alone. In some cases, societal actors have a stronger influence such as under participatory budgeting or industry self-regulation governance arrangements (Seller, 2011; Bell and Hindmoor, 2009). For the purposes of this study, governance is defined as the process of governing societies in a situation where no single actor can claim absolute dominance. By implication, governance is understood as a dynamic process involving implementation and monitoring as well as decision-making. Linking this back to complexity, policy making is assumed to be neither logical-rational nor linear. It is widely recognized by scholars that political and personal beliefs combined with the complexity of the system and large amounts of policy relevant information available – itself impossible to adequately process given the bounded cognitive capacity of actors – derail policy making from a rational and structured ideal (Blanchenay and Burns, 2016).

Statement Problem

The research problem of the study: According to Sen's capability approach theory (1999), education is considered a key factor in human development, as it enables individuals to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to fully participate in the economic, social, and political life of their community. In an ideal context, school governance should improve quality education, regardless of their socio-economic status or policies. However, statistics collected in the field show that reality is far from meeting this standard. According to a UNESCO study (2019), schools with poor governing system turn to have poor administrative process and as results influence the academic outcomes of the school negatively According to a study by the Directorate of Studies and Statistics of the Ministry of Education Experience shows that emphasis to governance is crucial for healthy educational systems to fulfill their essential public health/ public education functions. Both health and education governance encompass institutions and linkages among citizens, government officials and health/education service providers. Ideally, good governance in health and education should have the traits of responsiveness and accountability, transparency, encompass engagement of citizens and the capacity of state actors (central and local government decision makers) to design and implement policies in these sectors. These statistics show that students in poor governing

affected schools faces significant difficulties in accessing education, which contrasts with the standard established by Sen's capability approach theory (1999).

The contrast between theory and observed facts in the field shows that there is indeed a research problem to be solved. Students do not benefit from access to quality education that Sen's capability approach theory (1999) considers essential for human development. Factors such as poverty, distance to school, and lack of family support contribute to this situation centralization and bad governance and it is essential to conduct studies to identify solutions to this problem. This study aims to examine Decentralization: A Lever of School Governance in Cameroon

Specific Research Questions

- To what extent does Effective Decentralization Influence School good governance in Cameroon.
- what are the current governance practices in the Education sector?
- How is governance affecting decentralization in the Education sector?

Review of Literature

According to Hooge et al., (2012) In education governance, the central lever is held accountable for ensuring that the system provides high quality, efficient and equitable education. At the same time, decentralized decision-making processes – introduced to enable better steering at the local lever make it important to ensure that the various elements of the system work toward achieving common goals. The need to incorporate more and increasingly diverse stakeholders, to base decisions on empirical evidence and to cope with system complexity also presents challenges with respect to maintaining a system-wide focus on common goals. The priorities of teachers, students and other (local) stakeholders may not always be in line with the regulatory demands of the central lever, which can create tensions if stakeholders are to be integrated into accountability and governance processes (Hooge et al., 2012). Accountability systems specify who is answerable to whom and for what. The central lever develops an accountability system to ensure that decisions taken by other governance actors are in line with centrally set objectives and standards. Accountability systems are also developed at the local lever to govern the work of schools and teachers and to ensure that labor relations and teaching practices adhere to established guidelines.

Decentralization and increasing local autonomy create challenges for steering the education system as a whole. Coinciding with a widespread shift in focus towards improving education performance, accountability systems have shifted from focusing predominantly on regulatory compliance towards accountability based on measured performance.¹ Such performance accountability systems are now commonly used in a majority of OECD countries (Hooge et al., 2012). In such systems, central levers rely to a large extent on performance indicators to monitor, control, and steer the direction of education. These systems aspire to deliver relatively objective and clear comparisons across schools and other actors in the education system.

While they mitigate the first accountability deficit to some extent, performance-based accountability systems lead to a second accountability deficit, as they often fail to capture the full range of outcomes education is intended to produce. A second accountability deficit: measuring the full range of education outcomes The drawback of school performance accountability is that standardized tests do not measure the full range of outcomes that schools strive to achieve, including social skills, social inclusion and preparation for the labor market (Hooge et al., 2016). As performance accountability mechanisms focus on outcomes, they create incentives for meeting specified performance goals. As such, they provide little incentive to explore processes of teaching and learning themselves, or the kinds of social and emotional skills which are also important for educational and life success. On the lever of teaching practice, Holmstrom and Milgrom (1991) argue that systems using rewards and sanctions based on measurable outcomes create complex and possibly undesired incentives. This is exacerbated by problems in measuring and comparing outcomes even of seemingly objective elements of education such as scores in standardized tests

(see e.g. Baker, 2013; Papay, 2011). Teaching is characterized by a great variety of responsibilities in the classroom, which presents difficulties for identifying causes of successes and failures concerning student learning (O'Day, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 1997). Integrating stakeholders' perspectives for a more complete picture of education performance Integrating the public and local stakeholders in governance and accountability processes is a promising avenue for mitigating the accountability deficits described above and thereby improving education.

According to Gutmann, (1987) the involvement of citizens can improve input legitimacy by providing a direct-democratic element to local governance which can, to some extent, mitigate the first accountability deficit. The direct integration of stakeholders in combination with vertical accountability mechanisms can also mitigate the second accountability deficit by including perspectives beyond those measurable by performance indicators. Governing bodies such as committees and councils that actively involve parents, students and other members of the community enable stakeholders to voice their needs and incorporate these in decision-making processes. Involving community members has the advantage of integrating diverse knowledge and experience, potentially providing new insights that may have been previously overlooked by schools and local administrators (Wright, 2001).

Models of School Governance

Peters (2005) states that, the starting point is the widely accepted models of governance outlined by Pierre and The use of these models allows for the generation of hypotheses regarding the state's access to knowledge and its analytical capacity. The five models outlined by these authors "constitute a continuum ranging from the most dominated by the school and those in which the state plays the least role and indeed one in which there is argued to be governance without government" (Pierre and Peters, 2005:). The models, in brief, are:

1. **Etatist School Governance**, where the school principal or VC is the principal actor in governance and can take action unilaterally as well as decide whether some actors are permitted to exert influence. The school usually relies on a strong and professional bureaucracy for formulating and implementing policies (Campbell and Pedersen, 2008).
2. **Liberal-democratic School Governance**, where the school administration and students still plays a pre-eminent role and can choose which of the intensely competing actors it will grant influence to in governance. This system often has a weaker permanent bureaucracy and prefers to rely on parliamentary institutions instead.
3. **State-centric School Governance**, where the school administrators are still the most dominant actor, but it also establishes institutionalized relationships with several of the most powerful societal actors, such as business associations and trade unions. A close to ideal typical example of this model is the neo-corporatist system (Schmitter and Streeck, 1999), which displays a high degree of consensual decision-making. Often, strong state bureaucracy supports governance and the institutionally incorporated actors also possess considerable permanent organizations.
4. **Dutch governance school** – where the school relies heavily on social networks to govern. Among the many actors who take part in and influence governance, the state is merely one of the actors and not even necessarily the most powerful. Typically, there is no strong permanent state bureaucracy present, and actors decide based on widespread consensus.
5. **Governance without government** – where school actors are more powerful and carry more legitimacy than the state itself. In this model, the state merely provides an arena where other actors come together to decide and implement policies (Rhodes, Weller and Bakvis, 1997). Bureaucracy tends to be weak and to lack powerful analytical capabilities; in addition, consensus is often required for collective action since no single actor can authoritatively enforce its will on others. Modes of learning and types of knowledge While there is no single source which would constitute a widely accepted view on modes of learning and types of knowledge, a small number of distinct models emerge

these cases, whether it is an explicit manipulation of the learning mode of school decentralization or rather an incomplete understanding of how rational learning and scientific evidence could be used remains unclear. Similarly, rational and collaborative learning modes follow opposing patterns whereby the dominance of one makes the presence of the other one less likely. An example of this is the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of the United States. As already explained, the use of explicit declarative knowledge and in particular of quantitative scientific knowledge, was the cornerstone of the policy and process. This was intended to weaken the use of collaborative learning. As funding for programmes developed with collaborative learning was radically cut, there was a need to shift the rationale and basis for various proposed reforms from practitioner knowledge towards a more scientific and formalized learning mode.

Methodology

Research Design

The design used for this study was a mixed method design. This was because the approach was both quantitative and qualitative. A quantitative research is one in which it tries to bring out an understanding of the problem in terms of quantity. This means that it quantified the problem by way of generating numerical data or data that can be transformed into usable statistics. Qualitative research is used to get an in-depth understanding of the opinions, and reason of respondent. The research design is suitable for this work because the study involved seeking opinion of effective strategic planning and quality education. The data collection technique used is a questionnaire, which was administered to the selected respondents.

The questionnaire includes questions on the sociodemographic characteristics of the students, their school experience on governance and decentralization, the obstacles they face in bad governance, as well as their needs and expectations regarding education. Data were also collected through interviews with teachers and school principals, who provided information on the educational policies and governance implemented to promote decentralization. The data collection instruments were pre-tested to ensure their validity and reliability. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. The data were entered and analyzed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software. The study results were presented in the form of tables, figures, and graphs, which allow for visualizing trends and relationships between the variables studied. Statistical tests were used to verify research questions and identify factors that influence access to education for students.

Target Population

The target population of this study was made up of 180 secondary school teachers from four selected secondary schools in Buea

Table 1: Target Population

Variable Sub Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Name of School G.H.S Buea Bokwoango	50	27.8
Bishop Rogan College	40	22.2
Summerset Bilingual College	40	22.2
B.G.S Molyko Buea	50	27.8
Gender Male	81	45.0
Female	99	55.0
Age range 22 – 32	43	23.9
33 – 43	121	67.2
44 – 55	15	8.3
55+	1	0.6

Source: School Mapping and Statistics Secondary Education SW

Conceptual formula for calculating Spearman's Rho

Spear's man rho =1-

Where

Σ = summation

D=Difference in rank

N=Number of observations

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient

Raw Score method

Where

Σ =summation

Y=Values corresponding to the independent variable

X=values corresponding to the dependent variable.

Results of Findings

General Descriptive Analysis of Data according to the Variables of the study

The main independent variable of this study was Decentralization and the main dependent variable was school governance in secondary schools in Buea. Descriptive data analysis for all variables used in the study is presented in the table below.

Decision lever: Mean, $\bar{x} = \frac{4+3+2+1}{4} = \frac{10}{4} = 2.5$

Respondents accepted or agreed with the opinion expressed in the item if the mean score is 2.5 and above. Otherwise, they rejected or disagreed.

Specifically, the study sought to:

- To what extent does Effective Decentralization Influence School good governance in Cameroon.

Quantitative Results

The results of the study show that there is a significant relationship between the variables studied. The summary table of the simple linear correlation results is presented below:

- **Research Question One:** To what extent does Effective Decentralization Influence School good governance in Cameroon.

Table 2: Effective Decentralization and School Good Governance

Items	Respondents Option							
	A	%	SA	%	D	%	SD	%
Decentralization promote school governance	67	37.22	53	29.44	39	21.66	21	11.66
Good governance promote effective classroom management	70	38.88	50	27.77	32	17.77	28	15.55
The counselors are very supportive during decentralization	71	39.44	49	27.22	37	20.55	23	12.77
Firsthand information about the school governance helps me to become wiser given at the beginning of the school year.	65	36.11	55	30.55	48	26.66	12	6.66
Governance practices promotes quality education	80	44.44	40	22.22	35	19.44	25	13.88

Decentralization hinders effective school governance	61	33.88	59	32.77	43	23.88	17	9.44
Mean Total	69	38.3	51	28.3	39	21.6	21	11.8

From the above table, Research Question one to 3, to investigate Effective Decentralization on School governance in Cameroon Secondary Schools case study: Buea Municipality? According to Research question one to three, item one to five, effective decentralization will promote school governance and information is shared to us properly during effective decentralization, majority of the respondents 67(37.2%) Strongly Agreed to the fact that information is shared to us properly during effective decentralization in our school, 53(29.4) Agreed to the same fact while 39(21.6%) of the respondents Disagreed to the fact that information is shared to us properly during effective decentralization and lastly 21(11.6) Strongly Disagreed to the same fact. The data analyzed in the table above shows that effective decentralization is a means to improved quality access to education to students and bad governance play a significant setback to quality education. Firsthand information about the school helps them to become wiser given at the beginning of the school year; poverty might limit the access to quality education. Educational policy and orientation gives them knowledge on time management and punctuality; and the knowledge gotten from educational policies services improve their access to quality education. Conclusively, there is a significance relationship between effective decentralization and access to quality education through good governance.

Table 3; Question Items and correlated values

Variables	Correlation coefficient	p-value
Decentralization and good governance	-0.456	0.000
Good Governance and Quality Education	-0.321	0.001
Educational polices and access to education	-0.278	0.005
School support and access to education	0.421	0.000
Educational policies and school governance	0.351	0.001

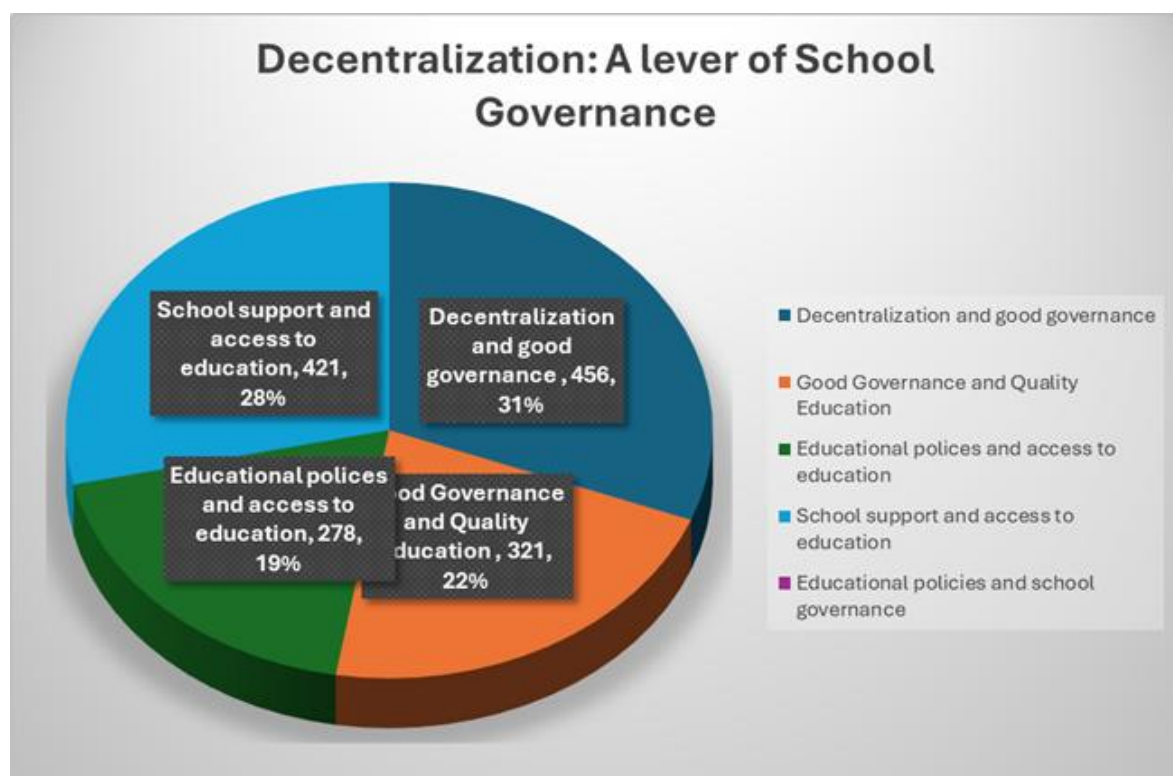


Figure 1: Decentralization: A Lever of School Governance Bar Chat

The results show that there is a significant relationship between decentralization and school governance ($r = -0.456, p < 0.001$), which means that students in schools practicing good

governance will perform better compared to students in schools with inadequate decentralization and school governance. The results of the study also show that students who have benefited from school support have a higher probability of accessing education than those who have not benefited from such support. Similarly, educational policies that take into account the specific needs of vulnerable students are associated with an increase in access to education for these students.

Discussion of Findings

The results of the study highlight the importance of taking into account the specific needs of students to promote their access to education and human development. According to Amartya Sen (1999), education is a key factor in promoting individual capabilities and human development through effective decentralization. Other authors such as Martha Nussbaum (2011) and Jonathan Kozol (2005) have also emphasized the importance of school governance in promoting social justice and equal opportunities. The results of the study are also consistent with Paulo Freire's (1970) theories on education as a means of liberation and emancipation of marginalized groups.

However, some authors have criticized the approach centered on the specific needs of vulnerable students. According to some, this approach can create unrealistic expectations and additional pressures on teachers and schools (Terry Meier, 2008). Other authors such as Diane Ravitch (2010) and Stanley Fish (2011) have criticized educational policies that emphasize standardization and decentralization of results, arguing that this can stifle creativity and innovation in schools.

The results of the study also suggest that educational policies and school support programs can play an important role in promoting the capabilities of vulnerable students and students. According to Linda Darling-Hammond (2010), school governance that emphasize teaching quality and teacher support can have a positive impact on student outcomes. Other authors such as Ruby Payne (2005) have criticized school support programs that focus solely on academic needs, arguing that this can neglect the emotional and social needs of students.

The results of the study are also consistent with Lev Vygotsky's (1978) theories on social learning and the zone of proximal development. According to Vygotsky, learning is a social process that requires interaction with peers and more experienced adults. School support programs that emphasize collaboration and peer support can therefore be particularly effective in promoting the policies of decentralization of students. The results of the study highlight the importance of taking into account the specific needs of students to promote their access to education and human development. School governance and school support programs can play an important role in promoting effective school climate and management.

Conclusion

This article highlighted successful strategies in building strong and constructive school governance. Successful accountability School systems are supported by clear communication of roles and responsibilities, the alignment of accountability pressures within and across governance levers, and a focus on dialogue and transparency. The research problem was to understand the obstacles that prevent school governance from accessing education and succeeding in their studies. The main research question was how decentralization influence school governance and how it can promote the capabilities of students. To answer this question, the researcher conducted a quantitative and qualitative study with a sample of 180 teachers. The results of the study showed that students face several obstacles in accessing education when there is inadequate decentralization in the school. Despite the promising results of this study, it is essential to note that this research has certain limitations. Firstly, the sample was limited to a specific group of teachers, which may limit the generalizability of the results. Secondly, the study focused on a specific moment in time, which may not reflect the changes that occur over the long term.

Recommendations

- Effective decentralization should be encouraging to avoid unnecessary expenditure of resources and effort in schools' governance.

- Encourage horizontal accountability and facilitate integration of school stakeholders in accountability structures.
- Help decentralized levers to identify and integrate local stakeholders in accountability processes. Promote inclusiveness so that diversity of stakeholders reflects all relevant perspectives.
- Avoid competing accountability demands between different governance levers and policy programmes by employing a whole of system approach.
- Build capacity to manage competing demands between horizontal and vertical accountability mechanisms in school administration.

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