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**DECENTRALIZATION AND EDUCATION - RATIONALE, IMPLEMENTATION IN
DIFFERENT COUNTRIES**

**DESCENTRALIZARE ȘI EDUCAȚIE – ARGUMENTE ȘI IMPLEMENTARE ÎN
DIFERITE ȚĂRI**

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Annotation: *Most researchers support the trend of decentralization, but emphasize especially the need for a high level of participation by the various bodies involved in education. Transferring authority needs to be defined and clear. These conditions are necessary for the success of decentralization. The question is principally where and how to decentralize. Not every country is ready and able to implement the process of decentralization.*

Adnotare: *Majoritatea cercetătorilor susțin tendința de descentralizare, dar subliniază în mod special necesitatea unui nivel ridicat de participare a diferitelor organisme implicate în educație. Condițiile transferului responsabilităților trebuie să fie definite clar. Aceste condiții sunt necesare pentru succesul descentralizării. Întrebarea constă, în principal, unde și cum să fie efectuată descentralizarea. Nu fiecare țară este gata și capabilă să implementeze procesul de descentralizare.*

Keywords: *delegation of authority, decentralization, work.*

Cuvinte-cheie: *delegarea responsabilității, descentralizare, muncă.*

Introduction

Decentralization is one of the central factors which have influenced on the education planning over the past 15 years.

– Who should be making decisions as to public education?

– And who should be paying for it?

These are questions that repeat themselves. Under current circumstances of pressure to decrease public budgets and to use resources efficiently, many countries, even those considered to be highly centralized, have adopted policies of decentralization. The argument of decentralization versus centralization has continued over several years. But it is apparent that there are no countries where total decentralization or total centralization exists. Therefore, the discussion should focus on the question: Which decisions should be made through decentralization; that the schools should be accountable to and be responsible for, and what is the regulatory role of the specific country.

Materials and methods of research

The main research methods for writing the article were: a correlation approach, namely, obtaining data on independent and dependent variables, analysis of scientific and information materials in print and electronic media on the topic of the study.

Results and considerations

There are different types and levels of decentralization and different ways of applying this policy. Usually, decentralization is efficient when it transfers only part of the authority to lower levels. In certain cases, decentralization is not recommended at all. Usually there are about four authority levels: the central government, local, regional or country controlling bodies; schools.

The most important conclusion about reform for decentralization is that if decentralization does not deal directly with the education bodies and does not influence them, then the educational results will not change or improve. That is, many reforms as a result of decentralization have no impact on the results of education if they do not include a structural change in encouraging teachers or the conditions for teaching and learning, which are the conditions for improvement of the entire education system.

Other lessons that may be learned from the decentralization process:

1. Reform in education is a localized process – school is the center of change and not the education department. Schools are the places that dictate the level of success. It is in their power to block applications of reforms or to motivate them. That is to say, schools need to fulfill an active and create a role in order to improve the quality of learning.
2. Central support is compulsory – the main office needs to learn to support the efforts made by schools. When delegating more authorities to schools the assumption is that strong support will accompany the entire system; the central unit needs to provide the lowest units in the system with support for reform on the subject of employment.
3. Affinity with the system – it is imperative to have an affinity throughout the system and mutual relationship between the three levels- national, regional and local. Also, the administration must combine pressure and support as well as providing all the required resources.
4. The process of reform is a learning process – the process of reform is a continuous and developmental process. The key to success is acquiring data from every part of the system on an ongoing basis. For this, a suitable foundation of supervision and evaluation is required.
5. All inclusive thinking – every reform of systems is complex and needs mechanisms and abilities to arrive at solutions for problems at every level.
6. Focus on work in the classroom – the focus needs to be on the dynamics of the classroom and the individual school, since this dynamic is what ultimately determines the level of success in implementing the reform.
7. Teachers as students – high quality learning materials and appropriate conditions are most important but they are not enough. Teaching skills are much more influential on the students and may be developed through a system of training and local upkeep, including in-school courses, supervision and facilitation in a staff environment.
8. Obligation at every level – the most important thing for the highest level to provide is a support mechanism. This is important at the local, school and regional levels. Obligation at the school level stems from local empowerment that builds emotional and administrative skills such as the ability to solve problems [9].

Decentralization Processes in the World

Canada. Since the early 1980's two parallel processes have been seen in the Canadian education system: one process is the centralization of authority as expressed by merging geographical areas and decreasing their numbers, giving them more equal budgets, clear definition of the official learning program and the workings of standardized testing throughout the schools. The second process is decentralization of authority and transferring it to the schools. The goal is

that the schools would become more aware and sensitive to the needs of the pupils and the demands of their parents. The authority given to the schools are varied and different from province to province (Canada has 10 independently governed provinces sharing a federal government) and from region to region within the province, but directed to empowering the schools and granting the staff of the schools responsibility for the education results. The policy of decentralization makes flexibility of action in the school possible as is seen in the activities of the schools; in the variety of subjects as well as the level of studies. This flexibility makes better connections possible between pupils and the school [10, p. 64].

Australia. The process of decentralization has caught momentum in Australia, especially in Victoria, where it was announced as the project for “the future of schools”. This project emphasizes the importance of controlling the local community of schools. However, research, done three years after the implementation of the program in 1994, shows that the reform still hasn’t reached its goals. Although the government in Victoria has proved its deep commitment to the subject of educational change, and has implemented reforms that have been adopted by the educational employees, still there are problems. One of the problems is that in the areas of new responsibilities added on to teachers’ tasks, these act in opposition to the goal of improving the level of quality of teaching, since the teachers have less and less time. As to the pupils’ achievements, there is no clear proof as to improvement due to decentralization. Other problems that exist are in the division of resources to the schools and the level of bureaucratic involvement. Viewing the reform as a continuous process for improvement and not as a quick fix for mistakes of the past, should allow it to be said that the view to the future is positive [1].

Sweden. In the 1980’s and beginning of the 1990’s the local authorities began receiving government grants to cover all activities, including health and education services. This accompanied decentralized authority and transfer of authority to recruit and fire employees, to pay and supervise teachers and all school staff. In spite of this, the government was still responsible for determining goals and guidelines for educational activities for these are much less detailed and stringent than in the past. The teachers’ organizations see this flexibility as very positive in the decentralization reform, since it allows them to be very involved in decision making both on the level of the system as well as on the school level.

The level of satisfaction of the teachers has grown thanks to the clearer work goals and their involvement in decision-making, however, the research conducted recently shows that there are still problems. Among other things the studies show higher levels of stress, more competition between schools, low cooperation levels amongst teachers, pupils and parents, lowered professional status of education works and lack of trust in local politicians who are responsible for the schools [7].

France. The decentralization reform in France of 1983 increased significantly the level of authority for decision making by the local authorities on pre-school and grade-school education and of the regional high schools. The government funding of schools during the 1980’s grew by 2.5% annually. Teachers received more significant and active role in developing work programs for the schools together with other bodies outside of the schools. In spite of the fact that their power was decreased a bit in the 1980’s in additional subjects, such as: teacher training, comparison of conditions of teachers in grade and high schools. In spite of decentralization, the government of France was able to guard its authority on the subject of employment and status of teachers [Educational Reform: Issues and Trends”. *International Labor Review*, 1995]. Subjects from recent years show that in spite of the control of the local authorities on the financial division of schools, it is apparent that the number of self-motivated activities connected to the educational activity is very modest. Another apparent fact in the research is that the country has gradually abandoned the idea

of acquiring local agreements on the value of education in favor of the more pragmatic approach of compromise on a number of principles [3, p. 62].

Eastern Europe: Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia

In **Hungary** the responsibility for financial management in pre-schools, grade schools and high schools has been transferred to the local governments. This was enacted in 1990 in an immediate and unpredicted manner. In **Poland** the transfer of authority has been consistent for nine years preceding 1999. In the **Czech Republic** the central government and local governments have cooperative authority over the grade and high schools and the government pays the teachers. In **Slovakia**, the government has kept all the authority as to all education matters. Only in 2001 some of the authority flow down to the local control administrations.

In each of these countries there is no support system for the reform. Schools were forced to deal with varying requirements of their populations, with the work force and economy that had undergone privatization. The research done showed that despite the reforms these countries underwent still keep some of the authority in the hands of the central government. Although most of the changes were initiated by the schools, they enjoy the freedom to change the decentralized system. With no connection to the level of decentralization, each of these four countries keeps their authority within the education departments which are responsible for unification and quality of the system and they deal with this obligation at different levels of success. The bureaucratic system of these countries had trouble adapting the move from administrative control to the role of supervision and standards promotion. The fact that there is no system to check achievement levels in these schools makes hard to evaluate these schools [2].

Argentina. One of the greatest structural and physical reforms in Argentina at the beginning of the 1990's was the transfer of education services from the central government to local authorities. Between 1992-1994 the Argentinean government transferred all budgets and human resources and increased the budgets for expenses and income from the provinces. That decision making on the central issues was transferred from the government to the mid and provincial levels. Schools were given authority to choose learning materials, teaching systems and some of the learning programs. All this was done with the knowledge of the local and provincial authorities. The researchers, who checked the influence of the reform on the quality of education in the high schools in Argentina, claim that they found no significant influence of decentralization on the quality of education. The findings of researchers show that in general there has been an improvement in student achievements on tests in language and mathematics in the public schools. But they note that the influence of decentralization is positive when the schools are under organized local administration for budgeting, but negative when the local authorities show deficits in the budgets. The researchers emphasize the need for checking the ability of the local authorities to support the effects of decentralization [8, p.275].

Chicago, Illinois. In 1988, after a grave crisis in the education system, Chicago decided on a reform in education which meant decentralization and total transfer of authority to the local authorities of the 557 schools in Chicago. However, in 1995 there was evidence that the reform for decentralization had not fulfilled expectations. It especially was apparent that there was no proof of positive influence of the reform on the quality of education or on the achievements of the students. The research revealed that there was an improvement in student achievement (30%) in some schools, some decreased (30%) and some remained the same (30%). Following this, Chicago proposed a new reform, whose goal was to balance the authority transferred to the schools and authority given back to the central administration. The intention was to found a strong central body that would provide support mechanisms that could create common goals and standards that could improve the situation. The mayor appointed education council members; a new function was

created for a general manager; the responsibility of the school council was to meet standards of the entire system. From the research that checked the reform in 1995 it appears that there was a change for the better which influenced student achievements and teaching. There was an improvement in the budget management and administration of the entire system, so that the schools requiring academic support were upgraded to recruit professionals, and to reach academic achievements; the management of schools and especially trust levels of the education system were all uplifted [5].

New Zealand. In 1988 there were different kinds of relations between management and schools in the education department of New Zealand. Each of the 349 high schools were managed by direct report to the department of education. The department was the highest authority on issues of manpower, learning programs and division of resources, and the council was responsible for the schools acting according to the guidelines of the department of education. The 2377 grade schools had one local council, that did not report directly to the department of education, but to one of ten local councils that represented them in the main department. The lack of satisfaction from the structure of the education system and the slow rate of decision making brought about the reform that was called "Tomorrow's Schools". This reform supported the transfer of authority to the education community through choosing trusted people for each school and forming a trans-school treaty according to the needs of the school and according to the guidelines of the New Zealand department of education [4].

Spain. Spain is an interesting example of increasing decentralization. During the past twenty years Spain has seen an ongoing process of decentralization in the public centralized system of 17 semi-independent communities which have received authority for decision making over the subject of education. The department of education decreed that the minimum requirement for 55-65% of the learning programs would be left to the community and that the remainder would be according to the needs and local and regional preferences. In 1985 a law was passed to ensure learning which strengthened the need for decentralization and democracy in the Spanish education system. According to the law each school would appoint a council to include representatives from each sector of the community, to be responsible for issues of management, pedagogy, and budgets. During the first years of the reform the teachers participated more than the parents. Over the years the number of teachers decreased leaving openings for roles for management of the schools. This situation brought about a new law in 1995 meant to increase the power of the management of schools and to decrease the competition between the different levels of administrative management. The principals were given more power over administration, budgets and manpower. In addition, the law led to a program for training principals by the department of education, the universities and autonomic communities. Following this the number of candidates for management of schools rose dramatically. It is worthwhile mentioning that educators interviewed in the study by the UN noted that self-management of the schools did not prove itself as an efficient tool for the improvement of the quality of management or the quality of the schools [6].

Conclusions

From the survey it may be learned that the trend to decentralization in the education system is a world-wide trend. This trend stems from democratic processes, and brings about more involvement of citizens on many issues that touch their lives and the lack of satisfaction from management of the centralized education system and student achievement. The observations coming from the different countries that have implemented the process of decentralization show dualism in relation to the decentralization. It is a process that is still in early stages of implementation and looking for content, ideals and professionalism. There is a difference between the countries using decentralization for their departments of education with the intent of bringing

about about more flexibility in the actual education and in those using decentralization as a means of the decreasing responsibility of managers and especially of financial responsibility of the government toward quality education and toward expansion of the department of education.

It may be said that most researchers support the trend of decentralization, but emphasize especially the need for a high level of participation by the various bodies involved in education. Transferring authority needs to be defined and clear. These conditions are necessary for the success of decentralization. The question is principally where and how to decentralize. Not every country is ready and able to implement the process of decentralization. In countries that come to the decision on the process of decentralization it must be recognized that the education system is stable and strong enough to support the significant changes that will be required from the top to the bottom and from the bottom to the top of the hierarchy.

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