

# CONTEMPORARY ISSUES ON IMPLEMENTATION OF EDUCATIONAL DECENTRALISATION POLICY REFORMS IN NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

This research examined the level of compliance to the provisions of the educational decentralisation law on the establishment and constitution of education boards and committees in Nigeria. The study provided answers to two fundamental issues bothering on:

- 1) whether or not local, district and village education committees were established in accordance with the enabling law; and
- 2) whether or not constituted education boards and committees were established according to the law.

Employing a survey design, 2160 key stakeholders in the education sector were administered the research instrument. Data collected were analysed using mean, standard deviation and correlation coefficient. Results from data analysed showed appreciable measure of compliance to the provision of the law in the establishment of education boards and committees, particularly at the local government level. The level of compliance was lower for district and village education committees. Differences were found to exist between sampled groups regarding the constitution of the boards and committees. Based on these findings, it was recommended that local community members particularly women should be adequately represented in education boards, and committees located in their districts and villages.

## **Introduction**

Within the last few decades, the management of education reforms in Nigeria has been alternating between different stages of centralization, decentralization and recentralization (Hanson, 1998). Today the Nigerian educational system is rated by many eminent scholars (Bray, 2003; Babalola and Adedeji, 2003) as one of the best decentralized in the African sub - region. 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 past variations and current stability in the nation's educational system. For example, during the early 1960, 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 keen. 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. But the centralized model could not endure because of several reasons ranging from cultural multiplicity to social and economic diversity. Thus, by 1988, 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 (DECENLAW) have over the years been subject of several debates and scrutiny by eminent scholars. Locally (Ejiogu, 2004; Ikoya., 2005) and internationally (Bray, 2003; 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 of the systems. Adequate empirical data have not been provided to enable education managers in Nigeria proffer solutions to the multifaceted problems facing

education, hence this study.

### Study Objectives and Other Related Issues

This study in line with globalised concept of decentralization in developing countries (Rondinelli, 1981; Murphy & Fleches, 1989; Hawkins, 2004; Astiz, 2004) sought to provide empirical evidence of compliance to the provisions of the law (DECENLAW) in 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 second objective looked into the area of Community representation in these established Boards. Are women in the Villages actually given the opportunity to serve in those 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 very important questions, by providing empirical evidence to establishment and membership of Local, District and Village Education Boards.

### Theoretical Links

Several studies have been carried out on educational decentralisation in Nigeria (Adesina, 1987, 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, 1997), looked at the goals of decentralisation (Ikoya, 2000) autonomy of sub-systems (Obanya, 2000, Ikoya, 1999) and development of proficiency of manager in smaller administrative units to nurture individual talents within organisational constraints. 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 (2003), 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 TaNgor, 1980; Hawkins, 2004; Ikoya, 2003 and 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.

In line with the ideas advanced by contemporary scholars of decentralisation and educational reforms, these authors hypothesized that even under situations where the desire and will to reform are noble, there still could be pseudo-decentralisation of education systems, which can slow down or altogether negate proper establishment of reform structures as well as encourage inadequate representation of all stakeholders at the local, district, and village education committees levels. In other words, for policy statement to produce corresponding change in education reforms, compliance should not be limited to the establishment of some or all required structures, but also to ensure adequate representation of all stakeholders in the education enterprise. These authors are of the opinion that intended educational reforms at the local, district and village levels could be more effective if all boards and committees are established and members of the boards are appointed in accordance with provisions of the law. These arguments formed the framework of this empirical study.

### Research Methods

Employing a stratified sampling technique, these authors employed the survey design to gather data from sampled 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 were sampled.

### Research Questions

Answers were provided to the following research questions.

- RQ 1. Was the provision of the law adhered to in the representation of governmental and nongovernmental official?
- RQ 2. Were local, district and village education committees established in accordance with the provisions of DECENLAW?
- RQ 3. Was membership constitution of different committees in accordance with DECENLAW?

### Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire was the main source of data collection. The researchers used it to get required information on the implementation of the decentralisation programme. We were 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 whether or not local community members are adequately represented. These information were required from stakeholders who were and who are also key players in the decentralisation process. Accordingly, 2160 key informants made of 360 participants from the six geopolitical zones were given questionnaires for completion in our quest to ensure 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 included ex-officio members of the boards, secretaries of the boards, local government chairpersons, district and village heads.

### Result

Data presented in table 1 show analysis of sampled participants by geopolitical zones. From the six existing geopolitical zones, one state each was randomly sampled. And from each of the sampled states, six local government councils (LGA) were randomly drawn. Finally, ten, local committee members were randomly sampled from each local government area. Thus, from each zone, 360 samples were drawn giving a total of 2,160 from the six geopolitical zones. RQ 1. Was the provision of the decentralisation law followed in the representation of government and non-government officials in the boards and committees?  
Answer to research question 1 is provided in Table 1.

**Table 1: Analysis of GOVOFF and Non-GOVQFF Sampled**

GOVOFF	GOVOFF %	Non-GOVOFF	Non-GOVOFF %
Rep. OfSPEB	136(7.01%)	District heads	189(9.785%)
Rep of LGA (Council)	158(8.15%)	Village Heads	193(9.95%)
Educ. Secretaries	209(10.78%)	Religious leader	208(10.73%)
Educ. Councillors	243 (12.53%)	Women Leaders	201 (10.37%)
		NUT rep.	205 (10.57%)
		PTA Rep	197(10.16%)
Total	746 (28.47%)		1193 (61.53%)

As expected, there was variation in the number of respondents from both governmental and non-government officials, but this ranged from 7.01 to 32.53 percent. The highest number of respondents (12.53%) were the education councillors. This was perceived as encouraging, because these are the elected representatives of the **communities**, and their show of interest in education reform issues was seen as good development. RQ 2. Were local district and village education committees established in accordance with the provisions DECENLAW?

When asked to comment on the establishment of local, district and village education committees, as a measure to enhance decentralisation, over 96% of the education councillors reported that the committees were established in their constituencies, in accordance with the provisions of the law. And of the number, approximately 78 percent agreed that membership of the established committees was constituted in accordance with the provision of the decentralisation Act. Only 35% of the sample however agreed that district education committees functioned in accordance with the legal specifications. Effective establishment and functioning of the local and district education committees were perceived to be important for a more decentralised educational system. However, subjects expressed reservation about the feasibility of setting up an effective village education committee above the PTA level. Empirical data of compliance to the provisions of the law in the establishment of Local (LEC), District (DEC) and Village (VEC) Education Committees is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation Score on Established Education Committees

Respondents	LEG		DEC		VEC	
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D
SPEB Rep	3.37	1.29	3.68	1.40	3.15	1.49
LGA Rep	3.71	1.18	3.39	1.61	3.26	1.52
LGA Sec.	3.68	1.79	3.27	1.07	3.14	1.47
Village Head	3.01 +	1.23	3.01 +	1.10	1.97*	0.78
District Head	3.29+	1.67	2.95+	0.96	2.01*	1.02
Religious Head	3.06+	1.19	2.95+	1.01	2.35	1.21
Women Leader	3.52	1.26	2.92+	0.99	2.55	1.09
NUT Rep	3.35+	1.49	3.02	1.04	2.09*	1.11
Educ. Councillor	3.89	1.06	3.71	1.17	3.04	1.29
PTA	3.67	1.29	2.99	1.03	1.99*	0.98
Total	3.46	1.35	3.19	1.14	2.55	1.19

Critical  $x > 2.55$  LEG: Local Education Committee  
 DEC: District Education Committee  
 VEC: Village Education Committee

Participants appear to agree that the local education committees were established in accordance with the decentralisation provision (mean = 3.46, SD = 1.35). However, the mean score for the District Heads (Mean = 3.29, SD = 1.67), Village heads (Mean = 3.01, SD = 1.223), religious heads (Mean = 3.06, SDD = 1.19) and NUT representatives ((Mean = 3.35, SD = 1.49) were lower than the group mean ( $x = 3.46$ , SD = 1.35), although higher than the critical mean ( $x = 2.55$ ).

Similarly, most of the non-governmental members of the committees seem to agree that the district education committees were established in accordance with the provisions of the law ( $x = 3.19$ , SD = 1.14). However, the data showed that the mean score on the establishment of village committee was lower than the 2.55. Probable reasons were given about these results in our subsequent discussions.

RQ3. Was membership constitution of different committees done in accordance with DECENLAW?

Regarding membership representation of the committees, the correlations among the tested variables are presented in table 4. The result shows that a significant relationship exists between village heads and the State Primary Education Board ( $r = 0.28$ ).

**Table 4: Local Community Representative Correlation Matrix Regarding Local Community**

### **Representation in the Board**

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	State Primary Education Board Members										
2	Local Government Education Authority Chairman	-.33									
3	Local Government Education Secretaries	-.33	-.32								
4	Village Heads	.28	.21	-.18							
5	District heads	.22	.19	-.09	-.06						
6	Religious Leaders	-.04	.12	-.11	-.09	-.26					
7	Women Leaders	-.15	.30	-.08	-.11	-.37	-.36				
8	Nigerian Union of Teachers representatives	-.30	-.36	-.13	-.15	-.07	.29	.13			
9	Education Councillors	-.32	-.29	-.34	-.28	.23	.31	.20	-.15		
10	Parent-Teachers Association members	-.26	-.22	.05	.17	.15	.12	.08	-.18	-.02	

**Note:** All correlations with a magnitude greater than .26 are significant at  $P < .05$ .

Similarly, women leaders appear to significantly differ from local education secretaries on the constitutions of the committees. Indeed, the result shows that less than 37% of the positions devolved to women were occupied by non-public officials of the female gender. The Education Councillors differed significantly from Village Heads ( $r = .28$ ) and Religious Leaders ( $r = .31$ ) regarding local community representative in the various education boards and committees devolved to local district and village administrative units. One important discovery in the course of our study is the low level of effectively functional PTA in most of the studied primary schools.

### **Discussion**

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 that we looked into was membership representation in the constitution of the Boards and Committees that were established for decentralised management functions, to also find out whether or not they were constituted in accordance with the law.

Results from data analysed show high compliance (83.3%) to the provisions of the decentralisation law, in the establishment of the boards and committees. 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, 1992) are well devolved. This result supports the findings of previous authors (Bray, 1991; Conyers, 1986; and Nwagwu, 2004) that the Nigeria educational system appears well decentralized.

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 ( $x = 3.19$  and  $22.55$ ) respectively. Several factors could have been responsible for these results. Prominent among the reasons could be some people's desire for a centralised education system. Nigeria is currently undergoing a political reform, with delegates gathered for a National Political Reform Conference (Vanguard, 2005). 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).

On membership constitution of the boards and committees, the authors reported wide disparity in the views of government officials. 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 ( $r = .30$ ). Just as, sampled groups were unanimous on inadequate representation of district heads, religious leaders, village heads and the Parent-Teachers association members. Several factors have been reportedly (Heines and Wallace, 2003), 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%), 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.

### **Recommendations**

Based on our findings, it was recommended that:

- > More functional district and village education committees be established in accordance to the provisions of the law.
- > More women, particularly those in rural committees should be voted or appointed into Education Boards and Committees.
- > Function Parent-Teachers Association (PTA) should be constituted with the village head as chairman, to enhance local community participation in accordance with the provisions of the law.

### **Conclusion**

Results from the study revealed that:

- S 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.
- ✓ Village, district and religious heads including women leaders differed from State Education Board members regarding the constitution of the board. Women and village heads were perceived to be inadequately represented in the Boards and Committees. It was therefore, concluded that visible efforts appears being made by stakeholders to comply with the provisions of the decentralization law.

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