



Decentralization and Effective Educational Leadership: Expectation versus Reality

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Abstract

Decentralization is a management reform that is widely believed to promise a range of benefits in transforming society and the effectiveness of local governance. By 1999, nearly all countries in the world were experimenting with decentralization, at least in policy level. Education is inevitably one of the sectors that has been affected by decentralization. In a devolved education system, schools are given both autonomy and responsibilities in decision-making authority. At school level, those who receive the transferred-authority are mainly principals, and hence, they have broadened-roles and responsibilities. However, research and literature drawn from more than four decades show that a devolved environment urges for accountability that is oftentimes regarded as pressure and dilemma by school leaders and teachers. As a result, there is an urgency to have a systemic solution that acknowledges the important role of principals, clarifies the responsibilities and roles of principal, and develops capacity of principals.

Keywords

Decentralization, decision-making authority, educational leadership, principals

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Introduction

Decentralization has become a global development strategy and management reform. Jütting et al. (2004, p.7) argue, “decentralization has been advocated by donors and development agencies as an important factor broadening citizen participation and improving local governance, thereby promoting poverty reduction from the bottom up.” As a result, it has been at the centre stage of policy experiments in many countries in various regions (Lugaz et al., 2010). For example, in many African countries, decentralization is regarded as a key component of restructuring management of service delivery (UNESCO, 2004). Despite receiving much attention worldwide, both literature and research show that decentralization results variously in its practice. Litvack, Ahmad, and Bird (1998, p.1), for example, explain that, “whatever its origins, decentralization can have significant repercussions for resource mobilization and allocation, and ultimately macroeconomic stability, service delivery, and equity.” Meanwhile, King and Guerra (2005) argue that decentralization is not a policy panacea, since the reform process is never smooth and is likely to be punctuated by either progress or setbacks. However, statistical tests by Triesman (2000, p.2), using data from 54 countries, suggest that, “states which have more tiers of government tend to have higher perceived corruption, and may do a worse job of providing public (health) services.”

In accordance with decentralization that has been a “fashion” of management and development reform, Fiske (1996) claims that, decentralization of education has also become a global phenomenon. Allied to this idea, McGinn and Welsh (1999, p.7) argue that “decentralization is one of the most important phenomena to come to the educational planning agenda....” Driven by different reasons, many countries have practiced decentralization of education to varying degrees with the hope to foster student and teacher motivation, community participation, and curriculum adaptation to local context (Fiske, 1996; McGinn & Welsh, 1999). However, international experiences show mixed results of its implementation. A study by Habibi et al. (2001, p.17) reports a positive impact of decentralization on education in Argentina in improving access to compulsory education, by using “the ratio of students enrolled in secondary school per one thousand primary students.” Meanwhile, a study by Behrman et al. (2002, p.i) on the role of education decentralization in promoting effective schooling in Asian developing countries found that, “while virtually all developing countries have made impressive gains in expanding the coverage of primary schooling, enrollment rates remain generally low at secondary and tertiary levels, particularly for children coming from disadvantaged backgrounds.” It was also discovered that the quality of education is a concern, when viewed from the dropout and grade repetition rates, and standardized test scores (Behrman et al., 2002). Also, King and Guerra (2005), furthermore, studied the impact of decentralization of education in East Asia. The study found that, “decentralization laws encourage greater local and community participation in providing and financing education, but this feature exposes inequalities between prosperous and poor areas, and the inability of poor areas to mobilize adequate resources” (King & Guerra, 2005, p.195). In line with this finding, Donald and Boon-Ling (2007) identified the impact of decentralization on the quality of education in developing countries. The study found that effective decentralization requires strong institutional capacity building, and effective exercise of responsibilities is dependent upon the capacity of school leaders (Donald & Boon-Ling, 2007).



Based on the implementation of decentralization that has various results as mentioned above, the paper aims at exploring what research says about the challenges of decentralization to the existing leadership cultures in schools so that their effectiveness is further improved. While attempting to do so, the paper seeks to figure out what is meant by decentralization and decentralization of education, why many countries are adopting it, as well as what its impacts are towards education in general and effective school leadership in particular, by referring to relevant international literature and research.

Decentralization: What and Why?

Although widely being experimented as a mechanism for transforming society, decentralization has been an old debate. Conyers (1984, p.188) argues, “the decentralization of government in developing countries has been a topic of debate ever since 1950s.” However, for more than sixty years, the centralization of power and resources became the trend among industrial nations as it led to massive economic gains and growth (Manor, 1999). As a result, after receiving independence from colonial regimes in 1950s and early 1960s, centralization also became the model for development in many countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia (Manor, 1999; Rondinelli et al., 1983).

By time, however, it is proven that centralization has failed to promote development and reduce poverty, since it is often misused as a negative political instrument to create class stratification among people and preserve elitism of the “privileged” (Manor, 1999; Parker, 1995). As a consequence, during the 1980s, the situation began to change in which decentralization became a widespread phenomenon (Fiske, 1996; Manor, 1999; McGinn & Welsh, 1999; Rondinelli et al., 1983). A study from the World Bank in 1992 shows that 63 developing countries with populations over 5 million claim to exercise some form of political power transfer to local units of government (Dillinger, 1994). By 1999, nearly all countries in the world were experimenting with decentralization, at least in policy level (Lugaz et al., 2010; Manor, 1999). Also, Dillinger (1994) reviewed country reports on the spread of decentralization in developing countries. The review notes that, in parts of Africa, for example, decentralization is shown with the establishment of local-political entities by the national governments in areas formerly under their administration. In Latin America, decentralization is portrayed through a change in appointing mayors: from centrally appointed to locally elected. In Asia-Pacific, decentralization could be seen in the enhanced local democracy as a result of governance reform (United Cities & Local Governments, 2007). In Europe, Crucq and Hemminga (2007) claim that, although decentralization has been under discussion since 1980s, its adoption became stronger after the creation of Committee of the Regions (CoR) in 1994. The main task of the Committee is to ensure that “the European Union give decision-making levels close to citizens as much scope for action as possible”(CoR, 2000, p.8).

It is, however, important to note that decentralization is a broad concept, because it embraces a complex, and at times confusing, set of policies (Lugaz et al., 2010). Defined simply, decentralization is about authority-transfer from people in one location to those in another level (Rondinelli et al., 1983). Allied to this definition, Florestal and Cooper (1997, p.2) mention that, “the broad meaning of decentralization [is] to move decision-making away from the centre and closer to the users of the service.” More specifically, Gash et al. (2014,



p.7) explain that, “decentralization can be broadly defined as the movement of power from central government to lower levels of aggregation.” Although the terminology is contested, Rondinelli et al. (1983, pp.15-28) explain that there are four different categories of decentralization, namely: (i) deconcentration: the handing over of some amount of administrative authority or responsibility to lower levels within central government ministries and agencies; (ii) delegation: the transfer of managerial responsibility for specifically defined functions to organizations that are outside the regular bureaucratic structure, and that are only indirectly controlled by the central government; (iii) devolution: the creation or strengthening – financially or legally – of subnational units of government, the activities of which are substantially outside the direct control of the central government; and, (iv) privatization: the transfer of power or responsibility to the private sector.

Besides variation in its categories, in many cases, decentralization has also been motivated by numerous reasons. For example, a study by Jütting et al. (2004) shows that decentralization in 19 countries (Bolivia, Brazil, Burkina Faso, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, Viet Nam, Ghana, Guinea, India, Malawi, Mozambique, Mexico, Nepal, Paraguay, Philippines, South Africa, Sri Lanka, and Uganda) has been motivated by two main arguments: increasing efficiency and improving governance. Meanwhile, in Indonesia, Kristiansen and Pratikno (2006) explain that, the country adopted decentralization in 1999 due to a severe economic crisis in 1997, the introduction of free elections and democratic governance in 1999, the central government’s inability to cover national expenditures, and the “push” from international agencies, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), to see policy reforms in the direction of devolution.

Different reasons for decentralization are found in the United Kingdom (UK). By conducting a study on UK’s seven main decentralizing reforms in 30 years, Gash et al. (2014) conclude that decentralization is important in the UK because: (i) although the evidence is varied, decentralization is necessary condition to boost economic growth, reflect local identities and preferences, and foster innovation in public services; (ii) there are people attempting to govern locally who feel they could do more, or better, with greater control and influence over decisions in their areas; (iii) national decisions and negotiations with central government institutions are felt to be highly burdensome and bureaucratic; and, (iv) there are self-interested reasons from those in central government to support pressures from public and local level for decentralization.

Decentralization of Education

Education is one of the sectors that has been affected by decentralization in countries adopting it. McGinn and Welsh (1999) argue that after going through some ideological debates on who should make decisions and finance public schooling for more than fifteen years, many countries turned their attention to the decentralization of education. Defined broadly, decentralization of education is the “transfer of authority for the financing or governance of schools to a subnational agency” (Kemmerer, 1994, p. 1412). It also refers to the transfer of authority, at least in basic and secondary education, to more local units of government – provinces, municipalities – or even to the smallest units in the education system, that are schools (Florestal & Cooper, 1997; Lugaz et al., 2010; McGinn & Welsh, 1999).



Since decentralization itself is conceptually and practically contested, the same situation also goes to decentralization of education. In some countries like Germany, the USA, and some parts of the UK, decentralization of education refers to the transfer of responsibilities away from the educational administration to elected representatives at regional or district level, such as the regional councils or district development committees (Lugaz et al., 2010). In addition, Bush (2016, p.1) adds that decentralization of education in England “involves the granting of powers by national governments to subordinate bodies.” Therefore, in England, “each school has a governing body, with representatives of parents, the local community, teachers and other staff, with the head teacher as an ex officio member” (Bush, 2016, p.1). To limit its complexities, decentralization of education in this paper is taken to mean as devolution of education. McGinn and Welsh (1999) explain that, when decentralization is understood in the view of devolution, it signifies not simply the transfer of authority, but also responsibilities.

There are numerous reasons why a country adopts decentralization of education. The reasons could be categorized in three motives: political, financial and efficiency (Behrman et al., 2002; Fiske, 1996; Florestal & Cooper, 1997; McGinn & Welsh, 1999). Political motives refer to increasing demand for participation in public decision-making by people who have or claim to have been excluded earlier (McGinn & Welsh, 1999). A case study by Fiske (1996) shows that Chile is an example of a country decentralising education due to political motives. Chile went through an opposite political transition – from democratic to a military government, and there was a strong support from neoliberal economists and social planners for more decentralization in education (Fiske, 1996).

Financial motives mean that central governments are no longer capable of providing finance to meet the demand for education and schooling (King & Guera, 2005; Kristiansen & Pratikno, 2006; McGinn & Welsh, 1999). A case study by Pascoe and Pascoe (1998), involving 25 high ranking Australian policy makers and educational bureaucrats and practitioners, discovered that Australia decentralized education due to financial reasons. Decentralization of education in Australia came in effect after “the Victorian Commission of Audit found public expenditure on education was far too high” and required for incremental change (Pascoe & Pascoe, 1998, p.3).

Efficiency motives are arguments supporting that more local decision-making will reduce the cost and long ladder of bureaucracy (Behrman et al., 2002; Florestal & Cooper, 1997; Gash et al., 2014; Kristiansen & Pratikno, 2006; McGinn & Welsh, 1999). With fifty state governments and approximately 85,000 local governments, Rosenbaum (2013) claims that, to some extent, USA is an example why decentralization is important for efficient management and public services reform, including education. In addition to the three major motives above, another reason is raised in relation to the role of development agencies and donors in reinforcing the decentralization of education in developing countries (Jütting et al., 2004; Kristiansen & Pratikno, 2006; Manor, 1999; Rhoten, 2000). In Argentina, for example, a study in three different provinces by Rhoten (2000, p.603) found that UNESCO, USAID, and the World Bank, to a certain extent, advocated decentralization of education by “touting school autonomy and education decentralization as must have reforms in progressive public services management.” In fact, Rhoten’s (2000) study finding was implicitly mentioned in the World Bank’s world review, *Priorities and Strategies for Education*, in 1995. In the review, the World Bank (1995, p.5) states that,



Increasing the involvement of parents and communities by making schools autonomous and accountable can offset the power of vested interests.... Around the world, parents and communities are becoming more involved in the governance of their children's schools.... Many countries have found that communities which participate in school management are more willing to assist in the financing of schooling.

Although the motives are different from one country to another, however, there are similarities in the objectives why decentralization of education becomes a “fashionable” method of educational reform. Florestal and Cooper (1997, p.1) argue that many countries decentralize their (at least basic) education systems “to give users a greater voice in decisions that affect them, to better recognize local linguistic or ethnic diversity.” Allied to this idea, McGinn and Welsh (1999, p.29) add that decentralization of education will “improve the operation of education system” from a formerly centralized system to a local-based one. For example, with decentralization of education, schools will have stronger autonomy to utilize available funding, increase learning innovations, or match curriculum to local interests (McGinn & Welsh, 1999). In the end, by borrowing OECD’s language, Ball (2003, p.217) explains, “a devolved environment” will give ‘managers and organizations greater freedom in operational decisions and remove unnecessary constraints in financial and human resource management.” In other words, since decentralization of education, to some extent, locates decision-making authority to school-level (Carr-Hill et al., 2014), schools will have more rooms for improvement to be effective.

Impact of Decentralization on Effective School Leadership

In a decentralized system, schools are given more autonomy in decision-making authority (De Grauwe, 2004; the World Bank, 2007). However, which decisions are transferred? and to who (at the school level)? In responding to the first question, De Grauwe (2004) explains that, in the decentralization of education, the decisions transferred to schools emphasize on: (i) authority to the principal to manage the school’s financial and human resources, including, for example, staff recruitment and the use of school’s budget; and, (ii) authority to the community, for example on the selection of the principal and the adaptation of the curriculum. Meanwhile, in writing the second question, Leithwood and Menzies (1998) identify four types of authority transfer along with its recipients in the decentralized-education system, namely: (i) administrative control: the principal; (ii) professional control: teachers; (iii) community control: the community or parents; and, (iv) balanced control: parents, teachers and principal in balance authority. In line with these answers, Pont et al. (2008a) argue that, decentralization of education makes school leaders, as the ones holding the authority at school level, have broadened-roles and responsibilities. Gessler and Ashmawy (2014) conducted an explorative qualitative study on the effect of decentralization on vocational school leadership in Bremen and Lower, Saxony in Germany. With increased autonomy and greater role and responsibilities, Gessler and Ashmawy (2014) argue that the school principals are responsible to manage various aspects, namely: (i) teaching environment: all affairs related to instructional issues; (ii) personnel management: affairs associated with



human resources; (iii) financial management: all about financial efficiency; and, (iv) school buildings and furnishings: finance purchases, maintenance and repair.

With these responsibilities, Gessler and Ashmawy (2014, p.184) conclude that, "decentralization entails the creation of elected bodies through which various stakeholders are involved in the decision-making process, and that schools are able to discretionally plan their own goals and objectives." As a result, Gessler and Ashmawy (2014) mention that, effective vocational school principal's exercise "participatory leadership". It is a leadership practice that allows the participation of various stakeholders in making decisions through the school conference consisting of the principals and representatives of teachers, students, parents, and relevant enterprises in vocational schools (Gessler & Ashmawy, 2014). Ashmawy (2003) carried out the same study, yet bigger in its coverage, by comparing the effect of education decentralization on school leadership in vocational schools in Germany and Egypt. With 30 vocational school principals as the samples (15 from Germany and 15 from Egypt), the study found that principals from both countries have an important role in: (i) being the responsible persons for the compliance to the rules and regulations set by the governments; (ii) motivating teachers and stakeholders to participate in the school life; (iii) sharing information and building good relationships with local educational authorities; (iv) involving stakeholders in the decision-making; and, (iv) guiding the decision-making processes. Based on these findings, Ashmawy (2003) argues that, in order to be effective, the principals from both countries demonstrate "participatory leadership". However, it is clear that the study by Ashmawi (2004) and the one by Gessler and Ashmawy (2014) are both limited in their generalizability as the samples are confined to vocational schools, and hence a further study is needed. Steinberg (2013, p.6), on the other hand, argues that in a decentralized system, "the role of school principals has shifted from one emphasizing instructional leadership to one focused on transformational leadership, and finally to one involving leadership practices that contains both elements." This argument is somehow backed up by different research with different findings that, while being contradictory to each other, all show the shift in effective leadership strategies. Robinson et al. (2007) carried out a meta-analysis study by involving 27 published studies of the relationship between leadership and student outcomes. The study found that, "the more leaders focus their relationships, their work, and their learning on the core business of teaching and learning, the greater their influence on student outcomes" (Robinson et al, 2007, p.636). Based on the findings, Robinson et al. (2007, p.655) claim that, "the impact of instructional leadership on student outcomes is three to four times greater than that of transformational leadership."

Narrowly defined, instructional leadership, also known as "learning-centred leadership" (Murphy et al., 2006) or "leadership for learning" (Hallinger & Heck, 2010), focuses on "actions that are directly connected to teaching and learning" (Murphy, 1988, p.127). Viewed broadly, instructional leadership also means leadership actions that centre on student learning, including managerial tasks (Donmoyer & Wagstaff, 1990; Murphy, 1988). The actions cover many things a principal does to support students' learning achievement and teachers' teaching ability (Sebring & Bryk, 2000). In addition, Robinson (2010, p. 2) explains that, instructional leadership also encompasses "sets of leadership practices that involve planning, evaluation, coordination, and improvement of teaching and learning."

In practice, however, critics regard instructional leadership models to heavily rely on principal-centric approach. Sergiovanni (1995, p.155), for example, explains, "being a strong



instructional leader may be a good idea in schools where teachers are poorly trained or lacking in commitment, but it is not a good idea in schools where competence and commitment are not issues.” Lambert (2002, p.37), furthermore, argues that “the days of the lone instructional leader are over. We no longer believe that one administrator can serve as the instructional leader for the entire school without the substantial participation of other educators.” Allied to these arguments, Leithwood (2007, p.629) explains, “Instructional leadership has admonished principals to become closely and directly involved in teachers’ classroom instruction. Especially in larger schools and those offering the kinds of diverse curricula common to high schools, this admonition has never seemed more than a fond but unrealistic dream to even the most conscientious of principals. It simply flies in the face of the unavoidable demands on principals’ time, attention, and professional resources. It is an image of the principal as an educational “superhero.” Day et al. (2016), on the other hand, conducted a study that drew empirical data from a three-year mixed-methods national study investigating the association between the work of more than six hundred effective and improving primary and secondary school principals in England and student outcomes over three years. The study found that, “schools’ abilities to improve and sustain effectiveness over the long term are not primarily the result of the principals’ leadership style but of their understanding and diagnosis of the school’s needs and their application of clearly articulated, organizationally shared educational values through multiple combinations and accumulations of time and context-sensitive strategies that are “layered” and progressively embedded in the school’s work, culture and achievements” (Day et al, 2016, p.222).

Based on the findings, Day et al. (2016, p.253) conclude that there is “...no single leadership formula to achieve success.... successful school principals draw differentially on elements of both instructional and transformational leadership and tailor (layer) their leadership strategies to their particular school contexts and to the phase of development of the school.” Transformational leadership, put briefly, is “a leadership that facilitates the redefinition of a people’s mission and vision, a renewal of their commitment and the restructuring of their systems for goal accomplishment” (Leithwood, 1992, p. 9). Based on seven quantitative studies, Leithwood (1994, p.506) concludes that, “transformational leadership practices, considered as a composite construct, had significant direct and indirect effects on progress with school-restructuring initiatives and teacher-perceived student outcomes.” Transformational leadership focuses on five broad sets of leadership practices, namely: setting directions, developing people, redesigning organization, managing people, and coalition building (Leithwood, 2007; Leithwood & Day, 2007). Under these core practices, there are twenty-three more specific practices within each category (Leithwood & Day, 2007). In line with it, Bush (2014, p.558) argues that, “the transformational model is comprehensive in that it provides a normative approach to school leadership which focuses primarily on the process by which leaders seek to influence school outcomes rather than on the nature or direction of those outcomes.”

There are, however, criticisms against transformational leadership. Chirichello (1999, p.5) argues that transformational leadership might be used as a means by”principals to be highly directive and offer little support, yet controlling at the same time.” Moreover, Bottery (2004, p.17) states that, “transformational leaders were to be social architects, who in creating vision, developed the trust of their followers, building loyalty, self-confidence and self-regard.” Meanwhile, by mentioning that in South Africa the language of transformation is



used to underpin a non-racist post-Apartheid education system, Bush and Glover (2014) question the validity of the transformational model in the policy climate within which schools have to operate.

The study by Day et al. (2016), to some extent, relates back to what Marks and Printy (2003) found almost thirteen years ago. Marks and Printy (2003) conducted a study to see the association between principal leadership and school performance by employing twenty-four nationally selected restructured schools in the USA. The study found that, “when transformational and shared instructional leadership coexist in an integrated form of leadership, the influence on school performance, measured by the quality of its pedagogy and the achievement of its students, is substantial” (Marks & Printy, 2003, p.370). In other words, Marks and Printy (2003) argue that both shared instructional leadership and transformational leadership are important in influencing pupils’ learning outcome. The former functions to evaluate the principal’s interactive role with teachers in the central areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, while the latter is needed to lead schools through reform as it emphasises the ingredients of change—ideas, innovation, influence, and consideration for the individual in the process (Marks & Printy, 2003, p.391). However, unlike Day et al.’s (2016) study, Mark and Printy’s (2003) study has a minor limitation in the extent of its generalization as the subjects of the study were purposively selected.

Although these three studies are, to some extent, contradictory, they support Steinberg’s (2013) argument on the shift of effective leadership practices in a decentralized system mentioned earlier. Literature and research show that decentralization makes school principals have broadened-authority, roles and responsibilities (De Grauwe, 2004; Leithwood & Menzies, 1998; Pont et al., 2008a; the World Bank, 2007), and therefore, in order to be effective, school principals will have to combine both instructional and transformational leadership practices, not solely focusing on teaching, learning, and pupils’ achievements. The studies by Gessler and Ashmawy (2014) and Ashmawy (2003) basically show how effective principals in vocational schools in Germany and Egypt have to combine instructional and transformational strategies in order to undertake their responsibilities in managing teaching environment, personnel management, financial management, and school buildings and furnishings. Up to this point, it is safe to say that decentralization gives wider autonomy in decision-making to schools to be effective. However, what are the challenges that it gives to the existing school leadership cultures to further improve their effectiveness?

Challenges of Decentralization to the Existing Leadership Cultures in Schools

A decentralized-education system is not only a matter of giving schools broader autonomy in their decision-making, but it is also followed with a transfer of responsibilities that demands accountability. In the same way, De Grauwe (2004, p.3) explains that giving authority and responsibilities to schools is not the same as giving them a “blank cheque”, because more autonomy equals more accountability. In this context, OECD (2010; 2011) research findings imply that there is positive association between positive outcomes and school autonomy, when it is combined with accountability. Both PISA 2009 and 2015 results (OECD, 2010; 2011) conclude similarly by confirming the interplay between school autonomy and accountability. OECD (2010; 2011) explain that when school autonomy and accountability are intelligently combined, and supported with systems where principals have



more autonomy over resources, curriculum and other school policies, students gain better performance.

Accountability is, however, a contested notion. For example, Møller (2007) regards that the term might be difficult to put into practice, since it is rather “elusive.” In the same way, Levitt et al. (2008) argue that accountability can be a “slippery” concept, because it can be defined differently in theory and practice, and applied variously in a range of circumstances. In addition, Levitt et al. (2008, p.2) explain that accountability is an ethical term as “it concerns proper behaviour, and deals with the responsibilities of individuals and organizations for their actions towards other people and agencies.”

To fulfill the semantic as well as academic clarity, accountability, as defined by Bovens (2005), based on a research on public accountability, refers to “the methods by which the actor may render an account (i.e. justify their actions and decisions) to the stakeholders and by which the stakeholders may hold the actor to account (i.e. impose sanctions or grant permissions).” In line with this definition, Levitt et al. (2008) explain that the “actor” refers to individual or organization, while “stakeholders” refer to people with a particular interest in the work of the actor (including the actor’s conduct, perceptions, attitudes and the outcomes of the actor’s activities).

In school context, accountability is oftentimes regarded as “pressure” (Mulford, 2006) or “dilemma” (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2015). It becomes “pressure” and “dilemma” when authority, responsibilities, and management of education have been decentralized to school level, but the curriculum and testing remain centralized (Behrman et al., 2002). When this happens, accountability is oftentimes valued in the context of “performativity”. By formulating it based on individualized comments from teachers in the UK, Ball (2003, p.216) explains that, “performativity is a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgments, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change – based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic).” Based on the definition, Ball (2003) regards “performativity” as a “terror” for teachers. Allied to Ball’s (2003) argument, Fullan (2003a, p. xiii) argues that, unrealistic expectations and a policy environment that contributes to increased prescription of the statistical targets of learning outcomes, and diminished coherence between learning needs and curriculum, cause “a dismal for principalship.” Meanwhile, a case study in five local authorities in England by Stevenson (2013) found that when educational achievement is measured solely by standardized tests and the publication of “league tables” of school performance, school leaders, especially principals, are faced not only with “right versus wrong” issues, but also “right versus right” dilemmas. As a result, inevitably, there will be “either/or” situations “where there exists a clear opportunity cost resulting from whatever action is not pursued” (Stevenson, 2003, p.380). Taken together, Ball’s (2003), Fullan’s (2003a) and Stevenson’s (2013) arguments show that, accountability as perceived in the sense of “performativity” becomes “pressure” and “dilemma” for both school principals and teachers.

By borrowing Ball’s (2003) language, “the terror of performativity” is faced by different countries with devolved-education system. In England, for example, Bush (2016) explains that although affairs related to budgets, school choice and governance have been decentralized to school level, the curriculum remains centralized. The national curriculum is set by the central government through the Department for Education, and its implementation is monitored by the statutory Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). The inspection



covers a number of areas, namely overall effectiveness, leadership and management effectiveness, quality of teaching, learning and assessment, personal development, behaviour and welfare, and outcomes for pupils (Ofsted, 2016). Based on the inspection, Ofsted inspectors use the following four-point scale to make all judgments, ranging from: (i) grade 1: outstanding; (ii) grade 2: good; (iii) grade 3: requires improvement; to, (iv) grade 4: inadequate (Ofsted, 2016). These judgments will then result in the form of “league tables” (Stevenson, 2013), allowing, to some extent, the public to make another judgment on the schools’ accountability based on the ranking.

Indonesia, on the other hand, is an example of a country where accountability in school context is somewhat measured by standardized tests. Since its implementation in 1950, there has been continuous debate on the fairness of determining learning quality through national examination (Ministry of Education and Culture, Republic of Indonesia, 2015). The debate is raised due to the country’s demographic diversity, covering 81,626 villages, around 17 thousand islands and 680 native languages, as well as discrepancy in education quality among more than 50 million students enrolled in over 200 thousand schools throughout the country (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2016; Ministry of Education & Culture, Republic of Indonesia, 2015).

In its broadest sense, however, accountability does not only bring pressure, but it also opens up opportunity for school leaders and teachers to be effective by showing responsibility. In Indonesian context, for example, a quantitative study by Pritchett (2013, p.118) suggests that the country would need at least 101 years to reach average OECD levels at Finland’s pace. In line with it, de Ree et al. (2016) conducted a large-scale randomised experiment across more than 3,000 teachers and 80,000 students in Indonesia. The study found that, “the doubling in pay led to no improvements in measures of teacher effort or student learning outcomes, suggesting that the salary increase was a transfer to teachers with no discernible impact on student outcomes” (de Ree et al., 2016, p.1). Based on these studies, it can be safely argued that, accountability cannot be solely taken as pressure, because it also seeks for responsibility from (Indonesian) school leaders and teachers to work more effectively.

Case studies in Indonesia by Raihani and Gurr (2006), Raihani (2007), and Raihani et al. (2013) signify how the pressure from the public as well as the newly adopted decentralization of education system has been able to make the principals become more “transformational”. Raihani and Gurr (2006) found that, three successful public senior secondary school principals in Yogyakarta Province demonstrated several common values and beliefs of successful school leadership found by Day et al. (2000), namely trust, caring and empathy. In addition, the principals also performed beliefs and values related to their Islamic values (e.g. the responsibility to God to do one’s best, and faith and piety), the family-relationship value, and promotion of Javanese values. However, emphasised more in the research, Raihani and Gurr (2006, p.121) found that, “trust was an important feature of the principals’ leadership due to concerns in Indonesia about corruption.” Based on these findings, Raihani (2007) argues that, the three effective principals in Yogyakarta Province exercised transformational leadership practices. Raihani (2007, p.481) claims that, “the principals demonstrated ability in developing the school vision, setting strategies, building capacity, and establishing a broader network to achieve the benefits of school improvement.” Raihani et al. (2013), furthermore, explored the work of Mr. Mulyono, a successful public



Islamic senior secondary school (MAN) in Palangkaraya, Central Kalimantan Province. The study is worth attention, because “whilst MAN is a school for Muslim children staffed by Muslim teachers, both students and staff come from diverse cultural backgrounds that reflect this complex part of the world.” The study found that, in order to be effective, the principal was being humble by showing empathy and respecting others, put quality teaching over ethnicity, worked with religious differences, and developed students’ multicultural awareness (Raihani et al, 2013). An important aspect found in the study also relates to trust, since Mr. Mulyono is not originally from Palangkaraya. Raihani et al (2013, p.185) explain that, “Mr. Mulyono is not only charged with leading a school in a culturally diverse community, but [also] doing [it] as an ‘outsider.’”

From the case studies, it could be seen that the “pressure” given to Indonesian school principals to show accountability could result positively. Since corruption was extensive under the centralised system that anchored in the country for more than 54 years (Bjork, 2003; Kristiansen and Pratikno, 2006), school principals are entitled to show their accountability by being trustworthy as a way to create a culture of trust. In fact, research findings by Day (2013, p.105) conclude that, “trust has been found to be key elements in all countries.” However, the question now is how to develop an approach “in which the elements of a devolved system are held in creative tension, with checks and balances to make sure that autonomy does not lead to isolation, that diversity does not become a barrier to collaboration and that accountability does not slip into regulation” (National College, 2012, p.3). More than a decade ago, Fullan (2003, p.22) argued that “the solution is to acknowledge the extreme importance of the principalship, clarify the power nature of the principal’s role, and invest in developing capacity of principals in numbers to act as chief operating officers.” In order to realise it, Fullan (2003b) explains that it requires individual and system action independently and conjointly.

At the individual level, school leaders are to take actions consistent with the moral purpose, and push for and be responsible to the opportunities they have (Fullan, 2003, p.63). Meanwhile, at the system level, Fullan (2003b) emphasizes that, “the point is that leaders learning in context and fostering leaders at many levels is the core strategy.” Although Fullan’s (2003) proposed-solution might be outdated and was not based on research, Austria, England, Finland, Belgium and Australia provide examples of how the solution is implemented in practice (Pont, Nusche, & Hopkins, 2008b). Case studies conducted by Pont et al. (2008b, p.10) show that, the five countries “demonstrated models of school organization and management that distribute education leadership roles in innovative ways; and showed promising practices for preparing and developing school leaders.” In England, for example, Pont et al. (2008b) found a systemic approach that provides opportunities for schools and school leadership to collaborate for school improvement through the role of the National College for School Leadership (NCSL). NCSL has played an important role in developing national school leaders, promoting school networks, and enhancing collaboration among schools (Pont et al., 2008b). In 2013, NCSL was merged with the Teaching Agency to form National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) (the UK Department for Education [DfE] and Gove, 2013). NCTL has responsibilities to: (i) improve academic standards by: ensuring the availability of a well-qualified and motivated teaching profession, in sufficient numbers to meet the needs of the school system; and (ii) help schools to help each other to improve (NCTL, 2016). With its important role and wide range of responsibilities, to some extent, NCTL represents England’s serious commitment and effort to improve the quality of



teaching and educational leadership workforce through individual and systemic approach as suggested by Fullan (2003).

Conclusions

Decentralization is a globally adopted development strategy and management reform. It widely is believed to promise a range of benefits by being an important element to improve the effectiveness of local governance and broaden local participation. However, since it is motivated by different reasons, decentralization is defined and exercised variously in actual practice. In line with it, literature and research show mixed results in the implementation of decentralization in different countries. One common feature found from research is that, decentralization depends on the capacity and commitment of central government to devolve authority to lower units of government.

Education, on the other hand, is one of the sectors that has been affected by decentralization in many parts of the world. Yet, since decentralization itself is conceptually and practically contested, decentralization of education is practiced variously. In this paper, decentralization of education is interchangeable with devolution of education. In a devolved education system, schools are given both autonomy and responsibilities in decision-making authority. The decisions transferred to school level encompass the authority to the principal to manage the school's financial and human resources, and the authority to the community (e.g. to select the principal). At school level, those who receive the transferred-authority are school leaders, mainly principals. Therefore, under a decentralized-education system, school principals have broadened-roles and responsibilities.

Research shows that decentralization of education allows the creation of elected bodies to involve various stakeholders in the decision-making process, and enables schools to plan their own goals and objectives independently. As a result, decentralization of education makes principals demonstrate participatory leadership model in order to be effective. In addition, research also supports the argument that decentralization of education has made effective school principals combine elements of instructional and transformational leadership practices. Despite giving schools broader autonomy in their decision-making, however, decentralization of education creates a number of challenges to the existing leadership cultures in schools. A devolved environment urges for accountability that is oftentimes regarded as pressure and dilemma by school leaders and teachers. When the curriculum and standardized tests remain under the control of central government, accountability is valued in the context of performativity. Yet, when viewed broadly, accountability opens up opportunity for school leaders and teachers to show responsibility in order to be effective. Another challenge relates to developing an approach in which elements of a devolved system do not lead to solitude autonomy, segregated collaboration and regulation-based accountability. A solution worth considering is by acknowledging the important role of principals, clarifying the responsibilities and roles of principal, and developing capacity of principals. However, it is important to take into account that it takes individual and systemic approach to realize it.



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