The Political Economy of Decentralisation of Education in West Africa: A Review

**Abstract:** This study reviews the decentralisation of education in six West African countries during 1980-2005 using a dual conceptual framework of systems theory of public policy and political bargaining model of management. The study notes that in many respects, decentralisation of education has been more spatial than substantial, essentially moving responsibilities for decision and operation a peg or two down but withholding authorities at the central level. The basic decision making for educational service delivery has been mainly transferred within the same legal entity, signalling the strength of deconcentration as the main mode of decentralisation in West Africa. These countries’ tools and techniques to organise school work and acquire and allocate resources to achieve educational goals are invariably based on the bureaucratic and flexible models of educational administration undergirded by a national governance model that is by and large monocentric and nurtures verticality. Thus, constrained by a political mindset that by tradition prefers physicality to functionality in local government enterprise and undermined by the absence of appropriate knowledge infrastructure for an advanced economy, decentralisation of education in West Africa more often than not stretches back into the past to define confinement rather than inspire refinement. To their credit, Nigeria, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Cote d’Ivoire, Mali and Senegal have dedicated capital to restructure their education systems and thus fundamentally created the pressure for change by virtue of decentralisation. But unless funds follow functions religiously and central dominance gives way to local prominence generously, the prospects for leveraging the impact of decentralisation on educational flexibility and quality will remain modest at best.

**Keywords:** Political Economy, Decentralisation, Education, Governance, Autonomy, Flexibility, Quality.

**INTRODUCTION**

Countries across the world have made fervent attempts to translate into practice the catchphrase of “decentralisation”, the “transference of control from the central to lower levels of a system” (Edwards & DeMathews, 2014: 2). Nigeria, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Cote d’Ivoire, Mali and Senegal have sought to decentralise their education systems in West Africa as a popular public sector reform aimed at realising greater “flexibility and quality of education” (Holler-Neyra, 2013: 5). This drive is meant to enhance school autonomy and local governance through more robust service delivery and relocating substantial political power and financial control to lower levels of decision and operation (Winkler & Yeo, 2007).

This conceptual paper reviews their endeavours between 1980-2005 from an inter-country perspective to examine how decentralisation of education has been conceptualised, pursued and measured. In particular, this study intends to “take a retrospective look at the achievements, [the] opportunities, and also the constraints, and risks characterising” decentralisation of education in the six country case studies (Kouraogo & Dianda, 2008: 23).

The selected countries are among the seven largest in West Africa and, therefore, provide a political economy milieu of educational decentralisation as they strive to “broadcast authority over harsh and sparsely inhabited territories” in the main. These countries are a blend of Anglophone and Francophone Africa; and also share a common feature of combating poverty under the stresses of fragility in their democratic dispensation (Ngaruko, 2003: 134; Eyoh & Stren, 2007; Brosio, 2000).
The description and argumentation in this paper spring from the theoretical lens of the study and a review of conventional notions of decentralisation of education in the next two sections. These are duly followed by two more sections on comparative analysis of the selected country cases and their prevailing conditions with respect to the correlates of effective decentralisation. A sparing section then serves the purpose of concluding this study.

STUDY METHODS

Decentralisation is, in the larger scheme of things, a redistributive policy, deciding on large-scale undertakings like social welfare and educational provision in a manner that attempts to balance relations between categories in a given population (Mogga, 2017). It is, therefore, pertinent that the theoretical outline to interrogate the decentralisation of education in the six selected countries of West Africa should sit across two frames: systems theory of public policy and political bargaining model of management (Mogga, 2017).

In 1953 David Easton made known the Systems Theory in his analysis of political systems. Systems are relationships or a whole made up of different parts. Conversely, a political setup that produces and consumes public goods is itself a combination of subgroups doing different parts of the same function that keeps the whole system on course (Mogga, 2017). As M’Nkanata (2008: 10) states, “an organisation is a system of independent structures and functions that work together towards common outcomes.” The advantages of this theory are that it offers a view of the entirety of the policy process and its interactions, and brings to the fore multiple relationships and interests worthy of investigation. Its downside is that it is not up to the mark so as to recognise that the political system itself may wield substantial, independent influence over the content of public policies (Mogga, 2017).

Thus, what is needed, too, is a simple recognition of the fact that the political system should be studied as an independent source of policy output, rather than just as a converter of input (Mogga, 2017). In this regard, enter the Political Bargaining Model. This model was postulated by G. Allison who saw the role of conflict, compromise and bargaining in decision-making by government circles. According to this view, policy is the result of tradeoffs between contenders who are keen to either project or protect their interests. It is thus accommodative and allows actors to welcome both action and inaction. The political bargaining model serves vital purposes in making us understand why governments adopt some policies but avoid action on others (Mogga, 2017). Decentralisation of education in a country context would, therefore, mean educational policies and decisions stem from “a complicated process of bargaining and negotiation over the goals of subunits...” (Ghasemy & Hussin, 2014: 4).

Thus, using this dual frame of reference aids the study to situate decentralisation in educational settings as “micro-politics” (Ghasemy & Hussin, 2014). To that end, the study seeks to achieve the following objectives:
1. Examine the mode of decentralisation of education as a public sector reform in West Africa;
2. Understand the design and implementation of each selected country’s decentralization scheme in terms of area and function considerations; and
3. Assess the claims of the resulting decentralisation on enhancing flexibility and quality of education in Nigeria, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Cote d’Ivoire, Mali and Senegal.

The area of this study is West Africa, a sub-region which contains 17 of Africa’s 54 nations with a total population of about 244,381,000; 42.2% of which was urbanized in 2003. It remains a rapidly urbanizing part of the continent as more than half of its population is poised to live in urban areas between 2015 and 2020. There are, however, wide variations among West African countries with Senegal attaining 49.6% in its level of urbanization while Niger struggles at a low 22.2%. Growth remains narrowly urbanized given poor economic performance, intermittent social upheavals and a pestering of natural disasters (Eyoh & Stren, 2007).

Table 1: Percentage of Urban Population in Africa’s Sub-Regions and the Rest of the World, 1950-2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Africa</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>43.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Africa</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>60.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Africa</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>47.9</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>63.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Africa</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>54.9</td>
<td>58.2</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>71.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Africa</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>54.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Africa</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>53.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>74.1</td>
<td>76.4</td>
<td>82.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>56.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>61.1</td>
<td>73.4</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>83.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>69.9</td>
<td>75.2</td>
<td>76.1</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>83.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td>70.6</td>
<td>70.8</td>
<td>71.3</td>
<td>75.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>62.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eyoh & Stren (2007: 45)

Decentralisation in Context: Evolution and Function

“Decentralisation is any act in which a central government formally cedes powers to actors and institutions at lower levels in a political-administrative and territorial hierarchy” (Ribot, 2002: v).

The world over has been beguiled by the promise of decentralised governments. Many countries and communities have regarded decentralisation as a “miracle recipe” for democratising their institutions and promoting efficient public administration. This is particularly remarkable in the aftermath of the collapse of communism in former Soviet Union where centred-centric control had lost out to democratic control espoused by the liberal polity in the West (Edquist, 2005: 6).

A vast body of literature attests to this fact. A strand of this literature offers a conceptual and definitional journey through the connotations and manifestations of decentralisation itself (Healey & Crouch, 2012). For instance, some scholars make clear distinction between political, administrative and fiscal decentralisation. Others argue that decentralisation would be a futile exercise without moving fiscal responsibilities down to the lower levels as well since this move will help local authorities to execute their new-found powers and functions satisfactorily (Eyoh & Stren, 2007). Another strand runs through the search for evidence about the value of decentralisation as a public sector reform bid (Winkler & Yeo, 2007). A third one gauges how changes in political institutions that are either bureaucratic or are supposed to be representative could alter the manner in which public goods are provided (Clayton et al., 2014). Florestal & Cooper (1997: 5) point out that African experiences™ have been covered as well. For example, “much of this research has focused on the relationship between conflict, ethnic diversity, and public goods provision” in Africa (Florestal & Cooper, 1997: 5).

McGinn and Welsh (cited in Edquist, 2005), have attributed the keen interest in the rise of decentralisation as a reform mantra to three important reasons. The first reason is the triumph of neoliberal market-based values of optimising resource allocation over Keynesian economic thinking in the 1970s and 1980s. For example, Tiebout’s seminal study in 1956 asserted that “a decentralised system of public service delivery maximises efficiency by allowing government services to vary according to the preferences of citizens in different jurisdictions” (Rosser & Fahmi, 2016: 4).
The resulting argument is that centralised education systems are outmoded and cannot feasibly allocate resources efficiently (Edquist, 2005). The second cause is the manner in which globalisation has in economic and financial terms undermined the nation-state with its idea of central government which can barely shake off the cumbersome rigours of public education. Hence, with increased school enrolment, the nation-state is categorically being weighed down by the sheer size of the responsibilities of a centralised education system.

There is, therefore, more demand for leaner and more agile bodies and lower levels of intervention to address the impasse, so to speak. The last straw on the back of the camel is the set of technological benefits that centralised education systems can deploy to cut costs in bureaucracy. This third motive is that central governments can afford to control their lower echelons at little or no cost given the readily available and affordable information technology (Edquist, 2005). In short, decentralisation affords two crucial benefits: “budgeting power at the local level can increase accountability for the provision of public goods......[and] the state can increase revenue mobilisation by tapping resources the centre is incapable of reaching” (Clayton et al., 2014: 4).

A crop of surveys, time-series, cross-sectional and qualitative studies have sought to point out evidence of the potential of decentralisation. In El Salvador, community-run schools for poor children have fared as well as normal public schools in academic achievement even though they access comparatively less resources under a decentralised scheme of EDUCO®. Nicaragua is another Latin American country where a scheme for autonomous schools has yielded substantially positive results whereby more instances of decision making have been recorded than in mainstream public schools, particularly in areas of personnel, school plan and budget (Winkler & Yeo, 2007). Chile’s Decentralisation Act of 1980 has handed over school premises to municipalities instead of the Ministry of Education in Santiago; and in Zimbabwe, churches or district councils own and run most schools. Conversely, France has a decentralised education system where schools are autonomous but are headed by principals appointed by Paris at the centre; while sub-national levels contend with providing funds to maintain these schools (Florestal & Cooper, 1997).

Africa has had a long story of decentralisation. The colonial era drew up decentralised governments to principally “manage Africans under administrative rule rather than to enfranchise them.” Thus, France christened the exercise as “association” while Britain preferred the designation of “indirect rule.” Most importantly, colonial-era decentralisation institutionally polarized the colonies into fortes of customary laws mainly for “natives” and civil laws for the Europeans and cohorts of natives in urban colonial Africa (Ribot, 2002: 4). Self-government after independence proved elusive on account of colonial disenfranchisement compounded by post-independence elites’ propensity to recentralise by taking over vital functions of lower levels of government such as education, health service, roads and taxes; while using the existing administrative units to bring locals into the orbit of central government (Ribot, 2002).

This tendency was further entrenched by the rise of single-party statehood and socialism as a form of government; thus, denying a local government practice based on elections. African countries explicitly preferred deconcentration as a mode of decentralisation to secure and nurture “verticality” (Ribot, 2002: 5). For Africa, decentralisation has come in “waves”, making its first real landfall just in the lead-up to independence around the late 1940s and early 1960s. This period witnessed the establishment of lower tiers of government jointly by colonialists and nationalists in an attempt to cut delivery of local services according to the master model in the European metropole (Eyoh & Stren, 2007).

The second wave hit the shores of African administrative set-up right after independence during which governments sought earnestly to instil notions of “central planning” and “national integration” to justify a recentralisation trend that had come to rob lower tiers of their autonomy. Under the pretext of stifling anti-national regional and local sentiments, African governments hijacked the powers and functions of local authorities and maintained administrative initiative as a coveted prize (Eyoh & Stren, 2007).

As a consequence, administrative maladies came to be solely and strongly associated with the centre. This state of affairs forced the third wave, more like a tsunami than anything else. It swept over African countries in the late 1970s and early 1980s in a bid to reverse the palpable “over-centralisation” propagated by military rule, one-party political systems and the popular notion of planning change from the “centre”. A concerted effort emerged to get governments “close to the people”.

The civil society led the charge mainly in urban Africa, buoyed by the growing calls to (re)democratise Africa around mid-1980s when the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) were introduced. This period includes present-day state of affairs in African decentralisation. Many countries have plainly undertaken reforms to (re)decentralise, so to speak (Eyoh & Stren, 2007: 4).

A great number of African countries have enshrined decentralisation in their national constitutions. Ethiopia is a prime example of a country that has been reshaped under a new federal dispensation in the 1990s to permanently transfer powers and
responsibilities for education to lower levels. For example, its BESO scheme achieved an initial upward climb in enrolment rates of above 40% for basic education in just 4 years after launch. The strategy hinged on allocating more resources directly to schools to carry out their improvement plans under the watchful gaze of empowered community involvement (Winkler & Yeo, 2007).

South Africa is very much like Ethiopia in adopting a federal or quasi-federal system to achieve decentralisation as an institutional creativity (Brosio, 2000). Sierra Leone has had quite an encounter, too. A process of decentralisation started in 2000 and resulted into the Local Government Act of 2004 which devolves most of the powers of the centre in Freetown to newly created local councils (Clayton et al., 2014). As is the trend, Mali, Madagascar and Senegal have each inserted a tier in between the centre and the periphery in an attempt to respond to popular demands for greater area autonomy and even-handed distribution of national wealth (Brosio, 2000).

Tanzania pulled off an even greater feat when it relocated its capital city to Dodoma in 1973 to symbolise a decentralised system with a spatial centre closer to the masses than coastal Dar el Salaam could otherwise afford (Eyoh & Stren, 2007). Elsewhere in the continent, Zambia, Botswana, Uganda, Kenya and others have followed suit and decentralised. However, little has changed in many African countries by way of substantial transfer of power and finance to local levels. The question of poor skills exhibited by local government personnel has not been addressed adequately, too (Eyoh & Stren, 2007).

Decentralisation remains a cherished goal in West Africa where governments “find it difficult to capitalize on political goods.” The challenge emanates from the inherited colonial nation-state which is a non-natural formation of self-governance in Africa (Pride et al., 2017:93). The Francophone part of West Africa had an experience with decentralisation dating back to at least 1917 and manifesting in the aftermath of World Wars I & II, right after independence in the 1960s and in the present moment (Ribot, 2002).

The bearing of this enchantment is that decentralisation has altered the “polito-administrative stakes in local arenas across West Africa; recast the primacy of urbanity and modern education; attempted to marry legality and legitimacy; and reinvented the local to be able to mobilise it from a top-down and highly authoritarian state with its colonial legacy” (Pride et al., 2017: 98).

The proponents of decentralisation hold that it renders education more responsive, efficient and accountable as a public good (Holler-Neyra, 2013). The basic idea is to provide the grassroots with greater scope to hold their local government accountable in the provision of public goods. As Winkler & Yeo (2007) contend, a centralised system of education offers limited prospects for citizens’ participation in their children’s education, schools may have little incentives to consistently provide information on their performance, and political leaders may lack the element of living up to their commitments to meet legislative goals and executive objectives for education provision.

![Figure 2: Correlates of Effective Decentralisation](image-url)
To remove these hurdles, education has to be decentralised on three important counts: transferring powers to make decisions from the centre to lower government levels on a permanent basis (devolution); reallocating decision making responsibilities to lower levels while retaining overall control at the centre in the education bureaucracy (deconcentration); or moving down administrative and legal responsibilities to school governing bodies that are either elected or appointed (delegation). It is hoped that decentralisation as such will facilitate initially the expansion of coverage and, later on, critically enhance quality in education provision (Winkler & Yeo, 2007). While there are inter-country variations, decentralisation of education in West Africa has been aimed at initiating and embodying robust national administrative reforms that utilise and save money (efficiency); granting locals more power in controlling education (effectiveness); and garnering sustained funding (financing) for improving quality. The thrust is to lower unit costs of education by addressing local peculiarities of dissimilar communities (Edquist, 2005).

Summing up the review of literature, there is considerable evidence that “the key aspects of education decentralisation require and are influenced by larger governmental decentralisation initiatives.” It is equally fair to add that education decentralisation has had mixed results with regard to its impact on high-quality education (Healey & Crouch, 2012). There are no quick fixes, too, when it comes to decentralising school systems successfully. There is need for a painstaking transformation at behavioural and institutional levels (Florestal & Cooper, 1997). In many respects, decentralisation of education has been more spatial than crucial, essentially moving responsibilities a peg or two below but withholding authorities at the central level (Edquist, 2005).

**The Mode of Education Decentralisation in West Africa**

The national constitutions of Nigeria, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Cote d’Ivoire, Mali and Senegal make explicit provisions for free and compulsory primary schooling as well as post-primary education. In particular, “national and state legislatures enact laws to govern the provision of basic education, and governments and local administrations adopt regulations to implement these laws” (Florestal & Cooper, 1997: vii).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>National (Million)</th>
<th>Regional</th>
<th>Sub-Regional</th>
<th>Local</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>106.41</td>
<td>2,955,833</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>137,481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>19.16</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>174,182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>10.68</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,068,000</td>
<td>98,889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cote d’Ivoire</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>72,538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>10.69</td>
<td>1,336,250</td>
<td>232,391</td>
<td>15,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>9.28</td>
<td>928,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>154,667</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Brosio (2000: 19)

A centralised system of education would normally be in charge of the overall policy direction and management, including training and rewarding teachers and support staff. It would also regulate all facets of the system such as facilities, funding, personnel, teachers, and students; but sparingly assign some powers to school functionaries to run schools on a daily basis. While the imperative for this transfer of power springs from the fact that certain technical and physical matters could only be addressed at the local level, usually, lower tiers like schools do not have a wider scope for initiative in a centralised system. It is the decentralised system of education that caters to broader scope for initiative. In the parlance of decentralisation, this is referred to as autonomy which is “characterised by the exercise of substantial power at the local level, subject to some limited control by the central government” (Florestal & Cooper, 1997: 1).

Nigeria got off to a bumpy start with a sporadic process of decentralisation in the 1970s, electing local governments in 1976 and 1983 (Ribot, 2002). Its mode of decentralisation was devolution, particularly in 1976 during which the most populous country on the continent of Africa permanently transferred to its elected local councils the powers to enforce the law, maintain roads and bridges, take charge of rural & agricultural development, and provide health care, housing and water services (Ribot, 2002). Each of Nigeria’s 36 states has its own state law for education and a peculiar set of administrative directives and regulations for implementing the law. While this makes education a function of the country’s composite states, the federal government in Abuja sets the requirements for the states to access federal funds. This is by virtue of the 1992 law which also stipulates that the federal government must pay primary teacher salaries, take charge of constructing and maintaining school buildings for primary education, and set the federal framework for school curriculum (Florestal & Cooper, 1997).

Ghana has had a change of heart following the debacle of coup on the wave of which rode a new military ruling class that was at least rhetorically keen in promoting participatory governance (Eyoh & Stren, 2007: 28). Ghana has charted a path of its own under
the 1993 Local Government Act which assigns the shared responsibility for education to the three layers of local government: the district, municipality and the metropolis. The population size of a district must be 75,000 at minimum; that of a municipality 95,000 as one dense commune; and finally the metropolis must be able to cover a bare minimum of 250,000 to qualify (Florestal & Cooper, 1997). Rawlings set up District Assemblies (DAs) in 1987 but with little power and a big number of their members appointed centrally. Thus, what was packaged as reforms actually led to increased control by the centre in Accra (Ribot, 2002). In the case of decentralising its education system, Ghana designs and controls the curriculum at the central level whereas its DAs take charge of primary and secondary schools at the local level. At the school level, School Management Committees (SMCs) act as an advisory body on managing and supervising school teachers. The country’s mode of decentralisation is, therefore, deconcentration. The basic tenet is to transfer responsibilities from the headquarters in Accra to the metropolis, municipality and district levels (M’Nkanata, 2008).

Burkina Faso has a history of strengthening its local democracy and promoting local development. This approach is not only historical but political. It established elected cells of local government (known as rural communes) following independence in early 1960s (Ribot, 2002). The West African country set off on the path to measured decentralisation following the vote on its constitution in 1991 (Vachon, 2007). In 1994 Burkina Faso defined its niche in decentralisation as one about seeking grassroots democracy and local empowerment (Ribot, 2002: 8). It expanded its municipalities from just 10 before 1982 to 108 thereafter. The scope for initiative was such that 31 of these municipalities were designated as having full powers while the majority 75 enjoyed relatively limited responsibilities for education (Brosio, 2000). In 2004 Burkina Faso adopted the Code for Territorial Communes which was a defining moment for decentralisation as it set up the regions and districts as two main tiers of decentralisation and clearly spelt out the share of tasks and responsibilities to be assigned to urban districts. Those responsibilities include pre-primary, primary education and literacy. Sweeping as it is in its scope and thrust, the Code has however failed to delineate the implementation modalities and the necessary resources to back up the agreed transfer of tasks (Vachon, 2007).

Cote d’Ivoire got independence in the early 1960s and was immediately a promising nation-state in West Africa given its cocoa and the influx of foreign investors. The government chose to concentrate power at Abidjan to the detriment of rural Ivorian people who had no access to state power. In 1999 a coup took place and a civil war ensued during which the military rulers focused on control rather than change. The result was a weak local constituency potential across the entire country. The country has since struggled to decentralise (Pride et al., 2017). The country’s Minister of Education, Pierre Kipre, staged a daring reform agenda between 1993-1999 to address gross school failure and bring onboard the communal element of educational management. He issued two major decrees targeting the school mapping of primary and secondary education, managing private education, and agreeing on the decentralisation of education, including decentralised exams and secondary student registration (Oyeniran, 2017). Cote d’Ivoire considered the 1994 Burkina Faso Conference as a harbinger of power-sharing between its central and local governments. Its approach to the process of decentralising education has thus been pragmatic (Ribot, 2002). In 1995 a Law was promulgated that recognises the right of all Ivorian people to education and equality in education. The Law was the outcrop of a lengthy and successful National Dialogue on the Ivorian School (Oyeniran, 2017).

Figure 3: Government Structure, Cote d’Ivoire

Brosio (2000: 18)
Mali first came up with elected local councils in 1979 but didn’t grant them powers. This, however, changed after the 1994 Burkina Faso Conference on Decentralisation in West Africa during which Mali renewed its faith in decentralisation as “the best available instrument to use in reorganising the state” (Ribot, 2002: 8). But Mali was a very poor country in the world and sought in the early 1990s to politically decentralise so as to combat poverty and undertake grassroots reform efforts. Popular uprisings brought about the establishment of a 3-tier sub-national government structure in 1995 and 1996 (Pride et al., 2017).

It has a decentralised system of education similar to Europe’s old continental model where the central government is effectively in charge of education service provision while sub-national levels of decision and operation are entrusted with only building and maintaining school premises (Brosio, 2000). The pattern of delegating responsibilities to lower levels holds true for other public sectors where Bamako has maintained its political power all the same (Pride et al., 2017).

**Figure 4: Government Structure, Mali**

Senegal instituted elected units of local government since its independence in early 1960s with a declared goal of helping locals participate through direct suffrage. The basic organisation of Senegal’s rural government covers a range of 5 to 50 villages dubbed as ‘rural communes’ (Ribot, 2002). Senegal set the pace for its decentralisation project at the 1994 Burkina Faso Conference during which it reaffirmed the exercise as “a fundamental element of a learning process in democracy and people’s participation in development.” It set up over 317 rural councils (Ribot, 2002: 8).

For all the six countries under review here, the basic decision making for education provision and practice has by and large been “transferred within the same legal entity”. This signals the strength of deconcentration as the main mode of decentralisation in West Africa (Florestal & Cooper, 1997: 2). These countries’ tools or techniques to organise school work and acquire and allocate resources to achieve educational goals were invariably based on the bureaucratic and flexible models of educational administration.

For example, in a clear proof of a bureaucratic appeal, Mali, Cote d’Ivoire, and Senegal decentralised their education systems but retained top-level decisions at the centre and assigned the bottom to “make the directives happen.” On the other hand, Nigeria, Ghana and Burkina Faso sought autonomy in spheres of education with greater flexibility (Eyoh & Stren, 2007; Lemos, 2014: 3).

None of the six countries has, however, sought the market mechanism model because they all do not have a truly knowledge-oriented economy suitable for this particular model of administering education. It is to be recalled, too, that the production model, popular in the Western world in the 19th & early 20th centuries, was not suitable for these countries in West Africa since the model is “premised on industrial revolution” (Lemos, 2014: 4). Given the lack of robust industrialised, knowledge-oriented economies in West Africa, countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Cote d’Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal have sought refuge solely in the shelter of an educational administration model that echoes colonial legacies more than anything else.

The pursuit of decentralisation to “democratise” or “reorganise” the nation-state is an old familiar romance. As Eyoh & Stren (2007: 3) aptly put it, “to the British, local government was a ‘school for democracy’, while for the French; the ‘commune’ was the arena for the exercise of rational civic rights on the part of both urban and rural citizens.” Thus, constrained by the absence of appropriate knowledge infrastructure for an advanced economy, decentralisation of education in West Africa has stretched back into the past to define confinement rather than inspire refinement.
As typified by Cote d’Ivoire, Senegal and Burkina Faso, the focus of decentralisation education in West Africa as of the 1980s has been on the need to democratise, respect diversity and safeguard the rights of national communities. This is a striking departure from the post-independence discourse of public sector reforms centred on prioritising national unity and controlling local communes (Ribot, 2002). According to Eyoh & Stren (2007: 26), the whole thrust has been to “build local self-governing capacities in communities...and increase the ‘decision space’...of local actors in the delivery of services.” This later assertion of the proper task of decentralisation in general and that of education in particular, negates the strong nation-state of the 20th century which was characterised by an insatiable appetite for a centralised structure at the behest of urbanisation which was presumably spreading like wildfire then. But it was the smokescreen of urbanization that paid off in Africa (Edquist, 2005).

It is clear Nigeria has a more determined extensive reform of local government and education as a service for the entire country and in all aspects of governance (Eyoh & Stren, 2007). But the overall prevailing pattern in the six countries is historically influenced by the ruling elite’s predilection for a heavily centralised form of rule propped up by politics of patronage and private accumulation (Eyoh & Stren, 2007). Thus, the distribution of tasks and responsibilities among levels and actors in the six selected countries of West Africa has tended to be structurally unequal. It would seem not enough elbow-room for initiative has been allowed, particularly for the lower levels (Lugaz et al., 2010; Florestal & Cooper, 1997). Thus, while it is easy to say these countries are pro-decentralisation of education, the degree to which this is translated into existence is a valid question.

Implementation Modalities: Area & Function

In this sub-section, we discuss strategies adopted by the six selected countries to decentralise as well as factors influencing local government delivery successes or failures (Lugaz et al., 2010; Mohmand & Loureiro, 2017).

It is important to understand at the onset that structuring an administrative system in a process of decentralisation rests on two essential tenets: area and function (Eyoh & Stren, 2007). Area essentially is the basic principle governing the downward order of physical control of a population such as regions, states, provinces, municipalities or districts. Decentralising service delivery based on the principle of “area” would, therefore, mean more powers are granted to lower jurisdictions to cater to the needs of populations obtaining in their areas.

By contrast, the tenet of “function” accounts for specialised units of service delivery as opposed to physical jurisdictions in structuring administrative work. In the case of decentralisation of education, the prime functional specialisation rests with the Ministry of Education and is cascaded down based on descending technical sophistication. Therefore, “since decentralisation usually involves strengthening some function at a local or intermediate level, when that function is administered by an area jurisdiction, there are bound to be conflicts and tensions” (Eyoh & Stren, 2007: 5).

Structuring education in a decentralised system is thus the interplay of area and function dynamics. Educational administration in contexts like this would be a “process of acquiring and allocating resources for the achievement of predetermined educational goals” (Surya, 2011: 2). The key functions are planning, implementing and controlling; while the key areas which connote physical jurisdiction are human resources, learning resources, and facility and finance.

In decentralising education systems, countries would most probably define the levels of functions (planning, implementing and controlling) against the range of areas (human resources, learning resources, facility and finance) that should be devolved, deconcentrated or delegated respectively. As Healey & Crouch (2012: 4) note, “good design is fundamentally about the proper allocation of detailed functions across the various levels of the system.”

### Table 3: Educational Administration Functions & Areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functions</th>
<th>Areas/Objects (connoting physicality)</th>
<th>Learning Resources</th>
<th>Facility &amp; Finance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Which levels of government plan, implement and control educational personnel, stakeholder community and education service users?</td>
<td>Which levels of government plan, implement and control learning tools such as the curriculum?</td>
<td>Which levels of government plan, implement and control facilities and financing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adopted from Surya (2011: 10)
This table effectively captures key items that a decentralised education system should include in its legislation: students and school choice, teacher employment, certification and academic freedom (human resources); curriculum and instruction, assessment of learning (learning resources); and facilities and funding (facility and finance).

The prime considerations are whether local control may take issue with regard to teacher academic freedom established by law or custom; whether local governments have the power to provide alternative routes to teacher certification in the face of shortage; whether allowances will be made for regional variations in assessing student learning; whether the central government establishes uniform facility standards; and whether local authorities have discretion in the use of funds (Florestal & Cooper, 1997).

There are respective reasons for locating certain functions of a decentralised education system at the centre and in the periphery. This offers a rare glimpse into how inter-jurisdictional spillovers happen and how they can be situated amicably across the central-local divide (Healey & Crouch, 2012).

Table 4: Reasons for Locating Certain Functions Centrally or Locally

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Explanations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Centrally</td>
<td>Economies of scale</td>
<td>Bulk purchases can lead to lower unit costs. Curriculum design and development can be extremely expensive; therefore, economies of scale can be acquired by the development of a national curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National goals</td>
<td>Various learning objectives and performance standards should be developed more centrally to ensure that successful school learners are all educated to the same degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National markets</td>
<td>A country benefits greatly by having a national marketplace for teachers where teacher qualifications mean the same thing nationwide and where salaries are more or less match by qualification level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jurisdictional spillovers</td>
<td>Families who move from one jurisdiction of the country to another need to be assured that their children can easily enrol in a new school and be able to continue their education satisfactorily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Customer satisfaction</td>
<td>Allowing schools to buy what they want and need increases customer satisfaction and overall effectiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locally</td>
<td>Speed of transaction</td>
<td>Many items purchased by the school can be purchased on the very day they are needed or within a week or so if the school is distant from an urban area where supplies can be purchased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subtle forms of information</td>
<td>Certain information can only be acquired and reacted upon at the local level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Characteristics of effective schools</td>
<td>Those functions that help to manifest the characteristics of effective schools should be located at the school level</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Healey & Crouch (2012: 8)

A normative implementation modality will, therefore, define which functions are to be carried out under a central jurisdiction in terms of area coverage; which ones are to be pushed downwards; what type of restructuring (elimination, rearrangement or creation) should be done; which relationships will disappear or surface in the decentralised system; and what legal and practical implications are to be catered for such as redefining the scope of tasks and responsibilities for personnel. These are the considerations we shall explore in each country as we examine their bids for decentralisation of education. Given the protracted nature of change, it won’t be surprising to see these countries proceeding “incrementally and in a contingency-based, experiment-oriented manner” (Healey & Crouch, 2012: 2).

Nigeria had a consultative lead-up to its decentralisation bid during which a wide section of community leaders, civil society actors, government officials and locals deliberated and moderated agreement on transfer of the exact duties to local governments. These responsibilities have been backed up by provisions in the Constitution. In implementing all these, Nigeria has devolved its manpower management to the lowest levels and provided a platform of three national universities to train cadres. A second crucial step has been to restructure all local levels of government across the nation on the basis of population. The third implementation strategy was to secure sources of income for the local governments. Nigeria has in this regard increased the share of its local governments in the pool of national revenues by 20%. In addition, all the country’s 774 local governments are legally entitled to claim 35% of Value Added Tax (Eyoh & Stren, 2007).

Nigeria set up federal specialised entities such as the National Universities Commission (NUC), National Board of Technical Education (NBTE), and National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE). Education Boards/Authorities are in charge of
managing primary schools. Specifically, these boards appoint and discipline teachers. As for secondary schools, they are under Nigeria’s 36 states and managed alongside primary schools via the boards. Secondary schools designated as “federal” exist in all these states and are funded by the federal Ministry of Education through the Federal Pay Offices. In implementing decentralised administration in Ghana, the country’s 110 District Assemblies set up in 1989 were assigned the exclusive role of development and taxation that includes budget preparation and approval. The DAs have been recognised as legal entities capable of legal representation in their own accord and entrusted with making by-laws that take effect upon being endorsed by Ghana’s Minister of Local Government. This initial relinquishing of revenue collection powers to the lower tier took on a more robust form through a provision in the Constitution for 5% of national revenues to be allocated to the District Assembly Common Fund (DACF) (Eyoh & Stren, 2007).

Burkina Faso has since 1995 decentralised its education service delivery. The flagship of this initiative is the Satellite System of Basic Education (SSBE), a participatory community process whereby a local satellite school is set up in a manner responsive to addressing gender equality. The community in any particular area is charged to locate the school site for the initiative, mobilise local hands to construct buildings and recruit teachers within a radius of 17 kms (Ngaruko, 2003). Administration of the country’s primary education has been decentralised by the central Ministry of Education (MEBA) to 13 regional directorates known as DREBA which have further cascaded responsibilities down to 45 provincial directorates (DPEBA) and 322 district primary education locales dubbed CEB. Transferred duties include bidding for and overseeing construction works, management of school facilities, and educational mapping (Vachon, 2007).

Mali has decentralised its education system against a deficit of only 22% of its school-age population attending school. The public system had by 2004 failed miserably (Winkler & Yeo, 2007). The country undertook a restructuring process that saw the Ministry of Education disestablishing directorates such as the National Pedagogical Institute (IPN); merging Ministry of Education directorates (DPEBA) and 322 district primary education locales dubbed CEB. Transferred duties include bidding for and overseeing construction works, management of school facilities, and educational mapping (Vachon, 2007).

Hence, the decentralised community school model afforded greater autonomy to community-run schools which are managed by School Management Committees (SMCs). These SMCs are mainly composed of local people and are charged with employing teachers, deciding on school fees, and overseeing the daily operations of the school (Winkler & Yeo, 2007).

Senegal had moments of institutional crisis in its bid to decentralise. The country considered these hard stretches as “moments of adjustment between the distribution of power and the distribution of benefits associated with the exercise of public authority” (Ngaruko, 2003: 141). It undertook a decentralising strategy that saw the central government setting up the Municipality Capacity Building Program (AFD) which acted as a catalyst to “restore the financial capacity of the communes and their integration into a credit system for the financing of local infrastructure” (Eyoh & Stren, 2007: 89). The idea was to have local governments capable of performing at their levels appropriately (Ribot, 2002).

All these country initiatives have come with a price tag. Although Nigeria’s implementation of a decentralised system of rule and service has been considered and sustained, the reform package itself has come to be too reliant on the cash transfers from the central government in Abuja. Almost the same fate met Ghana’s District Assemblies who have had to put up with the unpalatable dominance of the central government in Accra over the local governments as a result of the DACF (Eyoh & Stren, 2007: 30). The fundamental structural dysfunction emanates from the governance model these countries have adopted. As argued in the review of literature, West Africa has after independence opted for centralised planning to protect national unity, cement integration and combat corruption. It is this “moncentric” model that explains the region’s penchant for “deconcentration” rather than, say, “devolution” as the preferred form of decentralisation.

Thus, a loose spill of service delivery cannot be checked against fraud at a deconcentrated level. By contrast, the world’s industrialised countries use the “polycentric” model of governance whereby checks and balances prevail over conflicts of interests. Considered as a key feature of democratic decentralisation, the absence of a meaningful polycentric model in the six selected countries betrays their claims to use decentralisation so as to “democratise” (Eyoh & Stren, 2007).

It is therefore, logical that given the “long struggle for the accountable use of power” in West Africa, the rent-seeking nature of local officials is such that local governments have taken on their own character of misbehaviour, self-indulgence and fraud (Eyoh & Stren, 2007: 24). As Florestal & Cooper (1997: 4) would argue, “When local officials cannot keep the revenue...
they collect they have incentives to substitute market-enhancing public goods for rent-creation and corruption in most domestic political contexts." This is all self-evident in Nigeria’s school system where corrupt officials end up helping themselves to state resources meant for children’s schooling, all at a time when the very funds diverted elsewhere are already inadequate upon disbursement by the federal government (Okoroma, 2006). It is said that in Burkina Faso, local authorities have lacked the will and motivation to make good on the promise of decentralisation on similar grounds (Vachon, 2007).

The increased layered nature of government has had serious implications for these six countries as well. The most distinct of these implications are the immense political costs where gross domestic products are very low. Functional costs such as facilitating elections, compensating political cadres and running assemblies or councils have proven quite a political headache to these countries (Brosio, 2000). Burkina Faso knows this better than the other five countries because of its complex approach in implementing education services. There are three different line ministries which are headed by five ministers in charge of education! The Ministry of Social Affairs takes care of pre-primary education; while the Ministry of Basic Education & Literacy accounts for primary education. A third one, the Ministry of Secondary, Higher Education and Scientific Research, is responsible for everything else. Kouraogo & Dianda (2008: 25) succinctly note that “their sizes...and high costs make them favourite targets for budget cuts.”

One chief reason for this state of affairs is the simple fact that most African countries have wasteful tax systems that depend largely on foreign trade, prompting tax pressure. That pressure usually leaves local governments with user charges and property taxes as the only viable tax sources (Brosio, 2000). Of the two sources, property taxes offer greater promise but are categorically undermined by poor housing conditions and lack of basic public services such as water, sanitation and electricity; which in turn make property owners to dodge the tax altogether.

The only way to make good on this resistance by taxpayers is for local government to sidestep the unpopular course of action to tax these poor-quality property and instead shift their focus onto non-residential property. The end result is tax exporting.

“When major social expenditure is decentralised-meaning , as we have seen in Africa, the creation of a new, wide area layer of government-property taxes and user charges become totally insufficient” (Brosio, 2000: 20). Thus, in a way or another decentralising educational provision, like other services, has come to be de facto rather than de jure (Florestal & Cooper, 1997). As Nwoko (2015) notes, the state governments of Nigeria have side-stepped their official mandate to oversee primary education and have instead come to depend on funds from their “local governments” to provide for primary schools.

**Leverage on Education Flexibility and Quality**

In this third sub-section we briefly assess the impact of decentralisation reforms on improving educational quality and disparities in the six selected countries (Lugaz et al., 2010).

Based on the preceding “categories of description and argumentation” it is fair to assert that Nigeria, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Cote d’Ivoire, Mali and Senegal have, in their bids to decentralise, devoted resources to restructure their education systems and thus fundamentally “created the pressure for change.” This constitutes a huge point for leveraging the popularity of decentralisation on education flexibility and quality (Lemos, 2017: 555; Ngaruko, 2003: 140).

One clear benefit of decentralisation of education in the six selected countries is that “greater autonomy in decision making about pedagogical and administrative matters in schools produces a positive effect on student performance” (Holler-Neyra, 2013:5). A shining example of optimum service delivery in a decentralised context is given by Burkina Faso’s “Satellite Schools” that employ teachers from around a locale and pay them a modest 50% less than teachers in conventional public schools across the country. This cuts average primary teacher salary costs from “8.2 to 6.2 times the country’s per capita”. Amazingly, these teachers who teach at the satellite schools have been consistently reported to be highly motivated and cherish their ownership of the initiative (Ngaruko, 2003: 137).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Average Score (0 to 10 scale)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Satellite System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dictation</td>
<td>4.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar 1</td>
<td>4.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar 2 (Conjugation)</td>
<td>3.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>6.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arithmetic 1 (Operations)</td>
<td>6.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arithmetic 2 (Problem Solving)</td>
<td>4.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ngaruko (2003: 137)
School autonomy, thus, in great measure defines effective schools because it empowers head teachers and school leaders to effectively lead the school; increases parental involvement which in turn puts pressure on schools and teachers to deliver; raises community expectations of school performance; and finally requires that school and community work together on school improvement plans.

It is no wonder then that community schools should robustly boost access and completion rates, particularly to basic education; and effectively help poor children to perform just as well or even better than conventional public schools (Winkler & Yeo, 2007). That said, Burkina Faso has had shortcomings reflected in its decentralisation bid as well. For example, the 2005 assessment report noted that first graders in primary school (CP 1) got an average score of 41.4% in French and 34.8% in Mathematics. The next upper grade (CE 2) scored 39.9% in French and 38.1% in Mathematics on average (Vachon, 2007).

Another benefit regards educational flexibility. A major output indicator such as coverage rates can easily be subscribed to a more decentralised reach of educational services in remote parts of Nigeria, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali and Senegal. For example, in Nigeria gross enrolment ratio at junior secondary school level and gross and net enrolment ratios for girl children have markedly increased (Nwoko, 2015). But overall impact on learning outcomes seems to suggest variations within and across the countries. Nigeria still struggles with arguably Africa’s highest rate of out-of-school children whereby 49.1% of the estimated 30 million primary school aged children are out of school. The highest incidence of this cohort is in rural Nigeria and among its poorest households (Nwoko, 2015).

Cote d’Ivoire achieved a gross enrolment ratio of 81.28% in 1990 down from 69% in 1989. The country’s adult literacy stood at a paltry 38.5% in 1990 but quickly rose to 49.7% in 1998 (Lanoue, 2003).

Table 6: Gross Primary Enrolment Ration by Gender, Cote d’Ivoire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1989/90</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996/97</td>
<td>71.8</td>
<td>82.3</td>
<td>61.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997/98</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998/99</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>84.28</td>
<td>62.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999/2000</td>
<td>74.84</td>
<td>85.61</td>
<td>64.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000/01</td>
<td>81.28</td>
<td>92.2</td>
<td>70.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, more children were still not attending school by 2005. 76.99% of primary school aged children were not enrolled in 1998. By 2000, 1.0811 million school-age children were out of school. This was further compounded by the civil war in Cote d’Ivoire which had since 2002 denied access to schools for many children (Lanoue, 2003).

In Burkina Faso, in spite of substantial gains made in gross enrolment rates from 16.8% in 1983 to 72.50% past 2005 (in 2008, to be exact), transition to secondary school has remained rather elusive. Only 20,000 pupils enrolled in the first grade of secondary education out of a total of 87,127 candidates who had passed the primary school leaving exams (CEP) in 2004/2005 (Kouraogo & Dianda, 2008). This glaring poor intake capacity has been attributed in part to decentralisation which is “effective but begins to show its limits with the bureaucratisation of decentralised structures which lack the means to function properly” (Kouraogo & Dianda, 2008: 35).

Senegal registered a remarkable average annual growth of 3.5% of enrolment since 1999 which culminated into a gross primary enrolment rate of 75.8% in 2003. However, the quality of teaching has remained abysmal; an 8% dropout rate incurred particularly in rural Senegal; and a rate of repeating years in primary school that was an average 12.69% in the first five years and a peak of 28% at the age of 10” (Niane, 2004: 3).

On a commendable note, Senegal has decentralised education management and granted broader scope for lower tiers of government to combat illiteracy which has infested the populace.

Table 7: Performance of Learners in Functional Literacy Centres (CAF)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance of Learners in CAF/ PAPF*</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of learners able to read a piece of writing</td>
<td>% of learners able to understand a simple problem in writing</td>
<td>% of learners able to write a coherent passage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of learners able to write a simple passage</td>
<td>55.7</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of learners able to solve a technical problem in writing</td>
<td>28.25</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of learners able to fluently read a piece of writing</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of learners able to understand a simple problem in writing</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of learners able to write a coherent passage</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of learners able to solve a technical problem in writing</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

310
If anything, these countries have to increasingly focus their evaluation of decentralisation of education on impact rather than on the implementation process as is often the case. On a particular note, they should pay attention to “the peculiarities of poor and rural localities in order to assess the risk of incurring enhanced inequalities in learning achievements” derived from decentralisation, and to identify sensible factors that affect these areas” (Holler-Neyra, 2013: 2).

With regard to the durability of school buildings, decentralisation often results into a situation where local governments are rendered liable for their deeds or misdeeds concerning unsafe school buildings. Since durability is a feature of quality, it is important that foresight dictates these fault lines (Florestal & Cooper, 1997). As Clayton et al. (2014) succinctly note, decentralisation establishes new institutions that connote new positions and avails means to gather political power locally. This aspect may drastically affect the quality of school infrastructure or even school performance, particularly where “potential power-sharing between old and new elites have implications for the success of decentralisation policies” (Clayton et al., 2014: 3).

Decentralisation does not only grade prime urbanity or modern education. It also changes the local equation of political and administrative stakes. Thus, as these countries court decentralisation of education in West Africa, they will repeatedly stumble over “attempts to marry legality and legitimacy” in local areas where “family descent and ethnic belonging are made criteria for defining legitimate political actors” (Pride et al., 2017: 98).

**Issues of Note**

The main issue of note is how local governments often fail to deliver due to the incongruous divergence of leadership at all tiers of government, a penchant to control national budget resources by the centre, poor revenue pool, token financial autonomy and inhibitions and tensions in the very notions of decentralisation (Mohmand & Loureiro, 2017). Eyoh & Stren (2007) attribute all these to three prime culprits: politics, capacity and finance.

---

### Table: Literacy and Decentralisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>% of learners able to read a piece of writing</th>
<th>% of learners able to write a coherent passage</th>
<th>% of learners able to solve a simple problem in writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>68.2</td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>38.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*PAPF (Women’s Priority Literacy Programme), PAPA (Support Programme for Literacy Projects) Niane (2004: 6)

The first issue to do with politics is about central governments working fervently and subtly to “recentralise” powers that have earlier been decentralised to lower levels on the one hand. This tendency works against the “first and basic design principle [of implementing decentralisation] which states that higher levels of the system should play a subsidiary role to lower levels of the system-that higher levels of the system should only do what makes little rational sense for lower levels of the system to do” (Healey & Crouch, 2012: 6). On the other hand, the issue has to do with local elites seizing power at the local levels as a result of decentralised systems (Eyoh & Stren, 2007). Either way, decentralisation could become a metaphor.

The second prime culprit is the weak capacity at both the central and local levels where central governments still struggle to manage a decentralisation regime and local governments suffer continually from poorly skilled personnel to turn the promise into reality. In Nigeria, the federal government has found it extremely difficult to coordinate work among the many commissions it has set up ostensibly to achieve the EFA goals. Thus, the centre in Abuja has had a tug of war coordinating the Universal Basic Education Commission, National Commission for Adult and Non-Formal Education and National Commission for Nomadic Education (Nwoko, 2015). Healey & Crouch (2012: 6) propose that “since the school/community is the lowest level of the education system, all functions that the school/community rationally ought to do should be assigned to that level.” The third issue is financing which is intertwined with the preceding ones, exposing a “gap between devolved responsibilities and fiscal resources available to local governments” (Eyoh & Stren, 2007: 28).

Another issue of note is that decentralisation of education happens within a context of a crisis of legitimacy, culture and strategy. A faulty strategy could most likely result into decentralised education programmes and initiatives that “produce local institutions that lack legitimacy and are out of step with prevailing governance culture” in the harsh and wide territories of West Africa (Eyoh & Stren, 2007: 28). A typical example of this crisis that affects legitimacy, culture and strategy is fiscal decentralisation.
Unless fiscal decentralisation happens within a country’s national approach to taxation, empowering local governments to create own taxation systems, for example, would most likely cause disparities and imbalances which will call into question the legitimacy of such a given policy initiative. Conversely, a successful fiscal decentralisation necessitates that local governments furnish timely and transparent information on their use of finances. This is often easier said than done in a culture where financial transfers from the centre are taken for granted or reporting responsibilities are frowned upon (Eyoh & Stren, 2007). A good example of how a decentralisation strategy defeats the whole purpose of decentralisation is self-evident in the whole of West Africa where most governments chose to decentralise after independence to promote participatory local governments but ended up keeping a system of “ruling-party control and administrative oversight that strangled local economy”. Senegal and Cote d’Ivoire are such examples (Ribot, 2002: 6).

Figure 5: The Public Education Accountability Framework

A third issue is about the dire need to make sure centrally run education management information systems (EMIS) do not collapse when decentralisation reduces the power of central Ministries of Education (Winkler & Yeo, 2007).

Hua & Herstein (2003:4) define EMIS as “an institutional service unit producing, managing and disseminating education data and information.” There is need for a sustained institutional culture that persistently encourages data and information use and creates demand for information products on decentralisation of education in West Africa both at intra-and-inter-country levels.

That way, “data from multiple sources (payroll, achievement, and school census), multiple years and multiple levels (student, teacher, or school level) can be linked....for educational decision use at each level of the educational hierarchy” (Hua & Herstein, 2003: 5-6). In the larger scheme of things, countries like the ones reviewed here need to set up a Decentralisation Support Infrastructure (DSI) to serve as a platform for providing training and support to unpack decentralisation of education without a tussle. The DSI should be made up of highly educated and dedicated agents of change who network aggressively to bridge any divide (Healey & Crouch, 2012).

All the six countries are grappling with teacher issues such as cost, quality, and distribution. For example, Burkina Faso had a counterproductive outcome to its policy that rules primary school teachers must first obtain a university degree to qualify for advanced career roles such as inspectors. It was noted many primary school teachers quit teaching so as to be able to attend college. It was a “gold rush” for degrees that left many Burkinabe school classrooms empty in its wake (Kouraogo & Dianda, 2008)! Given the predominance of predatory and spoils-driven elites as the ideal-type of political settlement in these countries, the chances of achieving developmental gains and adequately providing public goods are minimal at best and inimical at worst. “The challenges have their origins in the way in which political and bureaucratic elites have for decades used the school system to accumulate resources, distribute patronage, mobilise political support and exercise political control....This orientation has meant that teacher numbers, quality and distribution have been managed to maximise flows of
rents and votes from schools to the elite, lubricate patronage and political networks, and ensure that elites maintain political control rather than maximise educational performance and equity” (Rosser & Fahmi, 2016: 1; Wales et al., 2016).

A fifth and final issue is the increase in the workload of school functionaries at the lowest tier as more head teachers and, indeed, senior teachers are taking part in school development planning. While decentralisation gains momentum, more questions will be asked about the evolving role of head teachers in terms of organising teaching and being responsible for general sweep of obligations such as infrastructure, working conditions, accounting for resources, etc (Mercer & Ri, 2006).

It is important that any bid for decentralising an education system be simultaneously accompanied by capacity building so that actors will take the effort seriously (Healey & Crouch, 2012). One of the real challenges of education systems in Nigeria, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Cote d’Ivoire, Mali and Senegal is how to “maximise student learning in educational systems with limited resources” (Hua & Herstein, 2003: 2).

**CONCLUSION**

This paper has examined the mode of decentralization of education as a public sector reform in West Africa and understood that the design and implementation of each selected country’s decentralization scheme depends to a large extent on whether ministries of education at the centre have the willingness and ability to provide needed technical, financial and logistical support to facilitate governance at multiple levels; whether new lower tiers of government embody decentralised education powers have the required capacity to function; and whether actual elected school committees do represent the local community or are mere stepping-stones for local elites. For education systems in West Africa and, indeed, elsewhere on the continent, the best way to decentralise is to make sure that funds follow functions. In that lies the promise of initiative.

**REFERENCES**

END NOTES

1. Niger is among the seven largest.

ii. “A theoretical framework refers to a set of interrelated variables and definitions that present a systematic view of a phenomenon by specifying the relationship among variables” (M’Nkanata, 2008: 10).

iii. For example, two most recent studies in West Africa have tackled the role of traditional actors in providing public goods in newly decentralised areas (Florestal & Cooper, 1997).

iv. Education with Community Participation Program (EDUCO).

v. Literally, decentralising control while retaining influence and power (Pride et al., 2017:98).

vi. Basic Education Strategic Objective (BESO).


viii. To decentralise education necessitates changes in the law of a country. An education system in any given context is produced by the law. Nonetheless, any reform bid for such a public sector will always only be possible when specific changes are made in the law itself (Florestal & Cooper, 1997).

ix. Burkina Faso is divided into 13 regions, 45 provinces, 350 departments and 301 communes (Vachon, 2007).


Failing to duly exercise their responsibilities for administration and finance, central governments have opted to pass these along to the lower tier by default (Florestal & Cooper, 1997).

Holler-Neyra (2013) argues that contemporary debate on the suitability of decentralisation for enhancing educational quality centres on establishing the definite conditions that determine its outcomes.

“In Senegal, for example, Cooperative Presidents—usually powerful notables—treat their cooperatives as private property, often filling them with family or dummy members to obtain state services that cooperatives are entitled to” (Ribot, 2002: 23).

“Indeed, in 1994 over 300 of Senegal’s 317 rural councils were of the ruling Socialist Party. Similarly, in Ivory Coast local politics were entirely controlled by the [ruling] party using the single, closed-list system” (Ribot, 2002: 19).