

The Impact of the Educational Management on the Educational Process Quality in the Context of School Education Decentralization

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Abstract

Decentralization - main direction of the Romanian school education reform, means transfer of authority, responsibility and resources towards local communities and schools, but also a general, financial and decision management at school level. Although the law stipulates that the school is run by the Administration Board, the majority of it is comprised of teachers who are required by law to provide a quality educational service, not the management, administration and school finance. Another disfunction is that, although the director should respect and apply the decisions of the Board, he/she is still its president and he/she guides according to decisions taken by a political majority created by him/her. In order to achieve a proper decentralization as practiced in all performant educational systems worldwide, it is necessary a correction of all abnormalities and malfunctions and quality management training of the personnel involved. It is also necessary to harmonize the legislation of schools with that of public administration and engagement of all stakeholders in the decentralization plan, but also in the organizational capacity development plan.

Keywords: *management, quality, decentralization, school, system, organization*

JEL Classification: I20

School reforms undertaken after 1990 and which focused on shift from quantitative to qualitative watched education policy at a constant orientation to macro changes and diversification of compulsory education in order to increase the degree of socio-professional integration. At the same time one tried reporting to the evolution of the education systems in the world which tend to extend compulsory education and strengthening of new values determined by a process of transition to a market economy, a democratic political system and a culture of a computerized society. Thus, a truly democratic society requires the process of decision making to be closer to the place of application, citizens having the opportunity to participate directly or indirectly in decisions which affect them (Barbu, 2009).

Inscribed in the national strategy of decentralization, decentralization of the Romanian education system approved in December 20, 2005, aims to create an organized educational system, managed and financed by the European requirements regarding quality

assurance of the educational process, open, equal and full access of all children and young people in the educational process, suitability of the educational offer to the interests and needs of direct and indirect beneficiaries. Characterized by the transfer of authority, responsibility and resources in decision-making and general and financial management to school units and the local community, education decentralization involves a redistribution of responsibilities, decision-making authority and accountability for specific educational functions at central to the local level, as well as participation of non-administrative factors (social partners, parents, businesses, NGOs, etc). The necessity to implement this decentralized system in the Romanian educational system is given by the fact that the time-wage standardization system was quite rigid, one did not know the priorities for financing and this was also pretty low, and the development of schooling plans was not made function of preparation needs of the labor force on the labor market, but for the teacher norms to be achieved.

To create the necessary prerequisites for quality assurance in education and efficient use of resources, decentralization is a dynamic approach which implies, on the one hand, involvement and responsibility and, on the other hand, strategic thinking and control. The decentralization model proposed to the Romanian school, which also holds the role of main decision factor, ensures at the same time the participation and consultation of all interested social factors.

The objectives of the decentralization process are focused on: increased efficiency and performance of educational institutions at central and local level and at the level of the school; democratization of the educational system; ensuring transparency and access to education; increase relevance of educational services for all children and students; stimulating innovation, professional responsibility and accountability.

In order to achieve these objectives it is necessary to increase the degree of responsibility of the local community and the school, strengthening the autonomy and ability to manage financial and human resources, consulting / involvement of the community and other beneficiaries of the educational system in decision making and quality assurance based on external self- assessment and public responsibility. Also, transparency, access and equity in education was achieved by providing public access to data on the budgets of schools, the school board decisions but also a cost-based allocation of funds for a student. Thus, regardless of geographical location or financial capacity of the localities in which students learn, the new funding system must allow equal allocations for students with similar needs. Stimulating innovation, professional responsibility and accountability for the teachers, school managers and students must be made by transferring the power of decision on budget execution, personnel policies and the growth of the school curriculum at school level. This approach of financial, administrative, educational (curricular) decisions, as well as the decisions on the human resources needs and interests of the beneficiaries, will lead to a better allocation of resources, boost partnership in education and diversification of the educational functions of the school.

Taking into account the need for skilled local workforce, development of the potential of the area, the needs and interests of students as well as existing human and material resources available to the school, local factors will need more freedom in changing the structure of the curriculum offer.

The most important advantages of decentralization implementation in Romanian education are getting autonomy to schools, increasing the efficiency of using human, material and financial resources, growth and diversification of participation in decision making through the involvement of the community and taking initiatives.

Real and effective involvement of local authorities in the operation and development of educational services, will present a benefit to the community, the school becoming an information and community development center. Following the multiplication of decision centers (schools), decentralization risks can materialize or in inconsistent decisions or in incompatibilities between the proposed measures and the resources available, the conservative local councils, subjectivity and particular interests. It is also not excluded the danger of widening the gap between schools in urban and rural areas or between the central and peripheral areas of cities. Since the decentralization of the education system is a change process which involves certain risks that may occur as a result of failure to observe the stages of decentralization, of not respecting deadlines, or other causes, one can define several weaknesses of the process (Panagoret, 2012):

- lack of attractiveness of the teaching profession due to low wages; poor management training and preparation of teachers with inadequate initial training (to competitions for teaching positions many candidates were not able to obtain degrees over 5); inefficient local and national cooperation structures;
- low degree of mobility in the educational system;
- an unattractive educational offer which lacks variety and most often drawn to achieve teaching norms;
- difficulty in understanding the issues of education by policy makers at the local level;
- funds are still very low;
- staff which is poorly trained and lacking in logistics;
- misinterpretation and misuse of laws;
- emergence of imbalances between schools, cities, regions;

Analyzing the weaknesses outlined in the decentralization process, one realizes that they are difficult to remove because the direction education is heading is still one oscillating, every year new changes appear in the Education Law, school regulations and methodologies on student exams or competitions for teaching positions. In order to discover the way in which the decentralization of preuniversity education is perceived and understood, but also the impact of applying decentralization principles and mechanism among teachers, parents and students, a reaserch was lead based on a questionnaire in four highschoools (2 in urban areas and 2 in rural areas) with the participation of 210 people (70 teachers, 70 student, 70 parents). The applied questionnaire included a set of 10 questions and the items included all areas that have undergone changes in the process of decentralization.

- School education decentralization involves the transfer of authority, responsibility and resources from the central level to: a) local administration; b) the school; c) economic factors in the area.

- Positive effects of decentralization are: a) the presence of the local authority and parents in the Administration Board of the school; b) democratization of the educational system; c) stimulating innovation, professional responsibility and accountability.

- Taking into account the decentralization strategy, the main deciding factor are: a) the Ministry of Education; b) the school; c) the local administration.

- On a scale of 1 to 5 (1- unsatisfactory, 5-excellent), which are the areas covered by decentralization affected by major changes: a) human resources; b) the school network; c) financial resources, d) curriculum.

- On a scale of 1 to 5, which will be the impact of decentralization of the educational process in the school you are part.
- Who should hold the power of decision in the organization and administration of school: a) Director b) Teacher council; c) The Administration Board.
- Who should develop curricula and school programs: a) The Ministry; b) The National Council for Curriculum, c) curriculum board in every school.
- Evaluation of the quality of educational services offered by your school should be made by: a) school inspectors; b) the external auditors; c) representatives of the local community.
- What are your sources of information on the implementation of the decentralization process in the school education system: a) the documents provided by the ministry, b) school inspectorate, c) the school board.
- Does the decentralization process contribute to increase the efficiency of the educational process in school?

Following analysis of the questionnaires it was concluded that only 75% of teachers have understood how the transfer of authority in the process of decentralization is made, 65% considered as a positive effect the presence of the local authority and parents in the school's Administration Board, and 57% concluded that the school and the local administration are key decision makers. In question number 4, regarding areas with major changes, they obtained, in decreasing percentages, as follows: 70% financial resources, 25% human resources, 5% curriculum and school network. In what concerns the impact of the educational process decentralization in the school of the people interviewed, 76% said that it may be ranked 3 (so the impact was not so great) and at question no. 6, only 8% considered that the principal should hold the power of decision, 25% the Teachers' Council and 68% the Administration Board. This demonstrates that subjects trust the power of decision of the Administration Board and very few in the power of decision of the principal, the principal being appointed on a political criterion and having a high degree of subjectivity.

Also, according to the respondents, the curricula should be developed by the National Council for Curriculum (92%), while 66% believe that the assessment of the educational services should be made by the representatives of the local community (with the observation that they do not have the necessary training in order to make such an evaluation). On sources of information on the implementation of the decentralization process 50% use the internet and 50% documents provided by the school, school inspectorates and ministry. Regarding how decentralization helps to increase educational effectiveness, respondents have different perceptions. Some people believe that decentralization requires an active involvement of the local community in the educational process and attract alternative funding sources, others believe that effective decentralization will be found in the value added in education, in the ability to integrate into society graduates on their professional skills. Another contribution would be increased interest for lifelong learning of teachers as well as lowering the disinterest for school and dropout manifested especially among the poor.

Teachers also felt that decentralization of education is a model difficult to apply in the current economic, social and administrative conditions, it is a process that faces many difficulties related to the conservative mentality and the management culture at the level of local decision makers as well as an inconsistent legislation in the field. Thus, learning by all its means must reflect the complex process of economic restructuring, which is the basic component of any global social reform and typical phenomena embodied in changing

macro-proportions, recovery of high technologies and rethinking of management legislation lead to a shift in the demand and supply plan, generating long term effects in the functioning of the education system.

Considered as a subsystem of the society connected to the realm of spiritual activity, the education system has strong links with other spheres (economic, social, political, spiritual, social, family) and cannot be limited by the economic system. Although decentralization of the education system in Romania has been a positive thing, because of the lack of economic training of the people who lead educational institutions, special problems were generated. If, in performant education systems in the world (Finland, Israel) managers are persons having economic schools, school principals in Romania are still political appointees and have no economic training and the Administration Board shall have as a president the principal itself. It is certain that, in order to provide results in line with the social demands, there exist and must be permanently sought methods and strategies which must be continuously adapted to the changes in society. Depending on the requirements of the society, as internal and external agents, all the persons involved in the education system contribute to the on- going changes in the system, directly or indirectly, that is why it is necessary to have continuous improvement and a quality management from the part of the principals. As internal agents, one must not exclude the improvement of teachers' activity, but also an active and responsible involvement of the students, the family and the local factors. Thus, taking into consideration the decentralized educational systems at worldwide level, it is necessary to make a permanent analysis of the management in the Romanian educational system, an improvement of the human resources and performing tasks which face the system. To discuss successful managers one must take into account the status of the director of a school organization, a status which encompasses both professional and decision-making skills (objectives, human resource management, financial, information, review of the educational activity, development of the organization and the relations with dialogue partners) and continuing education standards and methods of evaluation of the activity.

In Romania, as compared to managers of school organizations in other countries, the principal is not only an administrative manager, well trained in this field, but it also coordinates the entire activity of the organization, the educational activity being the center of this process. As its work encompasses a wide variety of problems (financial accounting area, administrative household, contact with pupils' families, relationships with the local community), and, if we also consider the fact that it is hierarchically subordinated to the school inspectorate, to the Ministry and the local community, it is required specialized training, as it is practiced in decentralized and performant education systems in other countries. Although it is stipulated by law that the school is run by the Administration Board and the principal should be subordinated to the Board and implement the decisions taken by it, he is still chairman of the board and is politically appointed and acts according to his training and as it is imposed by the political factor. Of course, these disorders should be removed and the current decentralization strategy of the school education should improve so that the school provides quality education and adapted to the needs of the labor market. Taking into consideration the weaknesses of the Romanian pre-university education system decentralization and the formation of some managers who need to emphasize strategies that lead to better performance and not remain simple performers pending between confusion and disorganization, it is compulsory to respect the following points: manager appointment by competition of a person who has management training; development of clear and consistent methodology to harmonize school legislation with that

of public administration; engaging in the process of decentralization and the development of organizational capacity of both the direct and the indirect beneficiaries; achieve effective inter-ministerial cooperation and compliance with legislation; internal and external monitoring of the decentralization process by using a system of well analyzed indicators and strengthen the systems of audit and financial control at local and county level; disseminating information on the content and effects of decentralization.

It is certain that, in order to obtain a decentralization most authentic and the desired results, one must consider whether the school is sufficiently mature and has trained human resource in order to become an autonomous institution, or it has a real support from the community.

For effective management in the process of education decentralization it is necessary teamwork, transdisciplinarity, openness to all that is good and new and last but not least a unified approach and a great flexibility of the organization. Due to the fact that the school is transformed into an information and community development center and positive effects of decentralization will result in a better correlation of the school supply with the needs of the labor market, this will mean a safe method to develop the community, to promote the authentic and specific traditions.

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