



Decentralization of educational development reforms in Nigeria: a comparative perspective

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to seek to appraise regional compliance to decentralization laws establishing Education Boards and Committees since the Nigerian Government has for some time now been making efforts aimed at reforming her educational system.

Design/methodology/approach – Employing ex post facto design, the study uses survey data generated from 1,939 participants, who are key stakeholders in the education sector between 2003 and 2005. Participants include men, women, youths, school administrators, teachers, politicians, traders, community leaders et al., from suburban, urban and rural areas of the country.

Findings – Findings emerging from analysed data, using comparative means show low regional compliance to the decentralization law establishing Education Boards and committees.

Research limitations/implications – There was a poor response (43 percent) from sampled participants in the South Eastern Zone, when compared to other zones having over 90 percent response.

Practical implications – This study has implications for improved compliance to laws on educational reforms, regarding broadband representation in education boards and committees.

Originality/value – The research exposes regional complacency to implementation of national reform programmes in Nigeria's educational systems.

Keywords Educational development, Decentralized control, Educational innovation, Education, Educational administration, Nigeria

Paper type Case study

Introduction

Since political independence, the management of education reforms in Nigeria has been alternating between different stages of centralization, decentralization and recentralization (Hanson, 1998).

Different political regimes that have ruled the country prior to, and after independence in 1960, have in one way or the other made contributions to these past variations and current instability in the nation's educational system. For example during the early 1960s, different reasons were adduced for centralization or decentralization of educational management. At this period, educational reforms were conceived to enable the newly independent nation produce the required medium and high calibre manpower for national development. Nigeria, like some other nations of Africa, at that time believed that decentralization of educational management would encourage regional competition which could in turn accelerate manpower development for national growth. Consequently, early in the nation's political history, the four



different regions that made up Nigeria, were completely autonomous in the provision, control, and management of their schools. Educational policies and school's curricular were different for the North, East, West and Mid- Western Regions of Nigeria, and the competition between these four regions for educational development was very kin. Hence as early as 1955, the Western Region started her free Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme and the Eastern Region followed suite in 1957.

In the early 1970s, however, a centralized model of educational management was imposed by the ruling military class. All existing democratic structures, such as private school ownership, regional curricular and decentralized funding were outlawed. The provision and management of schools at the Primary, Secondary and University levels became government responsibilities, with the Federal government providing the fund and also dictating the rules. But the centralized model could not endure because of several reasons ranging from cultural multiplicity to social and economic diversity. Thus, by 1988, (amended in 1999 and 2003) a law was established decentralizing educational management functions to state, local, district and village education boards and committees.

These boards and committees created by the Decentralization Law have regularly been subject of several debates and scrutiny by eminent scholars, locally (Ejiogu, 2004; Ikoya, 2005) and internationally (Bray, 2003; Hanson, 2000; Kamat, 2000). Issues commonly discussed have ranged from non- availability to inadequacy of relevant structures for decentralization. Other issues unresolved include dysfunctionality of structures, poor funding of programmes, inadequate or inappropriate private representation of local community members and inefficiency or efficiency of the systems. Adequate empirical data have not been provided to enable education managers in Nigeria proffer solutions to the multifaceted problems facing education, particularly in the areas of regional compliance to reform laws, hence this study.

Study objectives and other related issues

This study in line with globalised concept of decentralization in developing countries (Rondinelli, 1981; Murphy and Fletcher, 1989; Hawkins, 2004; Astiz, 2004) sought to provide empirical evidence of compliance to the provisions of the law regarding the establishment of education boards and committees in Nigeria. The first objective therefore, is to provide answer to a fundamental question as to whether or not the local, district and village education committees established were done in accordance with the provision of the law. The Decentralization Law for example, prescribed specific guidelines (Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN), 1999) in the establishment of local, district and village education committees. Are the guidelines being properly and adequately adhered to?

The second objective looks into the area of community representation in these established boards. Again, the law prescribed special positions for women, community leaders, village heads et al. For example, the law states that the village head should be the chairman of the village education committee. In addition to that, members of the local teachers' union, and youth leaders are expected to be members of the boards. The question is, are the provisions of the law regarding membership of these boards and committees being closely followed? Are women in the villages actually given the opportunity to serve in these boards of education, or are their positions occupied by

men or highly educated and highly placed women who are not resident in the villages? This study sought to elucidate these important questions, by providing empirical evidence to establishment and membership of local, district and village education boards.

Nigeria has been chosen for this study because of several important reasons. As was previously pointed out, Nigeria is currently seen as a nation decentralizing its educational management system. Findings from this study could provide more insight on the veracity of this rating. Nigeria's education reform has been going through the different management models of decentralization, in line with global and regional trends, therefore findings from this study could provide theoretical evidences to support or refute reports from developed nations (Hanson, 1998; Hawkins, 2004) that a clear example of completely centralized or decentralized system of education is not practiced. The Nigerian Educational system has a rich historical, cultural and political framework that could positively impact educational systems in both developing and developed economies. Finally, the Nigerian case study could provide insight on how establishment of decentralized educational structures could enhance or slow down educational growth in developing countries.

This paper is organized in the following order. Firstly, it provided a historical background to centralization and decentralization of educational reforms. Then, the author presented a summary of the Educational Decentralization Law (DECENLAW). Here the author looked into membership of the different organizational structures as well as the provision of the law as relating to membership of education boards and committees. The author thereafter presented the method and procedure for data collection. Finally, the result and discussion are presented in the concluding section.

Historical background

The Federal Republic of Nigeria lies along the West coast of Africa, North of the equator between latitude 5 and 18 degrees and longitude 0 and 20 degrees. Nigeria was a British colony, which became politically independent in 1960. A number of different constitutions had been written to effect educational development in Nigeria since the British first occupied Lagos, a major city in Nigeria in 1861. It was not until 1893 when the Niger Coast protectorate came into effect that a real government became established in what today is Southern Nigeria. By 1900 the protectorate of Northern Nigeria came into being. In 1906, the colony of Lagos was merged with the southern protectorate. In 1914 both the Northern and Southern protectorates were merged. Despite the merger, the former protectorates of the North, South and the Colony of Lagos never lost their autonomy. For example, the legislative council did not legislate for Northern province until a new constitution was introduced in 1946 and the next constitution that came into effect in 1952 extended increased regional autonomy. But despite these regional powers the quest, still, for more regional "independence" led to the convocation of a constitutional conference in London in 1953 to be followed by a similar one in Lagos in 1954. Then by October 1, 1954 a new constitution came into effect, making Nigeria a Federation consisting of five regions; the Northern, Eastern and Western Regions, the Federal territory of Lagos and the quasi- federal territory of the Southern Cameroons now part of the Republic of Cameroon.

The existed autonomy then, made for different educational management policies, in the different regions of the newly independent state. As a result, some regions, particularly the western and later mid-western regions, had diverse management policies in their provinces, which laid the underlying framework for democratisation and universalization of education.

Thus early educational policies encouraged regional autonomy, which created different levels of regional degrees of centralization and decentralization. In some regions of Nigeria, education was highly decentralized, while in other regions it was more centralized. This situation persisted until 1966 when the Nigerian Military seized power.

Centralization of educational management

Barely five years after political independence, Nigeria experienced its first, of several military coups, in January 1966. The era of military rule, which, span the period 1966 to 1999, with a brief inter-regnum of civilian administration from 1979 to 1982, had strong impact on education reforms in Nigeria. At the onset of the Nigerian Military rule many democratic structures for decentralised educational management were abandoned or outrightly destroyed, and quickly replaced with centralized structures in line with military governance. A decree was promulgated abolishing the federal nature of the Republic and the existing autonomous regions became provinces of the national government. The decree (Decree 34 of 1966) attempted to introduce a unitary form of government into Nigeria. By 1972, all existing schools were forcibly taken from the missionaries and private proprietors, thereby creating a highly centralized state school system.

Educational decentralisation laws

Between 1976 and 2003, several laws were made to reform education in Nigeria beginning with the local government act. The 1976 local government reform gave legal backing to local governments in the provision and management of Primary Education. By 1979, this reform was given constitutional powers and other functions such as management of adult education were added. Then, by 1988, the National Primary Education Commission was established by the decentralization Act. The decentralisation Decree, hereafter referred to as the Decentralisation Law (DECENLAW) for the first time in the history of Education in Nigeria devolved major management functions to lower units of government such as district and village education committees.

As in many other countries of the world (Auyero, 2000; Gorostiaga, 2001) the Nigerian government gave several reasons for the enactment of the law, but some of the major reasons include the following:

- the law sought to bring educational management nearer to the rural dwellers by establishing educational development structures in various districts, wards and villages; and
- the law also sought to enhance local community participation in the management of education by appointing rural dwellers into educational management boards, and committees that were established.

The law accordingly made provision for the establishment of:

- the National Primary Education Commission at the federal level of government;
- State Primary Education Boards in all the 36 states;
- Local Government Education Committees in all the 776 councils;
- District Education Committees for each district; and
- Village Education Committees for the villages with primary schools.

Despite the several amendments in the law in 1991, 1993, 1999 and 2003, two major questions that scholars and policy analysts continue to ask and seek solution to is how well are these education boards and committees established in the areas prescribed by the law; and what is the representation of its membership? Are local and rural community members adequately represented on the boards of these committees? (Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN), 1999).

Conceptual framework and related studies

Several studies have been carried out on educational centralization and decentralisation in Nigeria (Ikoya, 2005; Arubayi, 2004; Durosaro, 2004). A good number of such studies published in the 1970s and 1980s examined issues of efficiency and effectiveness in manpower production for developing economies. Adesina (1987) also did some extensive studies on decentralisation and decision making at lower management cadre. Other studies (Fafunwa, 1999; Adesina and Ajayi, 1997) looked at the goals of decentralisation, (Ikoya, 2000) autonomy of sub-systems (Obanyan, 2000; Ikoya, 1999) community participation. Later on, research in the 1990s and 2000s focused more on implementation outcomes of decentralisation and education reform policies. Astiz (2004) for example examined how reforms were adopted at provincial levels and the extent to which policy implementation matches national official mandates. Hanson (2000) looked at how increasing demand for democratisation appear to enhance decentralisation of public institutions, especially education. Bray (1991) examined strategies employed to work within decentralised frameworks yet effectively addressing issues of diversity and conformity in education systems. Although several studies have also been carried out on community participation in decentralised management functions (Levitskey, 2001; Carron and Ta Ngor, 1980; Hawkins, 2004; Ikoya, 2004; Akinwunmi, 2004), most of these studies have not provided at least for Nigeria, adequate empirical evidence of established educational boards and committees for decentralised management functions at the local, district and village levels of governance.

Statement of problem

The Nigerian government decentralisation law prescribed that at the local level an education committee be established. This committee the law, went further, should have the chairman of the local government council as chairman of the committee and his supervisory councillor for education as secretary. By the provision of the law therefore, these two positions were reserved for public office holders in the board. All other positions in the board are by law to be occupied by non-governmental officials. The question is, whether or not that is actually the case; or is it a case of public officials

occupying all the positions as rewards to political party faithfuls? Astiz (2004) reported that in Buenos Aires, there was decoupling between policy purpose and practice, because of evidence of less systematic efforts to include different sectors of education community. Could that be the case also in Nigeria as regards the establishment of education boards and committees? Are government functionaries occupying positions meant for non-governmental officials thereby limiting the locus of community role in the education boards? In other words, could the Nigerian decentralisation experiment be likened to what Astiz described as ritual compliance, which enables education system to continue its programmes unchanged despite political propaganda of educational reforms? Astiz (2004) reported that Ramirez and Robinson (1979) found out that developing nations adopt symbolic education reforms which in most cases produce little or no change despite the establishment of new structures for such reforms. The problem of this study therefore is to examine regional compliance to the provision of the law in the establishment of Education Boards and Committees in Nigeria.

Research questions

In examining this problem, two research questions were answered. The questions were:

- RQ1. Are local, district and village education committees established according to the educational decentralization law in Nigeria?
- RQ2. Is membership representation of established local, district and village education committees constituted according to the educational decentralisation law?

Methods

Employing a stratified sampling technique, the author employed the survey design to gather data from participants in the six geo-political zones of the country. Survey design can be a powerful tool for the exploration and evaluation of many aspects of the school system, such as administrative procedures and programmes implementation, when the appropriate conditions are satisfied. In our quest to satisfy these conditions, the authors ensured that the instrument used was standardised, the conditions of administration of instrument to sampled members were as much as possible near the same, and all the major stakeholders in the education enterprise at the national, state, local, district, as well as village levels are represented. Women association members, religious leaders, the youths and other stakeholders from different socio-economic status, as defined by the decentralisation law were also administered the research instrument. Information collected by the researcher and trained assistants were quantified for ease of data analysis. Although room was given for open-ended questions, these "open-ended" questions were codified so that they could be analysed and reported quantitatively. This design was adopted in the study because Nigeria is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and religiously diverse country "divided" into six geopolitical zones. The survey method enabled us to cover the entire country very effectively by drawing samples from these six zones.

Instrument

The instrument used for data collection consists of three parts:

- (1) examines a few relevant demographic variables about participants;
- (2) pertains to the established local, district and village education committees (boards); and
- (3) measures membership constitution in the established committees.

The instrument was adapted from an already developed and validated questionnaire, based on a UNESCO-Ford foundation sponsored study on the challenges of decentralized educational systems in the West African sub-region. The instrument was used in 1993 with a reliability coefficient of 0.78.

It was revalidated in 2002, at which time the reliability was 0.81. For this study, some minor changes were made by a panel that carefully scrutinized all the items of the instrument. Following these changes, the instrument was revalidated and the current coefficient of reliability is 0.84. Prior to this study, the instrument was carefully pilot-tested.

Data collection and analysis

The questionnaire was the main source of data collection. The researcher used it to get required information on the implementation of the decentralisation programme. I was more interested in obtaining information about the establishment of local, district and village education boards and committees in the country and also the membership of these boards and committees as to whether or not local community members are adequately represented. These information were required from stakeholders who are also key players in the decentralisation process. Accordingly, 2,160 key informants were given questionnaires for completion to ensure adequate and fair representation of all concerned stakeholders. Questionnaires were codified, so that the chairman/persons of the state primary education boards and other board members participated. Others include ex-officio members of the boards, secretaries of the boards, local government chairpersons, district and village heads.

The researcher spent quite some time in the field collecting the data, which process began in February 2003. It was decided from the beginning of the study to administer these questionnaires personally to reduce data attrition and other problems that respondents may encounter. But as the scope expanded to cover the entire nation, twelve assistants were trained for six months, regarding administration of the test instrument. The twelve trained assistants were sent in pairs to each of the six zones, with 360 questionnaires to be administered to stakeholders.

All statements written in response to open-ended questions were coded for common thematic statements for data analysis. Questionnaires going to each of six zones were identified and categorised by respondents' location, membership in the school management board and functions performed in the board or committee. These identification codes allowed the researcher to differentiate state management board officials from local, district and village education committee members. It also enabled us separate those involved in policy formulation from those who execute it and those affected by it and to measure the difference in their opinions.

Result*Descriptive statistics*

Comparative means and standard deviation to the two questions answered are displayed in Tables I and II. Although education boards appear well established at national, state and local levels, there is however, low compliance to the provisions of the decentralization law, in the establishment of committees and membership representation at district and village levels. Women, religious leaders and village heads are not fairly represented in the boards and committees.

Findings

Findings presented in Table I show little variation among the six regions regarding the establishment of education boards and committees. What we see is sparsity in the distribution of local, district and village education boards and committees across the six sampled zones, clearly showing that the level of regional compliance to the provisions of national laws is low, with a gradual decrease from local and district to village levels. For example, this study shows that whereas over 93.4 percent of sampled committees have actively functioning local education boards, only 68.6 percent of these committees have well established district education committees (boards), and less than 43 percent have functional village education committees (boards).

Findings on membership representation in the education boards, in accordance to the guidelines of the decentralization law as presented in Table II. Findings on board

Sampled zones	Sample size	Mean scores and standard deviation					
		Local education committee		District education committee		Village education committee	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
South west	353	3.37	1.19	2.75	1.08	1.80	1.06
South south	355	3.71	1.08	3.02	1.24	2.19	1.23
South east	230	3.58	1.99	2.83	1.02	1.79	1.45
North east	346	3.61	1.01	2.82	0.85	1.12	1.36
North central	340	3.54	0.92	2.69	0.74	1.38	1.43
North west	315	3.25	1.93	2.13	0.72	1.09	1.36

Note: Mean scores greater than 2.74 are considered good level of compliance

Table I.
Comparative means on regional compliance to establishment of education boards and committees

Sampled zones	Sample size	Percentage representation			
		Women leaders	Village heads	Religious leaders	Youth leaders
South west	353	33	51	63	49
South south	355	32	47	67	50
South east	230	38	49	62	50
North east	346	21	58	61	47
North central	340	28	52	64	48
North west	315	19	55	63	45

Note: Membership representations of 60 percent and above are considered adequate

Table II.
Membership representation in education boards and committees

membership representation was delimited only to village education committees. Local and district board membership were not considered for a very obvious reason. Several studies have shown that over 70 percent of the nation's population live in the villages. It was therefore considered that findings from the villages would be a better representation of rural communities, which is the focus of the educational decentralization law. Findings revealed that low membership representation for women (28 percent), village heads (52 percent), religious leaders (63 percent) and youths (48 percent).

Findings from this research has implication for effective management of education. Current trend towards effective community participation in the management of education demands that all stakeholders both in the urban and rural villages are represented in education boards. Similarly, education boards should not be seen as an exclusive preserve of the educated and the rich. The uneducated and poor also have children in the schools, therefore they have something to contribute. Even when they are unable to immediately contribute, they have something to gain and take home to their communities and families.

Discussion

This study is actually a continuation of a larger ongoing research concerned with current reform programmes aimed at enhancing educational development in Nigeria. Important findings with implications for effective management of education have been revealed in previous studies. For example Ikoya (2004) was able to show that inequity in the provision of education structures and resources due to legal constraints stifles effective implementations of education reform programmes. Similarly, the author's research on provision of school lunch reveals that a state funded school lunch programme enhances pupils' attendances and retention in schools, particularly in the rural communities. Improving female pupils access to education is a major concern of Nigeria's current reform programme. Our study, (Ikoya and Ikoya, 2006) shows that gender mentorship enhances female pupils' enrolment in schools. Other researchers (Arubayi, 2004; Ehiamentolor, 2004; Ejiogu, 2004; and Fafunwa, 1999) working on the current education reform in Nigeria here variously demonstrated clear relationship between decentralisation of educational management and effective implementation of National education reform programmes.

Scholars of education reforms in developing nations (Cheng, 1994; Bray, 1999; Bakken, 1988; Hanson, 2000) have often been quoted as saying that decentralisation is not necessarily created by passing a law, rather, it is established by overcoming several challenges at the national and sub-regional levels. This study has examined how the Nigeria education reform based on decentralisation has been making progress at overcoming two major challenges for effective management of education at national and sub-national levels through legislation. The first challenge is that of proper establishment of education boards and committees at the local, district and village administrative units. The second issue that was looked into is membership representation in the constituted boards and committees that were established for decentralised management functions.

At national and state levels, results from data analysed show high compliance (83.3 percent) to the provisions of the decentralisation law, in the establishment of the boards

and commissions. All the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory have State Primary Education Boards well established, to which functions of teachers' appointment, deployment, emolument, discipline and promotion (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1999) are well devolved. This result supports the findings of previous authors (Conyers, 1986; Nwagwu, 2004). Similarly, at the local level, the 776 local government authorities have functional education committees. However, the level of compliance in the establishment of district and village education committees were reported low. Several factors could have been responsible for these results. Prominent among the reasons could be national disposition to centralised or decentralised education systems. Nigeria a few months ago embarked on a political reform, with delegates gathered for a national political reform conference. A synopsis of the agenda to be articulated by representatives of the six geo-political zones show that while the South-West, South-East, South-South and North Central are gearing up for devolution of power to lower administrative units, delegates from the North-West and North-East zones are pushing for a more centralised system. Thus, both the government and the people are still divided as to whether or not they actually want a centralised or decentralised educational system. Even in areas where government functionaries are well disposed to decentralisation, most villages lack the required structures to successfully implement it (Salami, 2004; Adeyemi and Igbineweka, 2004, Famade, 2004; Ikoya, 2005).

On membership constitution of the boards and committees, the authors reported wide disparity in the views of participants. The opinions of village and district heads reportedly differ from those of local government authority chairmen, and education councillors regarding the constitution of the State Primary Education Boards. Regarding the representation of women in the boards and committees, only the local government authority chairmen reported their adequate representation, just as sampled groups were unanimous on inadequate representation of, religious leaders, village heads and the youths. Several factors have reportedly (Heines and Wallace, 2003) been responsible for non-active participation of women and rural people in general in education policies and programmes. First, the level of literacy in Nigeria is low (about 57 percent), but among women and rural village and district dwellers, these figures are even lower, therefore, there exist the general traditional attitude that women, particularly those resident in the districts and villages lack the requisite academic background to enable them function effectively in the complex world of policy formulation, execution and evaluation of educational reforms. The women and villagers themselves passively respond to this age long traditional stereotypes, and accordingly shy away from actively participating in decentralised educational management roles. But developing and implementing policies and programmes that target women and village dwellers, such as seen in the Nigerian experiment, may improve their participation in education reforms.

Conclusion and recommendation

This research is concerned with the implementation of educational reform policies and programmes in Nigeria. The objective of this study was to provide answers to two fundamental questions. The first was to find out whether or not local, district and village education boards were established in accordance with the provisions of the

Decentralisation Law. The second objective sought to find out whether or not membership of the established boards were constituted in accordance with the enabling law, at the local, district and village levels. Using data generated from 1939 sampled participants, who are key stakeholders in Nigeria education sector, from the six geopolitical zones, which constitute the nation, results from the study revealed that:

- most principal structures for decentralised management functions were established for local, district and village boards and committees;
- the level of compliance to the provisions of the law in the establishment of Boards and Committees seems higher at the local than district and village levels; and
- village, district and religious heads including women leaders differed from State Education Board members regarding the constitution of the board. Women, religious leaders, youths and village heads were perceived to be inadequately represented in the boards and committees.

Based on our findings, it was recommended that:

- more functional district and village education committees be established according to the provisions of the law;
- more women, particularly those in rural communities should be voted or appointed into education boards and committees; and
- more functional village education committees be established with village heads as chairmen, to enhance local community participation in educational management.

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