

Alina Dzhurylo,
Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences
Institute of Pedagogy NAES of Ukraine
Kyiv, Ukraine

IMPACT OF EDUCATIONAL DECENTRALIZATION ON THE QUALITY OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

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Low-quality education is an endemic problem in most developing countries. International tests of student achievement consistently show that developing countries score at the bottom of the performance scale. In many countries, raising education quality has replaced expanding coverage as the principal challenge facing education ministries.

Decentralization is probably the single most advocated reform for improving the provision of basic services such as education in countries over the world. Proponents argue that by taking decision-making “closer to the people”, decentralization in service delivery can increase relevance in decision making and enhance accountability. Both of these can in turn translate into tangible improvements in the quality of education.

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

Great expectations: By empowering parents and giving them information about the school’s performance relative to national standards or benchmarks, decentralization may increase parents’ participation in school governance, raise their expectations of school performance, and lead to increased pressure on teachers and schools to perform.

Educational leadership: School autonomy gives headmasters and school administrators the tools and the responsibility to effectively lead the school. Headmasters can encourage school-based reform when they display good leadership and receive sufficient training to lead and manage the school community and, especially, the teacher corps.

Consensus and cohesion: School level decentralization is often accompanied by policies requiring teachers, parents, and administrators to jointly prepare school improvement plans, with grant funding provided on a competitive basis by the education ministry. The joint preparation of school improvement plans can create a shared commitment to raise quality as well as incentives to work together to implement it. Teachers who shirk this duty may face disapproval from their colleagues. In addition, the increased power given to headmasters under decentralization gives them the opportunity, if not the obligation, to develop a vision and mission for the school that is shared by both the faculty and the community.

Under school autonomy, headmasters often acquire increased management powers to recruit, select, monitor, evaluate, and train teachers and to use the school's discretionary monies to fund that training. This combination of new headmasters to select teachers who share values and a common vision for the school's development. They also provide incentives for teachers to improve their classroom performance.

Parental involvement: Decentralization often promotes both the formal and informal participation of parents in the school. Formally, parents participate in meetings to select their representatives on the school management committee. Informally, parents are encouraged to donate money to the school, gaining a stronger interest in monitoring its finances and becoming more involved in their children's education. Involving parents more directly in the education of their children may also lead to changed behavior in the home, resulting in parents more closely monitoring their children's study habits.

Effective learning time: Decentralization is unlikely to have a large impact on how teachers use classroom time, but it can have an important effect on teacher attendance. Teachers may be pressured by parents to reduce their absenteeism from the classroom and parents may play a role in monitoring teacher attendance.

Decentralization has the potential to improve accountability, increase parental participation, strengthen the leadership role of school directors, and increase teamwork among the teaching faculty. If these arguments are true, countries that decentralize should show improvements in educational outcomes or the characteristics of effective schools.

Studies of the impact of education decentralization on educational outcomes follow three different methodologies. First, large scale evaluations compare experimental schools following a nationally implemented decentralization policy with a control group not yet following the policy. Second, several studies analyze time-series and cross-sectional observations and statistically isolate the impact of decentralization. Third, other studies are qualitative examinations of particular cases, including pilot experiments.

Ukraine is also on the way of this process. The decentralization reforms that began in 2014, although incomplete, have already brought significant change to Ukraine. After two decades of power being concentrated in the capital, new regional administrations now have more responsibility for local services.

On March 2016 a concept of establishment of pivotal schools was presented. The main objective of the establishment of pivotal schools is to procure the quality of education, equal access to qualitative education, as well as the matters pertaining to resources utilization efficiency. The concept provides that elementary schools in the countryside will remain at the place of residence of the child, and students of 5th through 9th grades will go to the pivotal school. The decision on optimization of the educational system in their territory, and on the establishment of pivotal schools will be made by the communities themselves. Concurrently, a respective infrastructure will be established, as well as opportunities for the carriage of students and teachers from the basic school to the pivotal school will be offered.

On November 2016, the Government reallocated more than UAH 1.6 billion of the educational subsidy intended for the enhancement of facilities

and resources of schools, purchase of buses, and support of education in the amalgamated communities. In particular, UAH 300 million are appropriated to assist the amalgamated communities in purchasing school buses, equipment of schools with teaching aids and computerised complexes comprising multimedia training tools, and implementation of energy saving technologies.

Separately, the funds in the amount of UAH 300 million are also appropriated to equip schools specialising in natural science subjects and mathematics, as well as pivotal schools, with teaching aids. UAH 200 million from the reallocation are appropriated for the purchase of buses taking schoolchildren to pivotal schools. The purchase of buses will be carried out on the principles of co-financing, where 70% of the funds come from the state budget, and 30%, from local budgets.

All that is left to do is to hope that decentralization of the education management in Ukraine will also have a beneficial effect on the quality of domestic education.

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