Evaluating performance in the Educational Sector of Decentralised services: A case study of Regional Councils in Namibia

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Abstract: The paper aims to investigate the factors influencing the state of improved performance in the education sector of decentralised service: The case study of Regional Councils in Namibia. The main objective of this paper was to investigate the factors that influences the state of performance in the educational sector of decentralised services in the Regional Councils. The paper used a descriptive case study approach to analyse the decentralisation policy on performance in the education sector; hence qualitative research design was adopted. The researcher used face to face interviews, observation and desk documents analysis to collect data. The target research population for this study consisted of about 4,000 permanent staff members of Regional Councils (including the Directorate of Education). A purposeful sample of 30 respondents were selected from all Regional Councils, including the Directorate of Education. The findings revealed that there is a little understanding of decentralization policy among participants. The findings from the paper revealed that planning of activities in the regions is done completely separately by two different offices such as Directorate of Education and Regional Council. The result of the findings further revealed the dual reporting lines and communication among staff members are both found to be problematic areas during the delegation phase. The findings revealed that education services delivered through different means of communications. Various issues were revealed which considered as the main contributing factors and major challenges that impacting the effectiveness of service delivery in the regions. The study is significant because it serves as a guiding tool to future researches who would wish to conduct research on decentralisation and service delivery. It is expected to inform educators of the factors, benefits and challenges that affect decentralised education and exploring ways of addressing them to enhance efficiency in education service delivery.

Keywords: Decentralization, Education, Regional Councils, Apartheid, Bantu education.

I. INTRODUCTION

The paper focused on the factors influencing the state of performance in the education sector of the decentralised services at regional levels. Before Namibia's independence, the country's education system was designed to reinforce apartheid rather than provide the necessary human resource base to promote equitable social and economic development. It was fragmented along racial and ethnic lines, with vast disparities in both the allocation of resources and the quality of education offered (Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia).

According to Stiftung (2010), Decentralization is a relatively new way of thinking about government administration. Stiftung (2010), indicated that decentralisation entails a process of dividing and distributing authority, power and responsibility for programmes and policy implementation to sub-units, as well as reassigning decision-making responsibilities to lower governmental units on a geographical basis. According to Crawford & Hartmann (2008) Africa is in dire need of democratic local governance that harmonises the sharing of responsibility between central government and local state level, and that empowers people, democratises society and shares the responsibility of deciding on policies which affect people's daily life.

According to Regmi (2013) decentralization is the process of negotiation between central and local government rather than a transformational process because it is very important to define the roles of central government and local government. Crawford & Hartmann (2008) stressed that the rationale of decentralization is to shrink the power of centralized state and deepening the democratic agenda in order to provide greater opportunity for influencing decision makings processes at the local level.

In Namibia, decentralisation is defined as, a process whereby central government (line ministries) either delegate or devolve powers and/or functions to sub-national government structures (Ministry of Regional and Local Government, Housing and Rural Development, MRLGHRD) MRLGHRD , 2004). In terms of the Decentralisation Enabling Act (Act 33 of 2000) Namibia opted to delegate with devolution being the target

The Ministry of Urban and Rural Development put in place the Decentralisation Implementation Plan, which guides all involved stakeholders in the various phases of implementation process (MRLGHRD, 2013). This plan was put in place to act as a monitoring tool on the overall performance of the decentralisation policy. The Plan is aimed at supporting regional councils and local authorities to implement and monitor the decentralisation programme. Despite these improvements, a readiness assessment conducted by the Ministry of Urban and Rural Development in May 2013 identified some shortcomings in terms of service delivery in the education sector in the Regional Councils. A lot of legal, political, administrative and economic changes have taken place as a result of decentralisation to try to improve service delivery at regional level. "Decentralisation had not been matched by increase of resources and capacity to enable Local Governments to perform their roles effectively" (MURD, 2013).

It is recommended to the Ministry of local Government and Rural Development to insist that powerful officials at the national level cede some of their powers to their subordinates in the regions and districts. To this end, incentives such as accommodation, vehicles and special allowances should be made available to attract and motivate qualified personnel to accept posting to the districts and local communities.

Findings from the MRLGHRD (2014) revealed that for effective implementation of the decentralisation policy, there are institutional and organisational changes needed at national, regional and local levels. The restructuring of responsibility for functions and changes of location is emphasised from the centre to the sub-national levels of government. This implies that increased capacity at regional and local levels needs different institutional arrangements and requirements.

Management of functions and tasks are increasingly being shifted from the central level to other levels of administration such as provincial, district, and community levels. In education, the level immediately below the Ministry of Education is usually the level in charge of ensuring the functioning of decentralized management of all education activities (except for higher education) (UNESCO, 2005).

According to Ahmad and Brosio (2006), even when it is not explicit, improving service delivery is an implicit motivation behind most decentralised efforts. Decentralisation reform in Namibia was aimed at improving service delivery to communities. However, the current state of service delivery in the education sector shows that there still remains a gap between service provision and local needs. There is a lack of inter-organizational collaboration and coordination in regard to the management of delegated education activities. The planning of educational activities is done separately from that of the regional council.

Muriisa (2007), argues that decentralisation offers two main benefits to the people; freedom to access and freedom to decide. The former implies that decentralisation enables people to voice their needs and to access certain resources through their representatives. According to Turner and Hulme (1997), through delegation within organisations and coordination between organisations, improved decision-making and greater efficiency and effectiveness are promoted

Decentralization of education sector management requires that central authorities (the Ministry of Education, etc.) and provincial education authorities apply a common approach to education planning and implementation monitoring. Such common approaches should include the planning concept, planning methodology and tools, planning terminology, resource allocation criteria, monitoring criteria and monitoring mechanisms (UNESCO, 2005).

According to Mukwena (2004), before Namibia's independence, the country's education system was designed to reinforce the Apartheid system rather than provide the necessary human resource base to promote equitable social and economic development. It was fragmented along racial and ethnic lines, in what was termed the Bantu Education system, which was also being enforced in black communities in South Africa and Namibia, with vast disparities in both the allocation of resources and the quality of education offered. This had had a great impact on the quality of education in the country.

Findings by Malan (2014) indicated that there were situations such as government systems put in place to favour the white colonial minorities in terms of service provisions before independence, hence creating disparities in terms of public service delivery. Independent Namibia took steps to reform government structures that would ensure that sustainable development is promoted in the entire country without prejudice. Hoop (2005) stresses that the administration of regional government in Namibia cannot be divorced from the country's painful history of colonialism and apartheid.

Decentralization thus intensifies the need for capable staff and increases the importance of capacity-building programs. Decentralisation in education in Africa has been gaining momentum in search of efficiency in service delivery (Winkler, D. R. & Gershberg, A. I. 2003). Opare et al (2000) suggest that there is still too much power lodged above

According to Ahmad and Brosio (2006), even when it is not explicit, improving performance is an implicit motivation behind most decentralised efforts. Civil services at all levels of government need a capable, motivated, and efficient staff in order to deliver quality services to its citizens. When civil service functions and structures are decentralized, existing bureaucratic patterns must be reorganized as roles and accountability are shifted. .

At independence the newly elected government reaffirmed its commitment to decentralisation as promised in the SWAPO Party's 1989 Election Manifesto (SWAPO, 1989). After independence the government started developing the policy and legal framework upon which decentralisation would rest such as the Regional Councils Act, 1992, the Local Authorities Act, 1992 as well as the Decentralisation Policy, 1997. The government also set up institutional arrangements that would facilitate the implementation process. The decentralisation policy was adopted in 1997 and it has been one of the cornerstones of government since independence with the expressed purpose of bringing government closer to the people. The decentralisation policy has its source in Chapter 12 of the Namibian Constitution which provides for the establishment of regional and local government (Ministry of Regional and Local Government, Housing and Rural Development, MRLGHRD, 2012).

The aim of the decentralisation policy in Namibia is "to provide people at grass root level with the opportunity to participate in decision making that affect their life and to extent democracy based on national ideas and values" Decentralisation Policy (1998). The implementation of decentralization Policy in Namibia aims to decentralize functions from line ministries to the Regional Councils and local authorities first by delegation and ultimately devolving the delegated functions, power, and authorities to local and regional governments.

The Government of the Republic of Namibia (GRN) set about to create one unified structure for education administration, from the previous eleven fragmented, ethnically based departments. English replaced Afrikaans as the nation's official language and was chosen as the medium of instruction in schools and other educational institutions. A new, learner-centered curriculum for Grades 1 to 12 was developed and introduced, which was completed in 1998. It received recognition beyond Namibia's borders and included an adapted Cambridge IGCSE programme for senior secondary level. Curriculum development, educational research, and professional development of school teachers is centrally organised by the National Institute for Educational Development (NIED) in Okahandja (Katjavivi, 2016).

Namibia is officially ranked as a middle income country, as evidenced by an average annual per capita income (2003/4) of N\$ 10 358 and per capita Gross Domestic Product (2005) of N\$ 18 874. Nevertheless, Namibia remains one of the most inequitable countries in the world, with an income gini-coefficient of 0.60. The inequitable distribution of wealth and income mirrors inequities in education with the poorest children the most disadvantaged Namibia has made substantial advances in developing an inclusive and equitable education system since it gained independence in 1990. However, inequities remain, especially for the poorest and most marginalized children (UNICEF/Namibia, 2011).

It is against this background that the Government of Republic of Namibia has undertaken ongoing reform initiatives, with the view to further strengthen and transform the system of education in the country.

In June 1998, the Cabinet Secretariat issued a circular about a cabinet memorandum to Permanent Secretaries (PSs) to start with the preparations for the implementation of the decentralisation policy as per the Cabinet Decision of March 1998 (MRLGHRD, 2007). This led to the organisational structures of regional councils to be expanded and fine-tuned to accommodate the new functions to be decentralised. The Directorate of Education was then established under the regional council structure.

The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (MoE, 2009) delegated the functions of Primary and Secondary Education to regional councils with effect from the 01 April 2009 as per the Cabinet Decision No. 5/17.03.09/004. The handover of these functions to the individual regional councils took place between 06 October 2009 to 24 November 2009 to explain

and agree on how the functions and activities would be carried out (MRLGHRD, 2012). The Ministry of Education seconded all staff members attached to the above mentioned functions to all the Regional Councils.

According to Du Toit (2013), decentralisation is desirable in view of the expansion of the education sector in terms of student numbers, number of institutions, teachers and multiplicity of providers which are difficult to manage from one central point. The Government of the Republic of Namibia created one unified structure for education administration.

Currently, Namibia allocates more than 20% of its national budget to education. This represents six to seven percent of Namibia's total GDP and is one of the three countries with the highest percentage of GDP directed toward education in the world (Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia).

It is argued that decentralisation was supposed to improve, among others, the personnel and its services in regions, however, this is far from being achieved. There are internal and external factors that affect effective delivery of education services. Regional jobs are not done in time, an indication that there is a problem with the decentralised personnel supposed to carry out these duties.

In most African countries, decentralisation has been through donor funded projects championed by the World Bank (Winkler, 2003). In Uganda, the provision of primary education serves as a good example in which participation of the people in the delivery of services is exhibited. Parents and the local population provide labour for the construction of classrooms while government provides funding for corrugated iron sheets and other capital inputs (Muriisa, 2008).

Ghana has decentralised education services by empowering District Assemblies to be in charge of primary and secondary schools. School management committees exist but play an advisory role on teacher management and supervision. The central government regulates curriculum materials and the curriculum (Yolande, Miller Graudvaux at el 2002). Ghana has decentralised education services by empowering District Assemblies to be in charge of primary and secondary schools. School management committees exist but play an advisory role on teacher management and supervision. The central government regulates curriculum materials and the curriculum (Yolande, Miller Graudvaux at el 2002).

According to Mclean (1997), Tanzania is administratively divided into regions, districts and local government authorities, sub districts (villages or wards). Primary education is managed by local government authorities and school committees with strong parental representation who oversee the running of schools by managing the funds and developing school development plans.

The Republic of South Africa has a strong regional government just like Nigeria and Ethiopia. Administratively, it is divided into provinces and municipalities. Education services are provided by provincial ministries of education. Financing is from central government mixed with community and regional contributions (M'Nkanata, 2012).

In the Kenya education sector, the schools prepare their plans and budgets. They receive funds from various sources such as the central government grants, fees and in some cases from income generating activities or projects. Decentralisation of functions in education service delivery has been centred on teacher management, financial and procurement management. The education management structure of the education sector implies shared responsibilities between the centre and lower level structures. Decentralisation of functions in education service delivery has been centred on teacher management, financial and procurement management. The centre has continued to retain authority to develop and formulate policy, formulate budget, provide guidelines and conduct monitoring and evaluation (Ministry of Education Science and Technology, 2005).

The Rwanda Decentralization Strategic Framework (RDSF), adopted in August 2007, provided the basis for furthering the decentralization process from 2008 to 2012 in a comprehensive and coordinated manner. The RDSF outlines six Strategic Areas (SAs) to boost the decentralization process and further empower local government authorities. It is aligned to the National Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy. The Decentralization Implementation plan (DIP) has been elaborated by the Government of Rwanda to implement the RDSF and addresses all the SAs of the RDSF (Republic of Rwanda, 2013).

According to Mukwena (2004), the prospect of decentralisation playing any meaningful role in helping to reduce poverty and inequalities at the sub-national level in Namibia, will depend on speedy and reflective implementation of the country's decentralisation policy. The current status of the decentralisation policy implementation reflect a very slow process with only four line ministries that have delegated functions to regional councils since the adoption of the decentralisation policy in 1997.

According to Masuku (2010), Tanzania and Uganda are the most advanced countries in implementing decentralisation in Africa and Uganda has won international praise. It was revealed that the decentralisation system in Uganda increased participation, transparency and accountability.

Masuku (2010) further reveals that in Zimbabwe, the implementation of the decentralisation policy was reported to have major inconsistencies between the intentions of government and the practice on the ground where educational services was delivered. The study further revealed that the implementers found the decentralisation policy as a complex process that was difficult to put into practice because power was seen to manifest in multiple ways.

According to Farooqi (2013) the empirical evidence from African countries has highlighted Botswana as one of the success stories of decentralization. The comparative evidence suggests that Botswana had a combination of favourable socio-political context, resource adequacy and mix of participatory arrangements for better accountability mechanisms.

According to a USAID Working Paper (2007) on identifying the Impact of Education Decentralization on the Quality of Education, decentralization has the potential to improve accountability, increase parental participation, strengthen the leadership role of school directors, and increase teamwork among the teaching faculty. This paper further stresses that there is a need for a more serious evaluation of education decentralization that focuses less on the question of whether decentralization is a good thing and more on the challenges of how decentralization should be designed and implemented to yield the best results and the conditions and supporting environment under which decentralization yields positive results.

The evidence to date on the impact of decentralization suggests that simply changing the organization of education, creating school councils or moving responsibilities to sub-national governments, has little, if any, impact on the delivery of education. It is the exercise of new responsibilities that has an impact. The effective exercise of those responsibilities may be dependent on the training and existing capacity of school personnel. There is consistent evidence of the positive impacts of giving schools budget authority and of involving parents in school governance (USAID, 2007).

According to Winkler et al. (2003), efficiency and effectiveness are likely to improve under decentralisation when service providers are held accountable for results and more so when the lower level structures contribute a portion of financing. Accountability requires clearly defined roles and responsibility hence it is clear from the outset as who is responsible for what and to what extent. Decentralisation especially to school management bodies would increase client voice as it enhances parental participation in school affairs.

It is clear from the above that the bulk of the resources come from the central governments. It also appears that the education sector in different countries implement different forms of decentralisation. According to Farooqi (2013) for decentralization to be successful, it needs firstly the commitment of the political and administrative leadership to overcome the hurdles of the implementation phase and secondly, significant attention should be paid to local contingency factors. Therefore, based on the empirical literature it cannot be assumed that empowerment and participation will automatically lead to responsive service delivery or better accountability arrangements. For this to happen, participation needs to be effective. It is not enough that citizen voice should be encouraged, it needs to be heard by those who hold the government accountable and translated into policy outcomes (Farooqi, 2013).

The main objective of this paper was to investigate the factors that influences the state of performance in the educational sector of decentralised services in the Regional Councils.

- To assess how changes in accountability mechanisms have in turn improved the performance of the education sector in the Regional Councils.

- To identify external and internal environmental constraints affecting the performance of education and identify potential barriers to achieve the goal of efficient, responsive service delivery.

II.   METHODOLOGY

The paper used a descriptive case study approach to analyse the decentralisation policy on performance in the education sector; hence qualitative research design was adopted. A descriptive case study approach was selected because "it enables the researcher to carefully study the order of events as they occur or to concentrate on identifying the relationships among functions, individuals or entities" (Zikmund, 2000). According to Silverman (2013), qualitative research is the most powerful research in exploring everyday activities that are taken for granted. The researcher used face to face interviews, observation and desk documents analysis to collect data.   Interviews were contacted in a way that encouraged research participants to feel that they could speak freely. It further analysed literature on the topic.

2.1 Research Population:

Research population is generally a large collection of individuals or objects that is the main focus of a scientific query and it is done for the benefit of the population (Castillo, 2009). The target research population for this study consisted of about 4,000 permanent staff members of Regional Councils (including the Directorate of Education).

2.2 Sample Size:

A sample is a portion of the target group or groups. According to Orodho (2008), a sample is a small part of large population, which is thought to be representative of the larger population. The research targeted 30 respondents and they were purposefully selected from all Regional Councils.

2.3 Research Instruments:

The researcher used different research instruments for the purpose of data collection. The following research instruments were used: in-depth face to face interview with key respondents, observation and desk study of relevant documents such as decentralisation guidelines, reports, and articles about decentralisation as well as books were analysed. Structured and open ended questionnaires with definite concrete and pre-determined questions were constructed.

2.4 Data Collection Procedure:

Both primary and secondary data were central to this study. The researcher made use of questionnaires that are both open ended and closed formats, and interviews to capture descriptive primary data. Primary data were sourced from key informants. To supplement primary data, secondary data was considered. Secondary data was sourced from relevant literature, relevant journals, dissertations, newspaper articles, annual reports as well as workshop reports. Informed consent was obtained from the Chief Regional Officer and the selected respondents before personal interviews were conducted.

2.5 Data Analysis:

A Thematic analytical approach was adopted to analyse data for this study. Data was presented through tables and charts and it will be interpreted in narrative form. Face to face interviews were recorded and then transcribed. The researcher classified similar responses and put them into themes and categories. This helped the researcher to examine the interview transcript and documentary notes before identifying the pattern and organising the data into categories.

2.6 Ethical Issues:

The purpose of the research paper was first explained to the participants and only after their consent did they partake in the study. The researcher strived for honesty, confidentiality and anonymity which included keeping the identity of respondents private.

III. CONCLUSION

The findings revealed that there is a little understanding of decentralization policy among participants. The paper found that the insignificant changes noticed mostly on handling and processing of financial matters as well as decision-making on finance issues. Meanwhile there are still a delay in providing educational good and services in the regions. Regarding that capacity building is important for keeping people up to date of any development. The paper revealed that many respondents did not attend any training on decentralization system. The findings from the paper revealed that planning of activities in the regions is done completely separately by two different offices such as Directorate of Education and Regional Council.

The result of the findings further revealed the dual reporting lines and communication among staff members are both found to be problematic areas during the delegation phase. The findings revealed that education services delivered through different means of communications. Various issues were revealed which considered as the main contributing factors and major challenges that impacting the effectiveness of service delivery in the regions. Issues as such as functions are not yet decentralized, better performance, insufficient funds,

shortage of transport, lack of monitoring of planning activities, unavailability of regional council staff members as well as involvement of stakeholders to executing their functions.

If decentralization is designed and implemented well, decentralization has the potential to improve service delivery and education quality (Winkler, 2005).

According to Farooqi (2013) for decentralization to be successful, it needs firstly the commitment of the political and administrative leadership to overcome the hurdles of the implementation phase and secondly, significant attention should be paid to local contingency factors.

Therefore, based on the empirical literature it cannot be assumed that empowerment and participation will automatically lead to responsive service delivery or better accountability arrangements. For this to happen, participation needs to be effective. It is not enough that citizen voice should be encouraged, it needs to be heard by those who hold the government accountable and translated into policy outcomes (Farooqi, 2013).

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