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Decentralization and Universalization of Educational Development in Nigeria: Regional Variability in the Implementation of Legal Provisions

This research examined the current level of diffusion of societal values into academic culture of the nation's school systems. A descriptive survey design was employed that used questionnaires and observation scales for data collection from 200 randomly sampled principals and teachers of public secondary schools. Analysis of the findings using ANOVA and t-tests revealed no significant difference in the opinions of participants on the ills of societal values permeating into school systems. However, principals differ significantly from teachers on teachers' attitudes toward enforcing school rules and regulations. Based on these findings it was recommended that principals of secondary schools develop competence in controlling the permeability of the school membrane to potentially harmful values.

Cette étude porte sur le niveau actuel de diffusion de valeurs sociétales dans la culture académique des systèmes scolaires du pays. Une enquête descriptive reposant sur des questionnaires et des échelles d'observation a permis la collecte de données auprès de 200 directeurs d'écoles et enseignants choisis au hasard dans des écoles secondaires publiques. L'analyse des données par une méthode d'analyse de la variance et par des tests T n'a pas révélé de différence notable dans les opinions des participants quant aux méfaits des valeurs sociétales qui s'infiltraient dans les systèmes scolaires. Toutefois, les opinions des directeurs sur l'application des règlements de l'école se distinguaient nettement de celles des enseignants à ce sujet. En tenant compte de ces résultats, il est recommandé que les directeurs d'écoles secondaires s'exercent à contrôler la résistance de la membrane scolaire à l'entrée de valeurs qui pourraient s'avérer nocives.

Introduction

Despite dwindling economic resources over the last three decades occasioned by political instability, corruption, and gross mismanagement of national funds, the urge to bring education to every Nigerian child of school age has not been disputed by successive political leaderships. Even the worst military dictatorship honored children's right to education and sought viable alternatives to educational development in Nigeria.

Recently decentralization of the establishment, control, and management of education (Adesina, 1987; Ikoya, 1999) seems to be a more preferred strategy for the universalization of educational development in Nigeria. However, its implementation appears to be hampered by various administrative and structural constraints.

This article is one in a proposed series of studies aimed at determining relationships between decentralization and universalization of educational de-

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velopment in Nigeria. Because this is the first in the series, it begins by examining the legal framework of decentralization of educational management in Nigeria and assesses the levels of implementation of the law by various states in the federation.

Legal Framework to Decentralization

Organized education began in Nigeria in 1842 with the arrival of Christian missionaries (Itedjere, 1997) mainly from Europe and the United States. In 1882 the British colonial administration enacted the first education ordinance, which provided for the establishment of a central board of education that comprised the governor and members of his cabinet.

The centralized nature of the ordinance impaired effective administration and supervision of schools. Consequently, the ordinance was abrogated, the board dissolved, and a process of decentralization was begun (Fafunwa, 1979).

Each colony then took care of its own educational needs. By 1946 Nigeria had adopted its first constitution and following the tenets for decentralization established four separate education boards, one each for the three regions and a fourth for the national government (Ukeje, 1986).

After independence in 1960, each of the regions maintained this autonomy in educational development and as a result, whereas the western regional government of Nigeria embarked on "free education policy" to enhance pupils' access to education, the eastern region merely subsidized education costs, and the northern region saw no need for Western education. Such variations in regional education policies, which began in 1955, gave rise to the present imbalance in educational development between the northern and southern states of Nigeria, which successive administrations have tried—albeit unsuccessfully—to address.

The military administration that seized power in 1966 attempted to solve the problem by creating a highly centralized state school system (Ikoya, 1999). The expanded role of government in the establishment, control, and management of schools stifled effective implementation of centralized state school policy, and urgent calls were made (Adaralegbe, 1972; Thompson, 1983) to find a lasting solution to the problem of universalization of education. For this reason the current decentralization process was initiated in 1976.

The local government reform of 1976 devolved major decision-making powers to local government councils. In 1979 constitutional provisions were made to give stronger legal backing to local government functions. The promulgation of the National Primary Education Commission Decree 31 of 1988 established and further delegated school management functions to state, local, district, and village units. In 2000 the Universal Basic Educational (UBE) edict was passed into law by Congress to enhance educational development.

Objectives and Related Issues

Since 1842 when Western education was introduced into Nigeria, several decrees, edicts, and provisions have been enacted to enhance educational development. The National Primary Education Commission Decree of 1988 was enacted to enhance educational development through decentralization. This document sought to examine regional variability in the implementation of the

decentralization process. There are 36 states and a federal capital territory with 776 Local Government Authorities (LGAs), to which schools management functions were devolved. The objective of this study is to appraise the level of compliance in the provisions of the decentralization law by examining how far specific functions (spelled out in the law) were devolved to these 776 LGAs by the individual states. For example, how much of human capital management functions, school finance management functions, or capital project development functions were devolved to the LGAs? The study used information obtained from chairs of local government caretaker committees. In turn I examined the question, What is the relationship between decentralization and availability of educational opportunity (which was the index used to measure universalization of educational development) to school-aged children?

Method

From a pool of 776 LGA chairs, 120 were administered the study instrument following a stratified random sampling technique to ensure appropriate representation of the existing six geopolitical zones of the country. The instruments were channeled through personnel assistants close to these officials who could access and retrieve instruments from them. This method proved advantageous as I obtained 98.6% of adequately completed and returned instruments for analysis.

Results

Mean scores and standard deviations on variables devolved to LGAs are presented in Table 1.

Data presented in Table 1 reveal that all the sampled states failed to attain the 12.5 critical mean value for adequate compliance in the provisions of the enabling law on educational decentralization. On the relationship between decentralization and universalization of education it would appear that in the few regions and districts where compliance in the provisions of the law was achieved, there was a corresponding increase in pupils' access to elementary schools. This area will be explored in greater detail in subsequent studies.

Discussion

Several nations, particularly those in the developing regions of the world, have embarked on decentralization of educational management for various reasons.

Table 1
Mean Scores and Standard Deviation on Devolved Schools' Management Functions to LGAs

<i>Devolved Functions</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Human capital management	117	7.5	1.07
2. Schools' infrastructural maintenance	117	10.2**	1.62
3. Schools' finance management	117	5.4	0.69
4. Capital projects development	117	3.9	0.33
5. Education policy formulation	117	8.3	1.59

**Critical Mean \geq 12.5

For example, the Asian countries have decentralized in order to increase local and community support for education (UNESCO, 1984), and countries in Latin America have begun to deconcentrate and decentralize to increase regional and local administrative responsibilities (Yannakopoulos, 1980). In Nigeria decentralization of educational management was undertaken in part to enhance pupils' access to universal basic education (Adesina, 1987).

Findings from the data analyzed show a low level of implementation of the provisions of the decentralization program by the various states of the federation. This revelation should be a matter of concern to educational stakeholders in Nigeria. Many state government organs have resisted decentralization, probably because existing centralized bureaucratic structures encourage corruption from which they (public servants) benefit.

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