ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE	OPEN ACCESS

DECENTRALIZATION OF SCHOOLS BY DEFAULT: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN COMMUNITY SCHOOLS ON THE COPPER-BELT PROVINCE OF ZAMBIA

*Dominic Yumba, Emmy H. Mbozi and Kalisto Kalimaposo

University of Zambia, Lusaka, Zambia

ABSTRACT

This article is an extract from the study: 'Decentralization and Quality Education in Community Schools on the Coper-belt Province' which sought to investigate the decentralized structural and administrative challenges, as well as opportunities faced by community schools. A descriptive survey design was used in this study. Purposive sampling was used to select 45 head teachers, two District Education Board Secretaries, two District Resource Centre Coordinators and the Chief of Party of Education Development Centre, Time To Learn Project USAID, Zambia. The findings in relation to the main research question include; lack of qualified teachers, limited infrastructure and sometimes of poor quality, irregular attendance of the learners, lack of interest in education by learners, sometimes parents' ignorance on their boundaries of operations. Frequent dismissal of volunteer teachers, conflict between governments and parents' appointed teachers. On the other hand, the research established that there were a number of opportunities that characterized community schools such as: active parental involvement in the education of the children, provision of pedagogical skills and continuing professional development to the teachers in collaboration with government schools, short courses in management skills to parent community school committees, and collaboration with non-governmental organizations, Ministry of General Education and other stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION

When Zambia got its independence from Britain in 1964 one of its main objectives was to develop its educational system. The high demand for education resulted in the construction of many primary and secondary schools in all districts. The government took over most of the schools that were run by missionaries and other stake holders (NGOs, Individuals and Business houses) and introduced a centralized and free education system under the Ministry of Education (Kelly 1999). One of the reasons which prompted the government to take over most of these schools was that it wanted to promote equality of education opportunity for all without regard to race, tribe, or religious inclinations (Kelly, 1999). However, during the mid-1970s the Zambian economy started declining because of a major slump (fall) in world market of copper, which was Zambia's major export and source of projects and education (Carmody 2013). As a result of this, the government started experiencing financial difficulties in the running of education,

there by failing to provide decent education in terms of both quantity and quality that the citizens of the country wanted (Mwanakatwe 2013). Following the raised financial constraints above, the Zambian government was prompted to restore partnerships in educational provision which led to the introduction of a policy in education to establish new and revitalized partnerships involving all providers of education at all levels: Partnership between the Ministry of Education and non-governmental organizations, private sector, local communities, religious groups, families and individuals (Carmody: 2013). This partnership was also aimed at promoting decentralization a term which in this context is used to refer to the devolution of power from the central government to the local level in districts up to the school level NDP (2002). To improve quality education in Zambia, a related process of decentralization in education in Zambia was established in form of education boards. This resulted into four main providers of education to come on board, the government, independent for profit (Private Schools), grant aided schools and community schools (Chondoka, 2004). The concept of community schools in Zambia is founded on the principle of partnership with the government in an attempt to

Corresponding author: **Dominic Yumba**
University of Zambia, Lusaka, Zambia

widen education opportunities for every Zambian child. A community school in Zambia is a community based, owned and managed, institution of learning that meets the primary needs of pupils, who for a number of reasons cannot access public schools (ZCSS n.d., 1). The concept of community schools was initiated by Dr. Janice Stevens who in partnership with the Catholic Sisters of Charity opened the first registered 'Misisi Open Community school' in 1992 in Misisi compound in Lusaka district, (Carmody, 2004). More of such schools were opened within a short space of time in the district and in other districts of Lusaka province. Today, Community schools are among the main providers of primary education in Zambia and at the moment, there are about 3000 Community schools dotted all over Zambia delivering education to approximately 600,000 students statistical Bulletin (2010). Statistically, this means that most of the pupils enrolled in the primary schools 20% are absolved by community schools Swazi (2012). On the Copper-belt, community schools contribute 12.62% given that of the 598,722 total populations of pupils at the primary school level, 75,575 are in community schools (Unene, 2013). This article focuses on the decentralized structural and administrative challenges faced by community schools on the Copper-belt Province. For better understanding of the discussion the words challenge and opportunity are well defined below. A challenge is a situation of being faced with something that needs great mental or physical effort in order to be done successfully. Casson (1982) defines, "opportunities as those situations, in which new goods, and services, raw materials and organizational methods can be introduced and sold at a greater prize than their cost of production."

Statement of the Problem: Community schools in Zambia have been seen as an alternative to public schools in the provision of primary education. Most of these schools are set up, organized and managed by the communities through the Parent School Community Committees. In case of Zambia, community schools are decentralized by default in the sense that they were not decentralized by design. The study sought to investigate decentralized structural and administrative challenges, opportunities faced by community schools

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the decentralization of schools by default: administrative challenges and opportunities faced in community schools on the Copper-belt province.

The research question

What are the decentralized administrative challenges and opportunities found in community schools?

Decentralization of Community Schools in Zambia

There are three common meanings of decentralization. First Deconcentration, secondly Delegation and thirdly Devolution. The term decentralization as used in the Zambian context refers to the devolution of power from the central government to the local level in districts up to the school level (National Development Policy, 2002). There are three main types of decentralization; Deconcentration, Delegation and Devolution. Deconcentration is the transfer of functions and resources to lower level units of the same administrative system while authority over decision-making and use of resource remains with the Centre (i.e. from headquarters of an institution or

administrative system to the lover level) (National Development Policy, 2002: iv). Delegation is a transfer of functions and resources to a subordinate authority with the capacity to act on behalf of the superior authority without a formal transfer of authority in the same structure. However, the lower office will be required to consult the higher office on matters that require decision-making. Devolution is the transfer of some powers and authority, functions and resources by legal and constitutional provisions to a lower level. The transfer is within formal political structures and is institutionalized by constitutional means**.** Privatization is the divestiture of state interests in public enterprises and the subsequent sale of such to private sector for example when a Parastatal departmental store is sold off to shareholders. When it comes to public administration, privatization cannot be applied since local authorities and related public offices cannot be privatized (NDP 2002: v).

Decentralization has been recognized by many education systems in Africa to be better than the popular highly centralized bureaucracies with most functions carried out directly by the Central Government (Bloomer, 1991). Many countries in Africa are planning on how public schools can be decentralized for better delivery of education (Florestal, 1997). Decentralization encourages administrators to find solutions to challenges right there and then without referring problems to be solved by the central office or any other office. Decentralization serves on time and resources; it does not entertain procrastination or bureaucracy. Community Schools have a lot to offer to other institutions of learning in terms of experience, of how they have managed to survive up to this time as institutions supplementing government's efforts in providing education. Government or public schools can learn a lot from Community Schools on how to go about decentralization and manage the schools amidst challenges with meager resources and what kind of opportunities they face. Community Schools have a lot to offer to other institutions of learning in terms of experience, of how they have managed to survive up to this time as institutions supplementing government's efforts in providing education.

Community Schools as part of the Decentralization Process: Community schools in their current state are decentralized by default (not by design) According Frischkorn and Falconer-Stout (2016:7) each community school, "is managed and organized by the Parent Community School Committee, composed of parents, community, school head teacher and teachers and prominent community members." A community school is an educational institution that is community based, owned and managed by the community (Chondoka and Subulwa, 2004). The PCSCs have been running these community schools autonomously without outside interferences. (Kalemba 2013:60) Observes that the PCSC-based system promotes ownership and community contribution to community schools and represents a key attribute of community schools. Active PCSCs sensitized parents on the importance of education, identified and recruited orphans and vulnerable children to attend school, mobilized parents and community members to support construction and rehabilitation of school infrastructure and organized community members to attend school meetings. Community Schools since their creation up to this time, have managed to survive through the management of Parents Community School Committees. For its theoretical framework the study used right-based approach to education and a School-

Family-Community Partnership Model by Joyce Epstein. The goal of a human rights-based approach to education is simple: to assure every child a quality education that respects and promotes her or his right to dignity and optimum development (UNICEF 2007:1).
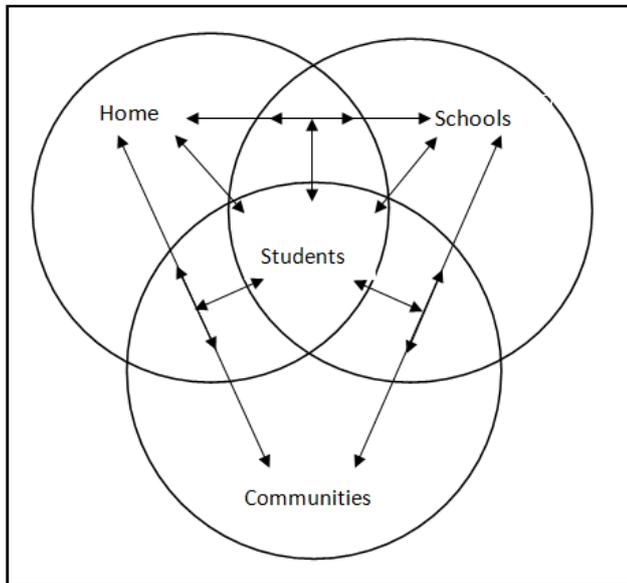
Figure 1. Shows Joyce Epstein model school-home-community partnership

Joyce Epstein model talks about school, family and community partnership as important to the education of the child. The school, family and the community should work hand in hand so that the child's welfare and education are enhanced (Joyce Epstein, 2002).

INTERNATIONAL EVIDENCE OF THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY SCHOOLS IN EDUCATIONAL PROVISION

In almost all African countries, community schools provide education to the underprivileged (Glassman, 2007). In the last 15 years community schools have become an important part of education landscape in sub-Saharan Africa (Karla Yoder, 2002). To mention just a few countries, in Togo, Community Schools came into existence in the colonial era and they were referred to by the Government as underground schools until 1995. Community Schools were officially recognized by the Government of Togo in 1997 as schools which came into existence as a result of the initiative of the Communities (Karla Yoder, 2002). After their being recognized by the government, inspectors of schools were instructed to count them, facilitate the training of teachers and provide material support where possible (Karla Yoder, 2002). In Mali, Community schools are defined as private schools created and managed by members of communities, to offer or provide basic education to underprivileged children, which is the common feature of all community schools in Africa. Community Schools in Mali follow the official curriculum and community school guidelines laid down by the Government. In Senegal, Tanzania, Malawi and Zambia and almost in all African countries one thing is common, community schools caters mainly for underprivileged learners and supplement governments efforts in the provision of primary education. Chondoka and Subulwa (2004) did a study on the Evaluation of the Spark Curriculum in Community Schools in Zambia 2000-2004. He discussed the curriculum that was used in the

community schools known as SPARK (Skills, Participation, Access to Relevant Knowledge).

The SPARK curriculum was tailored for the older children that were enrolled in the community schools (Chondoka and Subulwa, 2004:2). Swazi et al (2012) also conducted a study for Zambia Open Community Schools on Harmonization of Training Manuals for Orientation of Untrained community school teachers in Zambia. In his report he observed that the use of different manual reports posed a lot of challenges in the provision of quality teaching and learning (Swazi et al 2012). Swazi et al (2012: 11) noted that… respondents stated that the lesson plan formats that were taught in the manuals were different from those found in other community and government schools. For example, CHANGES2 had their own format while some DRCCs had their own as well. Nkosha and Mwanza too, conducted a study on Quality of Basic Education Provide by the rural Community and Regular Schools in the Northern Province of Zambia and concluded that neither community nor regular basic schools provided what may be referred to as good quality education (Nkosha and Mwanza 2009:19).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This segment discusses the methodology that was used to collect data. A descriptive survey design or normative was used to carry out the research which is the most appropriate for obtaining in-depth information from the people. The sample size included 45 head teachers of community schools, 2 District Education Board Secretaries, 2 District Resource Center Coordinators and Chief of Party of Education Development Center Time to Learn Project at USAID, Zambia. The study employed purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling technique is also known as judgemental, selective or subjective sampling which depends on the judgement of the researcher when it comes to choosing of units that are to be included in the study Sidhu (2013). Data was collected using questionnaires and interview guides. These instruments were used to collect data from head teachers, District Education Board Secretaries (DEBS), District Resource Center Coordinator (DRCC) and from the Chief of Party of Education Development Center Time To Learn Project Zambia under USAID.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section provides findings in relation to the focus of the article include:

Challenges faced by Community Schools: Community schools in Zambia face a number of challenges which included language limitations, limited financial resources, inconsistence in the opening and closing dates of schools, lack of qualified staff and incapacity of retaining of qualified staff, lack of uniformity (standardization) and parents community school committees (PCSCs) abuse of authority.

Opportunities experienced by Community Schools: Community schools apart from encountering a lot of challenges also experienced a good share of opportunities such as active participation of parents in the pupils' education (career talk during open and homework policy), in infrastructure building, communities participate in planning, budgeting and mobilizing resources for projects, teachers are

availed opportunities to be taught pedagogical skills, management skills to PCSCs and opportunities working with non-governmental organizations. The challenges and opportunities are discussed below.

Challenges

Language limitations: The new curriculums' policy encourages one to teach in the local language from grade 1 to grade 4. Language of instruction from grades 1-4 in all learning areas will be in familiar language, while English will be an official language of instruction from Grade 5 upwards (MESVTEE 2013:30). As a result teachers who are not indigenous or not conversant with the language are compelled to learn the local language for them to teach effectively.

"the community schools do not have the monopoly to choose their language of instruction but follow what the Ministry of General Education has identified as a regional language for that area", (Chief of Party Time to Learn USAID).

Limited Financial Resources: The participants revealed that there was a high level of attrition rate because many of the teachers in community schools did not last long as a result of poor conditions of service. For example; they worked for a long time without any salary or allowances because the communities on whom the teachers depended upon could not afford to support them (Chief of Party Time to Learn). Other than that, the infrastructure was in a poor state that did not provide a conducive learning environment.

That aside limited financial resources led to inadequate teaching and learning materials that made both teaching and learning extremely difficult, (Head teachers).

Inconsistence in the opening and closing dates: Some community schools were also not consistent in the opening and closing dates and as a result they were referred to as seasonal schools. In other parts of the country where there are no caterpillars but fish, children leave school and go onto the lake to help their parents catch fish only return when the government institutes a fish ban or some measures are put in place by the school authorities.

"*They can open and close at any time of the year, for example some schools close during caterpillar season because parents want their children to help in harvesting caterpillars,"* (Chief of Party Time to Learn).

"*Some economic activities that happen in a certain area distract the learner's attention from education,*" (Head teachers).

Lack of qualified staff and the incapacity of retaining of qualified staff

Community schools usually operated without qualified staff as most of them worked as volunteers to assist with some kind of knowledge transmission. "*At the same time even if there were some teachers who had the qualification, the poor working conditions did not allow those teachers to work for a long time as they sought greener pasture whenever opportunities arose",* (The DEBS and Head teachers).

Lack of Uniformity

They would also like to manage the schools on their terms instead of following the laid down procedures in the operation

guidelines for community schools booklet of 2007. The DRCCs indicted that according to operational guidelines for community schools functions of all stakeholders namely learner, parents/community members, traditional leaders and community school head teachers and teachers are well presented.

"*Other challenges were that of frictions between the teachers seconded to community schools by the government and the volunteer teachers, at times even with the PCSCs who fear of being displaced",* (DRCCs)

PCSCs abuse of authority

Sometime community schools experienced were characterized by abuse of authority which led to termination of teachers' services without proper reasons. This lack of professionalism negatively impacted on the quality of education because it did not motivate teachers and in turn, both teaching and learning were affected. There was lack of professionalism in the leadership of community schools which negatively affects teaching and learning (The DEBS and DRCCs).

Opportunities

Parents' Motivation to participate in the education of their children

The research revealed that among the opportunities surrounding community schools were that parents were given chance to participate in the education of their children by participating in building infrastructure and participating in resource mobilization. Some parents participate in career talk during open days and at home encourage their children to write home work. This is possible because community schools believe in home, community and school partnership. The PCSC also have an opportunity to monitor the progress of the learners in the class as they learn. Decentralization encourages all stakeholders PCSC, NGOs and the teachers to work together for the benefit of the child. Schools which function most satisfactorily are those where there is a good partnership between the home, community and the school. The response from the PCSC:

"Parents were doing everything possible to make sure that their children were educated. The community gets involved in the education of their children by putting in place support such as infrastructure, building new classroom blocks as well as providing teaching and learning materials**"**

Parents have opportunity to come on board and help their children to be educated. Parents with specialized skills can be invited by the school administration to give career motivational talks about their specialized skills. Parent's participation in education will be directed towards meeting three objectives;

- Educational provision
- School improvement
- Strengthening school community linkages

Educational provision involves increasing school places by expanding the educational system through community resources. Parents have opportunities to participate in education through construction of school buildings,

management of schools, and maintenance of classrooms and provision of school furniture (Kelly, 1999:222). They also participate in improving the school community linkages to narrow the gap between the school and its community (Kelly, 1999).

Improving efficiency and promoting transparency, accountability and responsiveness of service: Community schools encouraged stakeholders to follow priorities, encouraged participation and improved quality education in the schools. They also helped the government to offload some of its fiscal burden of education service provision. Since Community schools started they are organized and managed by the local communities and for their resources they depend on themselves. For the schools to stay afloat they set their priorities right, they are accountable to each other and encourage participation of everyone in the community in the provision of education. They contribute their personal resources and time for betterment of their schools. Community schools have survived up to this time because of team effort among members of the communities.
"community schools provide room for transparency because the communities as stakeholders keep an eye on all the activities that take place in school" (Head teachers).

Communities have opportunities of planning, budgeting and mobilizing resources for school projects

The PCSCs had opportunities of planning, budgeting and mobilizing resources for projects, carrying the vision of what they would like to see at their school, opportunity of teachers being taught pedagogical skills and management skills to the PCSC and an opportunity working with NGOs, ZOC, and other cooperating partners

"All the stakeholders in Community schools have opportunities to plan, budget and organize resources where required because they are interested in the success of the institutions" (DEBS)

Partnership with non-governmental Organization

Community Schools through their being decentralized, to survive have opted to an open door policy, in that they are ready to work with anyone in the Government, Non-Governmental Organizations and well-wishers to the benefit of the underprivileged learner. They are also involved in carrying the vision of what they would like to see done in their schools when working in partnership with the Non-Governmental organizations such as Time to Learn the USAID Project, Zambia Open Community School Secretariat and the Flemish Association for Development Cooperation and Technical Assistance (VVOB) and other stake-holders and well-wishers. According to DEBS and DRCCs NGOs, provide technical support or capacity building to improve quality of teaching and learning. Parents have been availed opportunities to share their skills and experiences with their children through open days and on others days as per arrangement by the Parent Community School Committees and the school. According to Epstein's theory of School, Family and Community Partnerships community schools encourage Parents to participate in the education of the child through a partnership, teachers, administrators and the community that create more family-like schools. A family-like school identifies the individuality of every child and makes the child special and

part of the education system Epstein (2002). Some of the opportunities community schools enjoy apart from the ones mentioned above are having workshops and Continuing Professional Development for teachers to improve their pedagogical skills. They also hold workshops for the PCSCs to improve their managerial skills in the running of the schools. At the same time meeting high profile people like government officials from the MOGE, NGOs and from other stake holders.

Alternative models to public schools: Community schools have proved to be an effective alternative model of schools to public schools despite all the challenges they pass through, (Head teachers). These schools on the other hand act as small rivers supplying water into big rivers that is learners graduate from community schools to the secondary public schools to continue their education.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion: With reference to the focus of the article the researcher concludes that decentralization as revealed from the experiences of the community schools encourages ingenuity and improves the quality of management, particularly at local level. In a system, that is highly centralized, key figures such as head teachers are denied decision making opportunities and frequently have little, if any, management training. Their quality of management is, therefore, not surprisingly, often poor Kelly (1999:243). A well-tailored system of decentralized management promotes accountability. Understanding the particular roles of central government, local government, school management and other agencies makes it possible to set suitable targets for each (Bloomer, 1991). For example, in community schools it was possible to deal with almost all challenges right there and then since there was no bureaucracy such as the PCSC being able to hire and terminate services of erring teachers. However, the researcher is of the view that decentralization needs a strong commitment of administrative leadership for it to succeed. Challenges are inevitable if the leadership is not committed, focused and transparent to the community. It also depends on interaction of various coalitions within the sector. Furthermore, decentralization requires putting a lot of things in place because greater autonomy implies greater variety. There should be a mechanism or system put in place to check in considerable detail the expected standards of decentralization in the public schools. A well-defined policy framework is thus an indispensable element of a decentralized system (Bloomer, 1991). A Community School is an example of an autonomous successful decentralized school. Public schools can learn a lot from community schools in terms of improvisation, commitment of teachers to work and managing of schools with less or no support from the government. Decentralization promotes critical thinking and releases human potential among the players. People respond to increase opportunities to use their talents and energies productively (Bloomer 1991).

Recommendations

The following are some of the recommendations:

- The Ministry of General Education should be organizing time and again management workshops for the head teachers and PCSC for smooth running of the schools. It should also consider mentoring volunteer teachers and PCSCs by attaching them to nearby schools in the Zones.

- The Ministry of General Education should consider giving grants in form of Cash Transfer directly to Community Schools in order to help them procure teaching and learning aids.
- The government should come in to assist the community schools in consolidating the by-default decentralization and use the Community Schools as models of decentralized schools for all government primary schools to appreciate.
- The government in collaboration with stake-holders should hold sensitization meetings for other schools to learn from community schools on how they have managed to be successful in providing education amidst the challenges.

REFERENCES

Bloomer, K. 1991. *Decentralizing of Education System.* London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

Chilobe, C, C. 2011. *The Factors that affect the running of rural Community Schools in Gwembe District,* Masters' Dessertation, University of Zambia, Lusaka.

Chondoka, Y. and Subulwa, C. 2001. *Evaluation of Spark Curriculum in Community Schools in Zambia,* 2000 – 2004. Lusaka: UNICEF.

Epstein, L. J. 2002. *School, Family and Community Partnerships*. London. Corwin Press,Inc.

Ghosh, B.N. 2013. *Scientific Methods and Social Research.* New Delhi. Sterling.

Kelly M. J. 1996. *The Origins and Development of Education.* Lusaka: Image Publishers Limited.

Kochhar, S. K. 2014. *Methods and Techniques of Teaching.* New Delhi. Sterling Publishers.

Mwanakatwe, J. M. 2013. *The growth of education in Zambia since independence*. Lusaka: Oxford University Press.

Rebecca, F. and Zachariah, J. Falconer-Stout, 2016. *Ensuring Inclusive and Quality Education for all: A Comprehensive Review of Community Schools in Zambia*. Lusaka Time To Learn.

Sidhu, S. K. 2013. *Methodology of Research in Education.* New Delhi. Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd.

The national Decentralization Policy (NDP) 2002. *Towards Empowering the People*: Lusaka. Office of the President.

Unene, G. 2013. *Time to Learn Review and Planning Meeting.* Ndola. Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education.

UNICEF 2007. *a Human Right-Based Approach to Education for All*. New York. UNICEF.

www.businessdictionary.com/definition/delegation.

Yolande Miller-Grandvaux, 2002. *A Literature Review of Community Schools in Africa:* USAID. Bureau for Africa, Office of Sustainable Development.

****