

Challenges of Decentralization of Primary Education in Bukedea District in Uganda

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Abstract

The study was about decentralization challenges in Government Aided Primary Schools in Bukedea District. The objectives were; to identify the challenges of decentralized supervision practices and assess the challenges of decentralized financial management practices. The study used both qualitative and quantitative approaches and employed a descriptive cross-sectional survey design. A sample size of 329 respondents were selected out of a population of 781, these were 1 District Education Official, 4 District Inspectors of Schools, 248 School Management Committee Members and 76 head teachers. The study used a questionnaire, interview guide and documentary reviews to collect data. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse data; and challenges of the decentralized supervision practices were found to include: inadequate supervision mechanisms, insufficient funding for supervision processes, inadequate formal training on effective supervision, inadequate linkage of supervision objectives to performance of teachers and limited numbers of supervisors. The decentralized financial challenges included: insufficient funds, delayed quarterly government release of funds, and lack of financial cost sharing practices. The study recommended that head teachers and district education supervisors need to adopt supervision practices that are fully linked to performance at both school and district level, and district education officials ought to roll out massive financial management strategies to help head teachers deal with such challenges.

Keywords: challenges, decentralization, supervision, financial management, district

Decentralization has been widely interpreted as the transfer of given levels of decision-making, authority, responsibility and tasks from higher to lower organizational levels so as to give institutions more autonomy and accountability, and increase their effectiveness (Tran, 2014). It is widely perceived that decentralization of planning and implementation of education

programs to local governments leads to improved performance expressed in form of increased local participation in decision making, service delivery, equitable access, monitoring and effective financial accountability (Tahina, 2015).

When the National Resistance Movement (NRM) came to power in 1986, the government of Uganda rapidly phased in country wide decentralization in order to restore good governance. The restoration of democracy was point no. 1 in the NRM Ten Point Programme. To strengthen democracy, a policy on Democratic decentralization was discussed and approved by Uganda parliament in 1987 (Florence & Mugabi, 2004).

Based on that, in 1992 Uganda adopted education decentralization in order to eliminate unnecessary bureaucratic channels, reduce corruption, boost levels of monitoring, improve financial accountability, and raise local revenue to fund services (Kasiisa & Tamale, 2013). Indeed, under this decentralized framework, the District Education Officers (DEOs) were expected to play a strategic role of interacting with the officials from the Ministry of Education and Sports, and schools. At the district level, the DEO was to be responsible for implementation of education policies and monitoring of quality of programmes in the district coupled with other roles like; financial management, appointments, recruitments, transfers and disciplining incompetent staff, carrying out inspections in schools, supervising the implementation of national education policies as well as the quality of teaching and learning in schools (Kasiisa & Tamale, 2013).

Upon adoption of this national trend, decentralization practices like human resource and financial management were implemented by government-aided primary schools in Bukedea though reports from the district perceived such practices as inadequate (Bukedea District Education Report, 2015). Further, Bukedea District at many times has been clustered under the hard to reach areas and benefits less from the local government area budgets given their meagre resources coupled with delays in receiving capitation grant from government to run such UPE schools. The level of implementation of such decentralization practices in primary schools is anticipated to have been met with challenges to head teachers. Such challenges are anticipated to be the root cause of low academic performance in government aided primary schools in Bukedea District whose pupils' estimated completion rates stood at merely 54.8%, 53.5% and 54.2% in 2013, 2014, and 2015 respectively (Ministry of Education & Sports, 2016). The researchers therefore analysed the challenges of decentralization practices in government aided primary schools in Bukedea District.

Scope

The content scope of the study was limited to analysing the challenges of decentralized supervision practices and decentralized financial management practices, in government aided primary schools in Bukedea District.

The time scope was premised on the challenges of decentralization practices in government-aided primary schools in Bukedea District between the years 2012-2017, a period it representing the time in which increased challenges relating to decentralization practices in government aided primary schools in Bukedea District had become persistent (Bukedea District Education Report, 2015).

The geographical scope of the study was limited to Bukedea District which is located approximately between latitude 1°10'N and 1°35'N and longitude 33°30'E and 34°20'E (United Nations Development Programme, 2014). It is located in the Eastern region of Uganda, Teso sub-region neighbouring Sironko district in the East, Kumi district in the North, Pallisa in the West and Mbale in the South (United Nations Development Programme, 2014). It is 259.7km from Kampala city (google map).

Research Questions

- i. What are the challenges of decentralized education supervision practices in government-aided primary schools in Bukedea District?
- ii. How do the challenges of decentralized financial management practices manifest in government aided primary schools in Bukedea District?

Literature Review

Planning and implementation of education programs was decentralized to the local governments in an effort to improve local participation in decision making, service delivery, equitable access, monitoring and effective financial accountability (Tahina, 2015). Despite the increasing hope to justify decentralization practices to empower lower government levels and schools to improve primary schools' performance, several challenges in the entire process had been constantly registered curtailing delivery of public goods and services (Diaz-Serrano & Rodríguez-Pose, 2015). This study highlights only supervision, and financial management challenges.

Supervision Challenges of Decentralization in Schools

As part of education and public-sector reforms, many countries are decentralizing the administration of educational services to regional, and local levels, where certain levels of decision making are transferred to schools, i.e. appointed or elected school councils giving them authority to make important educational decisions (Moraa, Chepkoech & Simiyu, 2017). According to Kotirde and Yunos (2015), supervision is an important requirement in educational management and is concerned with the tactics of efficient and effective management of human and material resources by way of advising, guiding, refreshing, encouraging, stimulating, improving, and overseeing the overall teaching-learning process.

Despite such anticipation, Papadopoulou and Yirci (2013) warned that where the state of local governments, legal frameworks, geographical, cultural and social features are not friendly, then decentralization in education would not yield significant positive impact. Such warning by Papadopoulou and Yirci was

premised on the challenges that would occur if monitoring of the teaching-learning process in primary schools was decentralized as presented in the following related studies, though they left a number of research gaps.

Adeyemi (2011) investigated the management of education in primary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria and found that though there was decentralization of the supervisory function of the teaching-learning process, there was a low-level usage of supervision and management tools by school head teachers and area local authorities. These findings were obtained having adopted a correlation research design with a sample of 320 schools selected through stratified random sampling technique and using a questionnaire for data collection. His findings were based on quantitative data collected on questionnaires which implied that several opinions, views, and reasons as to why such a challenge existed were not gathered. Therefore, to fill the above methodological gap, this current study employed, in addition to a survey questionnaire, qualitative tools like interviews and documentary evidence.

Mohammed (2016) found out that many principals or administrators in Nigeria had inadequate knowledge on how to effectively manage and supervise their schools. He thus recommended to the Ministry of Education to come up with methods of training Principals in educational administration and supervision as a prerequisite for their appointment. Since the observations of Mohammed (2016) were literature based, this current study bridged this gap by collecting primary data to generate instant and viable recommendations to address the prevailing problems in Bukedea District.

Furthermore, Obiweluzor, Momoh, and Ogbonnaya (2013) explored the role of supervision and inspection in effective primary education in Nigeria in order to front strategies for improvement. They established that supervision was challenged by insufficient staff / shortages of inspectors or supervisors, poor funding of the supervision process, limited time allocated to supervision exercises, inadequate formal training on supervision to head teachers, and staff inadequacy in terms of numbers to execute the supervision role.

In addition, Nwakpa (2015) found that politicization of primary education in Nigeria in recent years has been identified as one of the factors giving rise to crises in the implementation process of decentralized primary education policies. This is because at State and Local Government levels, appointments into supervisory roles are mainly based on political considerations as such roles are perceived as being juicy and thus suited party loyalists. He further established that politics breeds incompetence and jeopardizes implementation. Given that the geographical gap exists between Nigeria and Uganda, there was need to survey supervision challenges in Uganda to address the geographical limitation of the conclusions of Nwakpa (2015).

In the same line, Afework, Frew, and Abeya (2017) assessed the decentralized supervisory practice of Cluster Resource Centre (CRC) supervisors in Jimma Zone, primary schools in Ethiopia. To achieve the above purpose, they used descriptive survey design and collected data from 238

selected teachers, 60 school principals, and 18 supervisors. They used questionnaires, interviews and observation to collect data and found that CRC supervisors were less successful in playing their administrative, linking, and pedagogic and community mobilization roles and responsibilities on continuous base. Given that majority of respondents were teachers in the study by Afework et al. (2017) who had limited information on overall supervision of the teaching-learning process since this was an administrative role, this created need to address this methodological gap as this current study sampled head teachers, school management committee members, and district education officials.

Esia-Donkoh and Ofosu-Dwamena (2014) investigated the perception of public basic school teachers at Winneba, Ghana on decentralized educational supervision in relation to their professional development. They found that majority of the teachers perceived decentralized educational supervision as having a positive impact on their professional development.

Wamunyu (2012) found that though most of the school principals (93.33%) had been trained in project management they still experienced challenges related to project monitoring, supervision, and evaluation while managing the school projects in Mathura constituency, Nyeri County (Kenya). The current study wished to establish if such also existed in Bukedea District.

Financial Management Challenges of Decentralization

Pomuti and Weber (2012) contend that the advocates of decentralization assume that shifting authority and management responsibilities to local levels will enhance effectiveness and efficiency in the use of resources in education, make public education more responsive to local needs, and enable teachers and schools to exercise greater professional autonomy. But Khan, Munawar, and Mirz (2011) were pessimistic as they claimed that though powers were devolved from provincial to districts and schools, most of academic, administrative and financial powers remained centralized at the top in the decision-making hierarchy of districts. Such premised challenges would prevail if financial management was decentralized to local authorities or schools at large as illustrated in the following previous studies though several research gaps were left unanswered.

In Kisii County of Kenya, Otieno and Nyangechi (2013) established that the greatest challenge affecting decentralization of primary schools management was gross misappropriation and misuse of Free Primary Education funds raised by parents, the government, and donors despite the increased funding. They therefore concluded that the use of internal financial control procedures would have positive effective management of funds in such schools. Otieno and Nyangechi (2013) based their conclusions on quantitative findings from data collected on questionnaires and from the existing literature about financial challenges. This left opinions, explanations, and reasons of top administrators out of their study which would have generated far reaching contribution since they possess much information about the topic of study. This

gap was bridged by also holding interviews with District education officials in Bukedea.

Mbaabu and Orodho (2014) established that head teachers in primary schools in Chogoria Division, Meru County, Kenya had appropriate academic qualifications in school administration but they lacked adequate skills in financial management which was linked to poor schools' performance as schools were falling short of their financial related objectives. These findings were based on an exploratory study on a purposively drawn sample of 30 head teachers who offered qualitative data that was analyzed using thematic analysis. Given that Mbaabu and Orodho (2014) used only a sample of 30 head teachers, this current study sought to address this methodological gap by expanding its study population so that a wider sample was selected.

Also, Rotich and Kipkoech (2012) had earlier investigated the role of head teachers' effectiveness in the decentralization of implementation of free secondary education in Keiyo District, Kenya. They conclusively found the implementation of free secondary education was marred by financial related challenges like late disbursement of the already inadequate funds by government, misconception by parents that Free Secondary Education policy catered for all the fees and fluctuation of market prices of commodities. Rotich and Kipkoech concentrated on the financial challenges faced in Free Secondary Education especially in Kenya. Hence, there was need to bridge the generalization gap calling for a fresh study to trace the prevailing financial decentralization challenges in primary school education in Uganda, particularly in Bukedea District.

Waweru and Orodho (2014) further factually cautioned that head teachers were selected from classroom teachers who had no training at all in school administration, therefore it's expected that they might have faced various problems in school administration. This made Kaguri, Ibuathu, and Kubaison (2014) to investigate the financial management challenges facing the implementation of Free Day Secondary Education in Imenti North District, Kenya. Using a sample of 250 respondents from a study population of 730 that comprised of members on BOGs and PTAs committees, they found that financial planning especially budgeting was often done in a speedy fashion with minimal involvement of all education stakeholders in the budgetary process. The findings of Kaguri et al. (2014) neglected the role of head teachers from their study population and yet these administrators are responsible for the final implementation of the decentralized role of financial management. This current study therefore filled such gaps by using stratified sampling and including head teachers in the study population to be carried out in Bukedea District.

In relation, Kaltasso (2014) investigated financial resources utilization challenges in primary schools of Damot Pulassa Woreda, Ethiopia and found that budget preparation, implementation and evolution processes lacked adequate participation of stakeholders, inadequate financially skilled man power, insufficient financial-related training, inadequate internal and external

auditing activities, delay in releasing budget contributions, interferences by school principals, and low engagement of school management committees on different duties are the major challenges of financial utilization in Damot Pulasa Woreda primary schools. Given the geographical gap between Ethiopia and Uganda, there was need to re-investigate the actual financial related challenges that exist in Bukedea District in Uganda.

In addition, Cheruto and Kyalo (2012) found that primary school management faced challenges in the implementation of Free Primary Education (FPE) program in primary schools in Keiyo District, Kenya which among others included shortage of staff, limited financial management skills, and delay in disbursement of funds by the government. The findings of Cheruto and Kyalo (2012) did not consider the opinions of school management committees and yet these are influential in the management of government-aided schools. This current study addressed this gap by also including school management committee members of various schools in Bukedea District.

Adhiambo (2013) analyzed the factors that influenced head teachers' financial management in public primary schools in Kisumu Municipality, Kenya. She found that exposure to management training, possession of administrative experience of head teachers, and professional support groups all positively influenced financial management of public primary school head teachers in Kisumu municipality. Her study however noted that despite the findings obtained, there were still some areas which might have not been covered and therefore called for further research such as: Do factors influencing head teachers' financial management in public primary schools in Kisumu Municipality influence other districts or counties? As suggested by Adhiambo, this current study sought to analyze the prevailing decentralization challenges in Government Aided Primary Schools in Bukedea District.

Methodology

The study used a descriptive cross-sectional survey design coupled with descriptive statistics. This was used so as to traverse the entire study sample because it was considered to be generally efficient in obtaining large quantities of data from a large study population and sample (Creswell, 2013). This design was further considered appropriate as it adequately caters for the sparse location of the study population. Also, to generate deeper insight into the study variables and to understand the magnitude of the research problem, there was need to adopt a descriptive design that allowed respondents to adequately express their opinions and levels of agreement to certain research views (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012).

The study based its findings on a sample size of 329 respondents out of 781 population which was determined by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). It comprised of 1 District Education Officer, 4 District Inspectors of Schools, 76 head teachers, and 248 School Management Committee (SMC) members. Census inquiry was used for DEO and school inspectors while simple random sampling technique was used to sample head teachers and SMC members. The

researchers used questionnaire, interview guide and documentary review to collect data. They ensured and maintained quality through attaching emphasis on both data reliability and validity of instruments. The CVI was found to be 0.935 which was above the required 0.7 according to Amin (2005). Descriptive data in terms of frequencies and percentages were computed regarding key responses to the major variables in the study (Creswell, 2003). Content analysis was used for qualitative data.

Findings and Discussions

Challenges of Decentralized Supervision Practices in Government-Aided Primary Schools in Bukedea District

Findings on whether there is inadequate supervision of teachers in government-aided primary schools in Bukedea District. It was conclusively found that 202(62.4%) of the respondents were of high levels of consent that their schools faced challenges of inadequate supervision of teachers while 64 (19.2%) disagreed and 58(17.9%) were not sure. The findings of the study are in perfect agreement with Adeyemi (2011) who found that though there was decentralization of the supervisory function of the teaching-learning process in Ekiti State of Nigeria, there was a low-level usage of supervision and management tools by school head teachers and area local authorities.

In an interview with the DEO, he stated:

There were inadequate supervision mechanisms in the District given that some e-supervision practices can't be used because of unavailability of internet connections in most areas. These challenges also come from the insufficient funding allocated to supervision processes by Government that can't allow us to traverse all primary schools in the entire Bukedea District on time.

Findings on whether there was a challenge of supervision practices not being linked to performance in government-aided primary schools in Bukedea District. From the statistical revelations, it was conclusively found that 154(47.5%) agreed that their schools had failed to link supervision practices to teachers' performance standards while 72(22.2%) disagreed and 98 (30.2%) were not sure.

The above findings are in line with Mohammed (2016) who also agreed with the earlier conclusions of Adeyemi (2011) that many principals or administrators had inadequate knowledge on how to effectively manage and supervise their schools.

One of the District Inspectors of schools stated: *"We also often find evidence that head teachers do not perfectly link supervision objectives to performance of teachers and hence end up not adequately appraising them"*.

Findings on whether there was a challenge of shortage of inspectors or supervisors of the learning process. The study found that 198(61.1%) of the respondents in government-aided primary schools believed that Bukedea

District had enough Inspectors to do their supervisory work adequately and diligently and would not yield supervisory challenges in government aided primary schools. Although 57(17.6%) did not believe that, and 69(21.3%) were not sure.

The above findings are in agreement with Kotirde and Yunos (2015) who stressed that supervision was an important requirement in educational management. However, though supervisors were established to be duly deployed by government, there was no substantial evidence that they were performing their role because the challenges of decentralization of primary education in Bukedea District were just escalating.

One of the District Inspectors of schools stated: *“The District also has a few staff members that can’t sufficiently carry out all supervision objectives on time”*.

Findings on whether there was a challenge of insufficient funding to supervision processes. The study found that majority of the respondents 258(79.7%) believed that Government adequately funds supervision processes in the District despite the continuous existence of performance issues in the learning process in such schools. However, 23(7.1%) did not believe that while 43(13.3%) were not sure.

The above findings disagree with the observations of Obiweluzor et al. (2013) who found that supervision was challenged among other factors by insufficient / poor funding of the supervision process in primary education in Nigeria.

In an interview with the DEO, he stated: *“...These challenges also come from the insufficient funding allocated to supervision processes by Government that can’t allow us to traverse all primary schools in the entire Bukedea District on time”*.

Findings on whether there was a challenge of limited time allocated to supervision exercises. The study conclusively found that majority of respondents 266(82.1%) in government-aided primary schools in Bukedea District believed that supervisors allocated enough time to supervision exercises in the district despite the numerous challenges evidenced in the learning process in such schools. However, 12(3.7%) did not believe that and 46(14.2) were not sure. The above findings disagree with the observations of Obiweluzor et al. (2013) who found that supervision in primary education in Nigeria was challenged among other issues by limited time allocated to supervision exercises.

Findings on whether there was a challenge of inadequate formal training on supervision given to head teachers. Descriptive statistics revealed that 117(36.1%) of respondents disagreed while 109(33.6%) were not sure and 98(30.2) agreed. It was therefore established that majority of the respondents believed that there was inadequate formal training on supervision given to head teachers in primary schools in Bukedea District. The findings of the study agree with Adeyemi (2011) who found that many principals or administrators had

inadequate knowledge on how to effectively manage and supervise their schools which could be connected to poor performance in basic education schools in Nigeria.

The findings were supported by the DEO who stated: “... *it has been noted by many inspectors that there is evidence that most head teachers possess inadequate formal training on effective supervision of the entire learning*”.

Challenges of Decentralized Financial Management Practices in Government-Aided Primary Schools in Bukedea District

Feedback on whether there are budgeting challenges in government-aided primary schools in Bukedea District. It was found that majority of 170(52.5%) of the respondents were not sure as to whether they faced challenges in financial budgeting for their schools. However, 48(14.9%) agreed while 106(32.7%) disagreed. Such responses could be as a result of lack of participation by majority of the respondents in the budgeting process.

The District Education Officer said: “*There are budgeting challenges in most government schools greatly due lack of adequate training of school heads and not allocating ample time to the budgeting process*”.

Findings on whether there was a challenge of insufficient funds to facilitate school activities. From the statistical revelations, it was conclusively found that 134(41.3%) of the respondents in government-aided primary schools in Bukedea District agreed that their schools were grappling with a challenge of insufficient funds to facilitate school activities throughout the financial year. However, 120 (37%) disagreed while 94(14.8%) were not sure. The findings are in line with Rotich and Kipkoech (2012) who found out in Kenya that the implementation of Free Secondary Education was marred by financial challenges like late disbursement of the already inadequate funds by government and misconception by parents that Free Secondary Education policy catered for all the fees.

This is supported by the DEO who said: “...*It’s also true that schools experience insufficient funds’ allocation to facilitate school activities but it depends on how wide the government budget is*”.

Findings on whether there was a challenge of inadequate financial controls, it was evident from the data that majority 157(48.5%) of the respondents were not sure as to whether they faced challenges in financial controls applied in their schools while 96(29.6%) of them fully recognized the existence of the challenge and 71(22%) disagreed. These findings are in line with the observations of Otieno and Nyangechi (2013) who concluded that the use of internal financial control procedures would have positive effects on management efficiency of funds in schools in Kisii County of Kenya.

The District Inspectorate of schools said:

There are inadequate financial controls in government-aided primary schools in Bukedea District as there is no proper book-keeping for all expenditure made as most schools do not prepare their books of

accounts on time. This has often led to suspicion of financial misappropriations and embezzlements that has worsened management of such schools.

Findings on whether there was a challenge of delayed quarterly government releases of funds. From the statistics, it was found that majority 186(57.4%) of the respondents said they were being suffocated by delays in quarterly release of funds by government to facilitate school activities. Although 46(14.2%) disagreed and 92(28.4%) were not sure. The findings are in line with Rotich and Kipkoech (2012) who found that financial challenges stem from late disbursement of the already inadequate funds by government.

The District Inspectorate of schools said: *“The situation is further complicated by delayed quarterly Government releases of funds which curtail school activities”*.

Findings on whether there was a challenge on financial misappropriation or not, the study conclusively found that majority of head teachers 170(52.5%) did not agree that there was financial misappropriation in their schools and hence perceived it as not being a greater part of financial challenges. Although 53(16.4%) agreed and 101(31.2%) were not sure.

Findings on whether there was a challenge of cost sharing or not. It was found that 123(38%) of the respondents disagreed and 132(40.7%) were not sure while 61(21.3%) agreed as to whether they face challenges in cost sharing as a tool of effective financial management applied in their schools. The study agrees with Kasiisa and Tamale (2013) who earlier observed that in Uganda, education decentralization was rocked by several factors including failure to raise local revenue to fund educational services.

One District Inspectorate of schools said: *“...even avenues like financial cost sharing practices have not been fully embraced by parents as they believe that Government is funding everything”*.

Conclusions

The study found the following decentralized supervision challenges; inadequate supervision mechanism, insufficient funding to supervision process, inadequate formal training on effective supervision, inadequate link of supervision objectives to performance of teachers and a limited number of supervisors.

Therefore, the study recommends that head teachers and District education supervisors need to adopt supervision practices that are fully linked to performance at both school and district levels. But to attain this, timeliness, transparency, and objectivity ought to be evident to the target audience. Also head teachers need to receive formal training on best supervision practices since majority of them are promoted from classroom to head teacher without any vivid training.

Regarding financial management practices in government-aided primary schools in Bukedea District, challenges included: insufficient funds,

delayed quarterly Government release of funds, and lack of financial cost sharing practices.

The study recommends that District Education officials ought to roll out massive financial management strategies to help head teachers deal with such challenges. Indeed, adoption of strategies like value for money expenditures, introduction of cost-sharing avenues with parents, setting-up income generating avenues like agricultural farms, and tightening of internal financial controls to curb financial-related crimes like misappropriation and embezzlement is recommended. These will help not only to address the prevailing decentralization challenges but will also create financial self-sustainability of such schools in the long run.

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