



Decentralized Management in UAE Schools

(Potential of Educational System Decentralization in UAE)

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to review the educational system in UAE from management point of view, the paper addresses this aim by first reviewing the concept of decentralization and experiences of other countries, it discusses how education in general is fitted in the whole political framework of UAE, what public agencies have responsibility for education and what the policies and regulations are. It includes identifying a relevant passage in the constitution, in federal laws, and in government mission statements and policies. Also, it examines the positions of the non-governmental stakeholders in education in the UAE, determining what interests they have, what future they want for education, what their expectations could be and what their possible role could be in educational policy and decision-making in the country. At the end some conclusions are going to be drawn.

8689

Keywords Decentralization, Management, Schools, Education Sectors, Educational System, Stakeholders

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1. INTRODUCTION

The UAE is a young country, established as a political union in the year 1971 between the six Emirates: Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Fujairah and Um Al Quwain. The seventh Emirate, Ras Al Khaimah, joined the federation on 10 February 1972.

The educational system in the UAE is centralized. The highest authority is the Ministry of Education, followed by the educational zones. Responsibilities of the Ministry of Education include administration of education, enforcement of educational laws, preparation of educational bills, public education is mainly financed by the government, prescription of syllabi, curricula and textbooks, regulation

and supervision of educational institutions, construction of school buildings, maintenance and equipment, appointments, promotions, transfers and disciplinary matters of teaching personnel.

Decentralization is defined as the transfer of decision-making authority closer to the consumer or beneficiary. This can take the form of transferring powers to lower levels of an organization, which is called administrative decentralization. A popular form of administrative decentralization in education is to give additional responsibilities to schools. This is often called school autonomy or school-based management and may take the form of creating elected or appointed school



councils and giving those budgets and the authority to make important educational decisions. Administrative decentralization may also take the form of empowering school directors or directors and teaching faculty to make decisions within the school.

Another form of decentralization, called devolution, entails transferring powers to lower levels of government. Most often, education responsibilities are transferred to general-purpose governments at the regional or local levels. Examples are the decentralization of basic education to local level governments. In rare cases additional responsibilities are given to single-purpose governments, such as the local school district in the United States. When education responsibilities are transferred to general-purpose governments, the elected governing bodies of those governments must make decisions about how much to spend on education versus other local services.

2. REVIEWS & METHODS

2.1. Background

The Ministry of Education (MOE) in the UAE is the governmental authority in charge of managing governmental schools. School boards currently have very limited say in the managerial decisions. According to Hussein (2010) school management boards are mainly represented by the principal, sometimes, accompanied by the vice principal. Other parties do not have a significant role in managing the school or suggesting any changes seeking improvement of the educational system, teachers do not have any role in making decision or setting policies, allowing teaching to be part of the decision-making will give them satisfaction which will lead to better performance.

Decentralization has become popular in the education sector since many governments have experienced problems providing centralized education services including

financial inefficiencies, lack of transparent decision-making, and poor quality and access to education services (King and Cordeiro-Guerra, 2005). It is hoped that decentralization will result in educational improvements. Several researchers reported the advantages and disadvantages of decentralization (Hansen 2005; Tanner and Stone 1998; Walker 2007), it is stated that decentralization does not necessarily lead to improved quality of education and learning outcomes for students, but it remains an important tool for education reform in developing and developed countries by increasing local control, promoting democratization, enhancing quality of services, increasing management efficiency at central, regional and local levels, reallocating financial responsibility from the center to the regions and controlling and/or balancing power centers, such as teachers' unions and political parties. Decentralized governance and management in many countries is done through school boards or other similar governing bodies where there is often a representation of several groups or stakeholders, countries such as El Salvador, Guatemala, Hong Kong, China, Indonesia, Israel, Kenya, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Qatar, Thailand, the United Kingdom, the United States have used different approaches of decentralization (Barrera-Osorio, 2009). One of the characteristics of the centralized education system, as in the case of UAE, is that it responds slowly to the changes needed to keep up with societal needs. In the 21st century and with the current and needed shift in Emirati society towards change and be a more knowledge-based society Hussein (2010), there is a definite need to have a more effective and flexible system that would evolve and respond faster to the surrounding changes in society. Decentralization of the educational system could be the needed transformation to enhance the Emirati educational system.



The current management system is not effective enough to engage all staff members involved in educational process in order to implement changes, or to yield the required students' outcomes. Decentralization of the education system could be the modification required for the improvement need, it has been reported (UNESCO, 2007) that reform is being introduced in schools, all across the State of Minas Gerais, Brazil, where teachers, financial agencies and managers now have more autonomy, the sector became remarkably more efficient. A case in point, from 1990 to 1994, the number of children completing primary education rose from 38% to 49%, with repetition rates falling from 29% to 19%. Other successful examples have reported in Argentina and Netherlands (UNESCO, 2007).

Decentralization has different approaches, for example, when applying decentralization, feedback of the stakeholders involved in the education process is considered including principals, administrators, teachers, and parents. It is very important to find out how the education system in UAE would benefit if decentralization is applied. Furthermore, it is important to examine how decentralization can be governed and correctly implemented in UAE.

Always there is a need to improve any educational system along with its outcomes. Student achievement, among other factors, is one major component as well as a measure of how effective the system is. School improvement and school effectiveness have become a major concern of education authorities and policy makers. It has been reported that in many education systems, there has emerged recognition that school-based decision-making and management has the potential to bring improvement in the quality of education (Deller 1995). One technique for this is using benchmarking when considering introducing new educational systems, if it

has proven to be a success in other parts of the world.

One of the factors that has to be considered in the UAE case is that several educational systems have been introduced and are applied at present in UAE. Schools that apply these systems such as Schools of the future, and Public Private Partnership Schools, along with other school improvement programs have been introduced to the Emirati educational system. Comparing the advantages and disadvantages of decentralization might offer a better examination of the problem. Advantages could be summed as having the management board on site; decisions that are more proper to the day to day needs, teachers' satisfaction, classroom practices improvement, and above all, students' outcomes could all be improved through school based management. On the other hand, disadvantages are inappropriate usage of the power given to principals, inappropriate allocation of budget money, slow responses to the stakeholders' demands, and slower pace of decision-making process Hussein (2010).

2.2 Regulatory System

The constitution of the UAE provides the legal and political framework of the operation of the country as a federation of the seven Emirates, education is one of the main areas under the purview of the federal authorities, other areas include foreign affairs, security and defense, nationality and immigration issues, education, public health, currency, postal, telephone and other communications services, air traffic control and licensing of aircraft. In addition a number of other sectors specifically prescribed include labor relations, banking, and delimitation of territorial waters and extradition of criminals. All other matters were left to the jurisdiction of the individual emirates and their local governments, this is described under Articles 120 and 121 of the UAE Constitution (UAE Constitution, 2004).

8691



To understand the governance of educational system in UAE and how it works, review started with the most fundamental: relevant constitution articles and laws, Article 58 of the constitution which defines the jurisdiction of the ministers and the power of each minister showing the composition of the council of ministers of the union states, and that the Minister of Education is a member of the council. Article 17 of the constitution states that "Education shall be a fundamental factor for the progress of society. It shall be compulsory in its primary stage and free of charge at all stages, within the union. The law shall prescribe the necessary plans for the propagation and spread of education at various levels and for the eradication of illiteracy." It means that access to education in UAE is not only available but is compulsory in primary stage and free at all stages, it shows that education is a top government priority and developing human capital is considered to be a key enabler in the country's efforts to develop society. In parallel to public education sector, the constitution allows establishing private schools which leads to a complete private education sector, According to GCC Education Sector Report (2015), the UAE's private education sector is well developed, with thousands of national and international students enrolled in schools in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, Article 18 reads "Special schools may be established by individuals and organizations in accordance with the provisions of the law, provided that such schools shall be subject to the supervision of the competent public authorities and subject to their direction." According to Article 120 from the constitution states that education is one of the matters that the Union shall have exclusive legislative and executive jurisdiction, (UAE Constitution, 2004). According to these constitutional articles, the Ministry of Education is the governmental body that has the power to

manage and organize education in the country. The constitution refers to number of laws and regulations to organize its work, among these laws are the following (UNESCO, 2010):

1. Federal Law No. 1-M7, 1972 states that the ministry is responsible for educational affairs, supervision and improvements, to make education available and compulsory at primary stage to every citizen, prepare educational plans, educational curricula, examination systems and literacy programs, to establish schools and institutes and license private schools and supervise them.

2. Federal Law No. 11, 1972 states that education is compulsory at primary stage and free at all stages for every citizen. It is the duty of the state to provide school buildings, textbooks and teachers, the primary stage starts at age of 6 and continues as specified by regulations, the Ministry is responsible to prepare the curricula, scheme of work, courses to be taught, promotion policy and number of school years.

3. Federal Law No. 9, 1972 defines private schools that are concerned with general, technical and vocational education, it defines the objectives of private school and criteria for licensing. It states that Islamic studies, Arabic language and social sciences are compulsory in all private schools in which Arab students make up more than 50% of the student body, the syllabi of these courses are established by the Ministry, also it states that the Ministry specialized departments supervise private schools.

As can be concluded from these laws, major educational affairs and decisions are made centrally by the Ministry of Education, but according to Al-Taneiji and McLeod (2008) moves have begun to decentralize some responsibilities and decisions to schools. In addition to federal laws, there are organizational laws by the cabinet and ministerial resolutions with the purpose of



organizing the work at the ministry and defining specific tasks and responsibilities, including those relevant to the topic being researched, the idea of reviewing these laws is to understand how the Ministry function and investigate the degree of centralization in the educational system. Some of these laws are listed below (UNESCO, 2010):

1. Cabinet Decree No. 1, January 1987 defines the ministry objectives, potentials and resources, as well as the functions of the ministry and its different departments, and it forms the supreme committee for education policy, educational zones and offices and defines their functions.
2. Ministerial Resolution No. 378/2, 30 October 1988, it defines the decision-making bodies regarding technical, administrative and financial tasks between schools, zones and head office.
3. Ministerial Resolution No. 345/2, 1989 defines the planning cycle of the ministry's activities, various departments, projects and programs.
4. Cabinet Decree No. 7, 15 May 1991 deals with the formation of a permanent ministerial advisory committee, the committee is responsible of the structure of education policies, agreements related to education, culture, and manpower planning.
5. Ministerial Resolution No. 480/2, 1989 and its amendment Ministerial Resolution No. 20/2, 1996, deals with student enrollment and transfer from one school to another.
6. Ministerial Resolution No. 2011/2, 1995, concerns the primary stage student assessment and provisional data about branches, evaluation system, transfer regulation, registration and cards.
7. Ministerial Resolution No. 624/2, 1991, it came after adopting the two-term academic year to regulate the evaluation and examination for preparatory and secondary stages.

As the Ministry of Education is responsible for general education, literacy and adult education programs in the country, the structure of the educational system, which is similar in the seven Emirates consists of basic schools and secondary schools. Schools are funded by the UAE government with basic public education is free and compulsory at the first unit between the ages of six to twelve. The Ministry of Education delegates some of its authority to nine educational zones: Abu Dhabi educational zone, Al Ain educational zone, Al Gharbia educational zone, Dubai educational zone, Sharjah educational zone, Ajman educational zone, Ras Al Khaimah educational zone, Fujairah educational zone and Um Al Quwain educational zone, both public and private schools report directly to their educational zones (Grant et al., 2007). Schools in the UAE are licensed by the relevant education zone in the emirate in which they operate. The UAE Ministry of Education oversees all emirate-based education councils and authorities. The power of taking a decision at the level of an educational zone, a school, and other educational and administrative spheres, in respect of planning, admission, registration, private education, adult education, examinations, educational services, personnel and financial matters, shall be authorized by a ministerial decision.

Decentralization, in particular School-based management with devolution of authority and responsibility to school level decision-makers has become the most prominent feature of public-school management systems in most countries around the world, Bandur (2012), in his article he provided the global trends and current developments in decentralization in Indonesia with an emphasis on how school-based management has created partnership and participatory decision-making processes in school level.

Decentralization programs take many different forms in terms of who has the



power to make decisions and how much decision-making authority devolves to the school level. Whereas some programs transfer authority only to school principals or teachers, others encourage or mandate parental and community participation, often through their active membership in school committees. Each program is shaped by the objectives of the reformers and by the broader national policy and social context in which it is created. There are two key dimensions to the devolution of decision making: the degree of autonomy being devolved and the people to whom the decision-making authority is devolved. With so many possible combinations of these two dimensions, almost every decentralization program is unique. It is estimated that there are more than 800 school based management models in the United States alone, and globally reforms vary even more widely (Barrera-Osorio, F. T. Fasih, H. Patrinos and L. Santibáñez, 2009).

3. STAKEHOLDER FINDINGS

An education stakeholder is someone who has an interest in the success and welfare of a school or education system. This includes all parties that are directly affected by the success or failure of an educational system, as well as those indirectly affected. Hence stakeholders are identified as Head-Teachers/Principals, Teachers, Students, Parents, Parents Teachers Association, School Management Committee / School Board Members, Community Members, Elected Officials, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's), Board of Governors and Ministry of Education (Helle et al. 2011). There is a need for all education stakeholders to effectively play their role so that students will learn better and attain their potentials in its fullest form.

One of the main stakeholder groups is parents. The parents have a keen interest in the type of education provided for their children. They want the type of education

which will make their children employable in a highly competitive market. Parents therefore play a pivotal and supportive role to the learners and to the educational system. Regular parents' meetings are there to facilitate a good working relationship and to ensure that parents are well informed of what is happening at schools. There should also be effective communication with the parents as a stakeholder group. Kosunen and Carrasco (2016) compares Finland and Chile in the images that parents form about the reputation of schools when they need to select a school for their child, they clearly stated that parents evaluate the reputations of the schools when making judgements about their desirability. They try to approximate the quality of schools and the social environment and contrast those with their hopes and fears concerning their child's education.

In her study, Al-Taneiji (2013) explored the practices used by school leaders: principals, vice principals and social workers to encourage parental involvement in UAE schools, and the differences in these practices based on their gender, school level and job position. A questionnaire was distributed to teachers in schools in Dubai, Sharjah, Fujairah and Al-Ain, and 377 responses were collected. The study revealed that school leaders in UAE schools often communicate with parents. Further, they frequently engage parents in school decisions related to students' activities and behavior. The results also show that school leaders involve parents in their children's education in different ways, and that these differences are linked to the gender, school level and job position of those leaders.

In their study, (Hourani et al, 2012), they explored the constraints and subsequent limitations to parental involvement within primary schools in Abu Dhabi, they concluded that a gap between the ADEC's parental involvement policy and its implementation. Their findings call for reciprocation between home and school

8694



through effective dialogue to develop a framework which accommodates stakeholders effectively and comfortably. Students are the most important stakeholders, they have an interest in receiving a good education, and thus providing quality education is a key element in any educational system. Of course, this requires well-qualified and competent educators with a passion for teaching. Schlechty (2001) states "statements about the purpose of education have emphasized the intention of the schools to provide all students with the opportunity to learn". Today schools serve a wider range of students who are expected to meet standards that were required of only a few students' years ago (Schlechty, 2001). Those who are identified as students have changed from all to those who participate but their role in the education process has not change. The student plays the lead role in the educational process and as stakeholders are expected to participate in the process. Wilson (2008) believes that successful schools encourage significant participation by parents, students and teachers. Hussein (2010) stated that there is a relationship between administration decisions and students' achievement through teachers' performance and satisfaction conditions. Decisions should be thoroughly studied and carefully implemented in order to maximize teachers' satisfaction, and consequently improve their classroom performance. According to his survey results in Abu Dhabi schools a high percentage of teachers (51%) agrees on the strong relationship between administration decisions and students' achievement.

Teachers are a major stakeholder group that has an important contribution to make to the provision of education. The teacher, along with the student, plays an interactive role in the education process because one cannot function without the other. "The empowerment of teachers will facilitate the

empowerment of students (Short and Greer, 2002)." Teacher empowerment takes the form of providing teachers with a significant role in decisions making, control over their work environment and conditions, and opportunities to serve in a range of professional roles (Short and Greer, 2002) the teacher as a stakeholder is expected to possess the professional knowledge to lead the students in instruction. In addition to serving in an instructional role the teacher can be a mentor, supervisor, counselor, and community leader. In her thesis work about evaluation of the school-based management practices in the new school model, where she considered schools in the City of Al Ain as a case study, Al Kaabi (2015) highlighted the role of teachers in influencing decisions by participating in planning, developing, monitoring and improving instructional programs within the school, they are responsible for student learning and are expected to take responsibility for their own professional development and create a healthy learning environment. Hussein (2010) identified the main stakeholders as principal, teachers, and parents, according to his analysis and conclusions, teachers who currently experience the centralized management with MOE/ ADEC, they were invited to feedback about the efficiency of school based management (SBM) if it were applied in public schools. The highest percentage of teachers, 38%, "Strongly agree" while another 30% "Agree" that more efficiency to be expected with SBM. On the other hand, 24% affirmed "Not sure", and only 8% affirmed "Strongly disagree" and 0% "Disagree" that SBM would lead to more efficiency in the educational system.

NGOs are another stakeholder group in education, these NGOs may be interested in the protection of the rights of students or of teachers. They may also be interested in assisting the ministry of higher education in grappling with issues relating to the



provision of education. They may also be interested in the monitoring of standards in education.

Another important stakeholder group is that of the potential employers and in particular the private sector. The employers are interested in the quality of students produced so as to maximize their productivity. Employers engage with schools in a variety of different ways, not only working with students directly but also in less direct ways through curriculum development/support and through leadership and governance of schools. As the UAE education system has two distinct aspects which are: the Government system that provides free education exclusively to UAE nationals; and a private full fee system that caters primarily for the expatriate population. This educational dichotomy is further divided by gender segregation in both the Government high school system and the higher education system. The private education system provides a diverse range of educational services that mirror the various national curricula of the expatriate workforce. This private system is a co-educational system with mixed gender schools at all levels which is distinct from the Government education system. The Commission for Academic Accreditation under the Ministry of Education grants licenses to private education providers to operate an educational institution within the UAE national boundaries. The number of private education providers continues to increase in the education market; currently they represent more than 30 percent of all K-12 schools in the UAE (Godwin, 2006).

Emiratization is an affirmative action quota driven employment policy that ensures UAE nationals are given employment opportunities in the private sector. The policy is a UAE Government decree which imposes employment quotas on various business sectors with financial penalties for non-compliance.

UAE nationals prefer to work in the government sector due to higher salaries and better employment conditions, which has resulted in a very small percentage accepting employment in the private sector. The International Monetary Fund has suggested that the UAE Government reduce the benefits to government employed Emiratis in order to discourage them from seeking cradle to grave government jobs. The gradual alignment of government salaries and conditions to those in the private sector would encourage a shift away from government employment. Despite these recommendations, in May 2005 all Emirati government employees received a 25 percent pay increase in order to offset the high levels of inflation (Khaleej Time Online, 2005). The employers as a stakeholders can play a role in guidance and support careers education, leadership and governance, curriculum support and contributing to young peoples' skills and awareness.

As education is an important tool for achieving socio-economic as well as political development and an instrument par excellence for national development, the community as a whole is considered a stakeholder in its education system. This is because local schools educate future employees, business owners, and community leaders. A solid education program builds a stronger community by better preparing its students to be successful community members. Every different stakeholder plays a different, significant role in support of the education system (Agba et al., 2007).

The role of education stakeholders in policy decision making as well as in policy implementation for educational development is very important. This is due to the fact that governments the world over do not function any longer as entities separate from the larger population making unilateral decisions, rather they involved numerous other actors from the public in



order to participate in power sharing and influence (Geurtz and Ted, 2010). Kamba (2010) observed that involving relevant stakeholders in managing the affairs of education improves the quality of educational system. Thus education stakeholders' are often viewed as important contributory factors of ensuring educational quality as well as its development. Citizen participation is essential in facilitating and transforming the work of government and education is not an exception in this trend as education is no longer the responsibility of any government alone. This in essence indicates that the goals of education are best achieved when stakeholders join hands and share responsibilities.

4. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

From the review of the constitution, federal laws and cabinet and ministerial resolutions we can conclude that the educational system in UAE is centralized, the Ministry of Education oversees and take decisions at all emirate-based education councils and authorities, part of the authorities and power can be transferred to the educational zones, in my opinion this can be started with handling activities such as monitoring and evaluation of teacher performance and student learning outcomes and procurement of textbooks and other educational materials, in this case the MOE needs to modify its policies and regulations to accommodate this change.

Decentralization may devolve authority over one or more activities. These can be any of the following: (1) budget allocations (2) recruiting and termination of teachers and other school staff (3) curriculum development (4) procurement of textbooks and other educational materials (5) infrastructure improvement and (6) monitoring and evaluation of teacher performance and student learning outcomes.

My plan is to have decentralization of UAE education system as a topic of my final

project, in particular I would like to examine the form of decentralization that fits UAE educational environment and empirical evidence on the relationship between decentralization and educational quality. A survey to take the opinion of different stakeholders will be designed and conducted for this purpose.

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