

THE ROLE OF CAPACITY – BUILDING FOR SCHOOL DECENTRALIZATION IN KOSOVO

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Abstract

After the war in Kosovo (1999) many powers concentrated in school were drawn out the former Department of Education, led by UNMIK. Many responsibilities were transferred from central to local level in the period from 2003 until 2010, but there was no assignment at school. Obviously, the return of powers to schools is having many difficulties. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in Republic of Kosovo has still no clear strategy on how to make the decentralization of educational system.

This paperwork deals with analysis of the existence of capacities for successful implementation of decentralization process of school system. It also identifies the challenges and difficulties faced by principals and teachers in meeting the school needs because of a lack of competencies in school management.

*The study uses survey data generated from 29 primary and secondary school principals and 172 primary and secondary school teachers in Republic of Kosovo. According to the **survey and interview results**, schools in Kosovo do not enjoy autonomy. Their needs are addressed at the municipal level.*

Key words: decentralization, capacities, roles, legal infrastructure, pre- university education.

Introduction

Decentralization of education management systems is a common feature of the countries of the region. Kosovo is still in the early stages of this process. Education system in Kosovo faced many challenges after the war in 1999. Until 2002, pre-university education in Kosovo had gone through the emergency phase which was characterized mainly by reactivation of the education system, namely by rehabilitation of war consequences, construction and improvement of school infrastructure, accommodation of all students in school buildings, as well as preparations for the start of radical education reforms. From 2003 onwards, the educational system in Kosovo went through the development stages that included the preparation, approval and implementation of strategic education documents and reforms.

Pre- university education in Kosovo is regulated by the Law on Pre- University Education (2011) (which replaced the Law of 2002 on Primary and Secondary Education) and the Law on Education in Municipalities (2008).

Kosovo educational system includes Pre-primary education (normally ages zero (0) to six (6), primary education for five (5) years (normally from age six (6), Lower secondary education for four (4) years (normally from age twelve (12), Upper secondary education for three (3) years, depending on curriculum determined by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) (normally from age fifteen (15) and Post-secondary vocational institution for one (1) to two (2) years, depending on the curriculum determined by the MEST (normally from age eighteen (18).

From 2003, first efforts of international organizations in Kosovo began to create a framework for budget allocation for education in municipalities based on a per pupil funding formula. The uncertainty in the transfer of roles and responsibilities, lack of public awareness,

lack of a clear strategy for reforms in education and limited skills for cooperation between relevant stakeholders in this process caused a graduate slowing as far as the realization of plans for school financial autonomy is concerned. Municipal authorities were largely dependent on the finances received by MEST.

Responsibilities for school budget management were transferred to Municipal Offices of Education in 2008, by adopting the Law on Local Government. This followed piloting school financial autonomy in three municipalities in 2009 and 10 more municipalities in 2010. Schools involved in process of piloting financial autonomy faced many difficulties due to lack of trained staff. The Law on Pre-University Education in the Republic of Kosovo, which provides only financial autonomy for schools in Kosovo, not the other types, was approved in August 2011. All schools funds still remain under the management of municipalities, as their own revenues as well as donations. Schools are still addressing their needs at the local level. Decentralization of education is not properly understood. The municipalities have pressured MEST to start **transferring of competences and responsibilities to the local level, not meaning** that decentralization of education has to go beyond the school level and not to do new centralization at the municipal level.

In Kosovo, schools don't have autonomy in staff selection. The school principal is elected by the MEST and municipality, while teachers and other school staff by the municipality and the school principal. School board representative participates as an observer in the selection of the principal, deputy principal and the school teachers.

Regarding the curricular autonomy, even though the new rates of Kosovar education system allow teachers to take initiatives in 20% of the curriculum, which has not yet been fully put into practice, school teachers do not feel confident enough on how much they can use this "window" of autonomy for fulfillment of their profession. In many cases, school activities have stalled due to lack of freedom in taking different decisions, which require the approval by the municipality (Municipal Offices of Education).

Importance of Capacity Building for Decentralization of Education

With decentralization of education, the demand for capacity buildings will further increase as more and more people from the local and school level are likely to take on new planning and management responsibilities. Capacity building has to go beyond more development of some technical skills and knowledge. According to Hallak and Carrón (1994) capacity-building activities consist of three basic components: development of basic knowledge and skills to effectively contribute to educational development programmes, development of an appropriate institutional framework to function effectively and development of a favorable policy environment. The traditional approach, regarding the question, whether it is better to decentralize or build capacity first, is to build capacity before transferring responsibilities or revenues. But, some findings argue that it may be better to do both simultaneously. School autonomy increases when schools develop their capacity to make decisions and implement strategies that strengthen school management (Nikoceviq, 2011, p.36)

Research Focus

Research on decentralization shows "that, in itself, it is not enough to transform the way a school is run" and that there is a need for "school autonomy from within." (OECD, 2001b, p. 25, emphasis in original) Tactical (a series of tactics or quick fixes) or strategic (focus systematically on particular areas of weakness and what to do about them across the institution) approaches are not seen to be as successful as capacity building. (Gray et al, 1999) Major focus of this research was to explore the level of school autonomy in Kosovo and to analyze if

there does exist the capacities for school decentralization. This research offers the opportunity to better understanding of current situation in Kosovo schools and the difficulties they are facing due to lack of capacities. Fully operating decentralized education management requires strengthened management functions and capacity.

Methodology of Research

General Background of Research

Since, this is the first research conducted in Kosovo regarding the level of school autonomy in Kosovo and the existence of capacities for implementation of the decentralization of education, the results obtained from this research present a current overview of school autonomy in Kosovo. The survey was conducted during the school year 2010/2011, in 13 municipalities in Kosovo. In three of these municipalities, financial autonomy was piloted in 2009/2010, while in 10 municipalities financial autonomy was piloted in 2010/2011. The main hypothesis upon which the research was built was that “Schools in Kosovo are facing a complete lack of autonomy because the institutional, financial, managerial, legal, human, etc. capacities are not yet established”.

Sample of Research

The survey was conducted on a sample of 201 participants, 29 principals (79.3% male and 20.7% female) and 172 teachers (43% male and 57% female). In each municipality, questionnaires were distributed to the principals of two schools (one primary and one secondary), except in three municipalities (in which financial autonomy was piloted during 2009/2010) where questionnaires were distributed in three schools (one elementary school and two secondary). In each school by 6 questionnaires were distributed to teachers (from 174 questionnaires distributed, 172 questionnaires were valid). Individual interviews have been conducted face to face with six education officials (Appendix 1).

Instrument and Procedures

Quantitative and qualitative methods are used for collecting the data. Questionnaire for the principals and teachers, done by the researcher, is prepared according to Likert scale. Research was conducted by means of an anonymous questionnaire which consisted of 15 questions. The principles and teachers questionnaire included 5 questions related to demographics, personal, and professional aspects and 10 questions related to information about school decentralization, legal infrastructure, curriculum, trained staff, etc. The principals and teachers were asked to complete the questionnaire and put it in an envelope, to give them back to the researcher visiting the school. Interviews were focused on four key questions which were related to the degree of school autonomy in Kosovo, the degree of implementation of the school decentralization, the difficulties they face during the decentralization reforms and the implementation of school decentralization in the future.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used in order to analyze the data collected. The descriptive statistics includes the use of frequency tables, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Coding technique has been used for analyzing and interpreting of interviews data. The data are read and within it are demarcated segments. Each segment is labeled with a “code”. When coding is completed, researcher did summarizing of important data.

Results of Research

Initially, respondents were asked about their opinion on what extent is school staff informed about process of decentralization. Most of the principals surveyed (51.7%) indicated that they partially agree that their school staff isn't informed enough about the process of decentralization, 31% strongly disagree, while 17.2% strongly agree. The majority of the teachers (48.3%) stated that they strongly agree that in their school there's a lack of information about decentralization, 37.8 percent partially agree, 8.1 percent strongly disagree while nine teachers (5.3%) are undecided.

Both principals (72.4%) and teachers (57.6%) strongly agree that there is a lack of resources (mjeteve) to provide support for new initiative of teachers or students, 27.6 percent of principals and 32 percent of teachers partially agree while only sixteen teachers (9.3%) strongly disagree.

Table 1 presents the results concerning the perceptions of principals and teachers about school need for trained staff, role of school board, school financial autonomy and legal infrastructure.

Table 1. Perceptions of principals and teachers about school autonomy (N/%).

Statements	SA		PA		SD		UD	
	P	T	P	T	P	T	P	T
S1. There is a lack of trained staff for decentralization of our school.	7 (24.1)	59 (34.3)	15(51.7)	57(33.1)	7(24.1)	42(24.4)	0	13(7.6)
S2. Our school board has now more powers than before.	8(27.6)	45(26.2)	15(51.7)	52(30.2)	5(17.2)	54(31.4)	1(3.4)	20(11.6)
S3. Our school manages own budget.	6(20.7)	47(27.3)	11(37.9)	32(18.6)	11(37.9)	63(36.6)	1(3.4)	29(16.9)
S4. There is a lack of legal infrastructure to decentralize the schools.	11(37.9)	80(46.5)	15(51.7)	46(26.7)	2(6.9)	19(11)	1(3.4)	26(15.1)
S5. School board representative participates in the selection of teachers and school principal.	9(31)	37(21.5)	8 (27.6)	27(15.7)	12(41.4)	80 (46.5)	0	26(15.3)

SA: Strongly Agree; PA: Partially Agree; SD: Strongly Disagree; UD: Undecided, P (Principals), T (Teachers)

As can be seen on Table 1(S1), 51.7 percent of principals partially agree that their school has a lack of trained staff for implementation of decentralization, 24.1 percent strongly agree while 24.1 percent strongly disagree. While the majority of principals partially agree, majority of the teachers (34.3%) strongly agree that their schools have a lack of trained staff for implementation of school decentralization, 33.1 percent partially agree, 24.4 strongly disagree and 7.6 percent of teachers are undecided.

Although it was expected that the powers of school councils will be increased, the respondents have stated that nothing has changed significantly. According to the findings, the

majority of principals (51.7%) partially agree that their school board has now more powers than before, 27.6 percent strongly agree while 17.2% strongly disagree. Furthermore, the majority of the teachers (31.4%) strongly disagree that school board has now more power than before, 30.2 percent partially agree, 26.2 percent strongly agree while 11.6% of them are undecided (See S2, Table 1).

The results revealed that 37.9 percent of principals strongly disagree, 37.9 partially agree while 20.7% strongly agree that schools manage their own budget. The majority of the teachers (36.6%) affirmed that they strongly disagree that schools manage their own budget, 27.5 percent strongly agree, 18.6 percent partially agree while a considerable number of the teachers (16.9%) are undecided (See S3, Table 1).

According to the findings, both principals and teachers perceived that their schools have capacities to manage their own budget. The results revealed that 69 percent of principals strongly agree that their schools have capacities to manage their budget, 27.6 percent partially agree, while only one principle doesn't agree. More than half of teachers (52.3%) strongly agree that their school have capacities to manage their budget, 22.1% partially agree, 19.8% strongly disagree while seven teachers (4.1%) are undecided.

Almost half of teachers (46.5%) and more than half of principals (51.7%) strongly agree that there is a lack of legal infrastructure for implementation of decentralization (See S4, Table 1). Regarding the selection of school staff by school board, the results revealed that 41.4 percent of principals strongly disagree that school board representative participates in the selection of the principal and teachers, 31 percent strongly agree while 27.6 percent of principals partially agree. Findings also revealed that the majority of the teachers (46.5%) strongly disagree that school board representative participates in the selection of the principal and teachers (See S5, Table 1).

Regarding the results concerning the perceptions of principals and teachers about nature of school curriculum, majority of the principals (48.3%) partially agrees that centralized nature of their curriculum does not allow adjusting teaching style with the students need, 37.9 percent strongly agree while 13.8% strongly disagree. More than half of teachers (47.1%) strongly agree that centralized nature of their curriculum does not allow adjusting teaching style with the students need, almost half of teachers (41.3%) partially agree, 9.3 percent strongly disagree while only three teachers (1.7%) are undecided.

In the last question of questionnaire on how much school decentralization will be implemented in the future, the majority of principals (75.9%) stated that school decentralization will be partially implemented, only seven principals (24.1%) stated that it will be fully implemented while none of them stated that it won't be implemented. More than half of the teachers (52.9%) maintained that school decentralization will be partially implemented, 20.9 percent stated that it will be fully implemented, 8.7 percent claimed that it won't be implemented while thirty teachers (17.4%) are undecided.

Interview Results

First question has to do with assessing of the degree of school autonomy in Kosovo by the interviewed respondents. All of them answered that so far schools have failed to have complete autonomy. "Schools have a kind of semi-autonomy because they depend on Municipal Offices of Education in many aspects". (Sh. Gashi, personal communication, November 5, 2010). The degree of school autonomy considered to be too low since "even though there are made many transfer of responsibilities from central to local level, there was no assignment at school"... "Schools still don't have leadership and management responsibilities." (M. Kasneci, personal communication, November 28, 2010).

When they are asked about the level of the implementation of education decentraliza-

tion reforms in Kosovo, respondents stated that this process is not fully implemented due to lack of capacity in schools, lack of legislation, lack of sufficient budget that would enable the organization of trainings, hiring of new school staff, etc.. “Although Municipality of Podujevo is among the municipalities that are involved in the transfer of authority at school level this still didn’t happened because this requires the legislation that would allow it.” Lack of Law on Decentralization of Pre-university Education in Republic of Kosovo is considered a major deficiency in the legislation on education. Also, it is estimated that the Law on Public Finance and Law on Public Procurement in Kosovo, create barriers to using the full financial autonomy of schools. Since the school staff is still not trained to manage the finances, it deprives schools from the autonomy to decide independently how to use their funds, thus again they should be managed by the Municipal Offices of Education. “Schools are not managing their finances” ...”finances will be managed completely from school after a school management staff will be trained for this.” (N. Rudari, personal communication, December 20 2010). Furthermore, it is estimated that “school councils exist only on paper” (I.Potera, personal communication, December 21, 2010) since they don’t have a right to vote for the selection of school staff.

As for the difficulties that are encountered during the implementation of the decentralization process, there are very often mentioned lack of capacity in schools to accept new responsibilities and lack of legislation that would enable clarification of the roles and responsibilities of each party involved in this process. Among other difficulties stated are highly centralized budgetary procedures, lack of budget for hiring new finance officials, lack of readiness of the central level to transfer responsibilities for the selection of school staff to the school board, the centralized nature of curriculum, etc. “Opportunities for employment of accountants are very small because the school budget is very low to afford this priority.”(Sh. Lushaku, personal communication, November 29, 2010).

Last question they answered was about their opinion on how much will be school decentralization implemented in the future. It is estimated that this process need more time and work to show the first positive effects. “After a period of consolidation, certainty that the effect of decentralization will be positive but this requires a little time and trainings for school staff to except new responsibilities.” (A. Berisha, personal communication, December 15, 2010). Also, it is estimated that full implementation of decentralization need good coordination of responsibilities between schools, municipal and central level. One respondent claims that we are far from the school decentralization, while another see this process as something that will easily be applied after approval of legislation that clarify everything about process of decentralization.

Discussion

The designs of the new autonomy initiatives seem to anticipate school capacity as a main implementation impediment and promise targeted investments in building schools’ capacity for implementation. (Honig & Rainey, 2011, p. 6) The real challenge facing most schools is no longer how to improve but, more importantly, how to sustain improvement. Sustainability will depend upon the school’s internal capacity to maintain and support developmental work and sustaining improvement requires the leadership capability of the many rather than the few. (Harris & Muijs, 2002, p.1) Decentralization is sometimes misguided and translates into “dumping of responsibilities into lower levels of government – commonly labeled ‘load-shedding’ – without allocating sufficient resources or strengthening local capacity to undertake these responsibilities” (Cheema & Tabet, 2000, p. 266). Even though laws in Kosovo are predicting that the decentralization of education must go right down to the level of the school, lack of appropriate capacities at all levels are making impossible the realization of this process and implementation of existing laws. The limited capacity-building supports of schools that

start implementation with far lower capacity than schools chosen for their ready capacity in implementation may fall far short of their particularly high needs. (Honig, 2009a).

All efficiency of decentralization depends upon the capabilities/capacity. In practice, weak management capacity, insufficient funding, inadequately trained teachers, and weak system support makes it difficult to realize the positive potential of decentralization (USAID, 2005). Successful models consistently show that clarity in the role of participation, adequate resources, and capacity building can create positive change (Bruns, Filmer, Patrinos, 2011).

Conclusions

Kosovo is a country that has accepted more reforms in education without piloting them, as it was required by political and social situation after the war. Regarding the decentralization of schools, there is no progress in creating conditions for the transfer of authority from municipalities to school level. Lack of Law on Decentralization of education in Kosovo and the lack of any particular strategy for the decentralization of pre-university education are the main causes of problems that arise in implementation of decentralization process. So, lack of basic documents required for decentralization of education is disabling the process of capacity building impossible for decentralization at all levels. Wrong steps towards this difficult process can have negative impact in education system of Kosovo.

According the findings of this research, MEST and Municipal Offices of Education have not worked enough to inform school staff about the process of decentralization. Results confirmed that decentralization of education in Kosovo has not arrived at the school level, as the degree of school autonomy in Kosovo is very low. Laws on education in Kosovo do not provide school autonomy in staff selection, while school financial autonomy remains unrealized due the lack of institutional, financial, managerial, legal, human, etc., capacity.

While most of principals and teachers surveyed think that their schools have capacities to manage their own budget, the municipal officials stated that the capacities for transfer of budget management responsibility from local to school level are not yet created. Both principals and teachers stated that there is a lack of trained staff for implementation of school decentralization. Schools don't manage their own budget in totally. Initiatives of teachers and students are not supported due to lack of funds, nor the students needs can not be fulfilled due to the centralized nature of curriculum. Although it was expected that the powers of school councils will be increased, the respondents stated that nothing has changed significantly. Furthermore, school councils are not included either in the selection process of principals and teachers. Decentralization of education is the next challenge for the Kosovo education system that requires mobilization of all stakeholders in creating a concrete strategy for its successful implementation.

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Appendix 1

List of Interviewees

Miranda Kasneci - *Director of Department for Development of Pre-University Education in Ministry of Education, Science and Technology of Republic of Kosovo.*

Nexhmi Rudari - *Director of Municipal Office of Education in the Municipality of Podujevo.*

Agim Berisha - *Director of Municipal Office of Education in the Municipality of Ferizaj.*

Ismet Potera - *Researcher- Institute of Pedagogy in Republic of Kosovo.*

Shemsi Lushaku - *Principal of Secondary School "28 November" – Prishtina.*

Shpresa Gashi - *Deputy Principal of Elementary School "Elena Gjika" – Prishtina.*

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