

Decentralized Education Management: a work in progress

In this article the author weighs up decentralisation in education and indicates that education management must be decentralised if it is to achieve the results and objectives expected of state policy. He argues that the channels for liaison between intergovernmental agencies need to be recovered and strengthened.

Gestión educativa descentralizada: un proceso en construcción

Hace un balance de la descentralización en educación y señala que para lograr los resultados esperados y los objetivos de las políticas de Estado se requiere de una gestión educativa descentralizada. Sostiene que es necesario recuperar y fortalecer los espacios y mecanismos de articulación intergubernamental.

JOSÉ LUIS VARGAS DÁVILA

Bachelor in Political Science and Government. Currently reading a Master's degree in Political Science and Government- Special subject: Public Administration from the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru Specialist in education policy and public administration.

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In 2016, the National Education Council (*Consejo Nacional de Educación*, CNE) conducted a balance of decentralised education management. One of its general conclusions was the shift which occurred in 2011-2016 from a national education management that promoted decentralised education management to another, which focuses on the latter as an instrument for implementing national policies and measures, directed by the Ministry of Education, as part of the modernisation of the state.

This general finding indicates that in the education sector, decentralized management works side-by-side with deconcentration. The budget legislation and its instruments support the latter, whereas the regulations for decentralisation, modernisation and education management promote decentralised education management, albeit not as strongly. Budget instruments carry greater weight. Hence, the trend towards deconcentration is greater. This undermines the already fragile institutions of state decentralisation, weakens the regional governments and reduces the opportunities they have to intervene in the management of education policies geared to developing their regions.

In this article follows the argument of the balance conducted, to illustrate why decentralised education management is a work in progress.

PRIORITY EDUCATION POLICIES

The objectives of education policy are the substance and *raison d'être* of decentralised education management. They may be understood as the product of building a

consensus capable of addressing the demands and interests of the general public as education development objectives, which in turn contribute to local, regional and national development. Over the last ten years, there has been greater emphasis placed on policies of access to pre-school education, learning, and Intercultural Bilingual Education.

The net enrolment rate of children aged three to five rose from 77.3 per cent in 2012 to 83.2 per cent in 2015, or approximately six percentage points. The policy and its instruments were inclusive and as a result the increase was higher in rural areas: almost 14 points over the same period (Source: The Ministry of Education, Escale). The greatest problem at this level of education however is the service quality. This is true not only of the supply of basic conditions (premises, furniture, basic services, complementary services —health, food—, trained teachers, educational materials etc.), but also pedagogy itself. In a context of an obsession with the results of national evaluations, pre-schools are increasingly pressured to function as schools and provide primary education, getting their students ahead in early literacy and maths problems-solving. The efficiency of the education system seems to have become more important than children's comprehensive development.

Results in learning have also improved. In reading comprehension, the percentage of second-grade students who achieved the expected level of learning rose from 30.9 per cent in 2012 to 49.8 per cent in 2015. To a lesser extent something similar occurred in maths: the level rose from 12.8 per cent to 26.6 per cent in the

same period. Regardless of the size and scope of the increases, it is unlikely that these would not have occurred. All the system's messages and efforts — official and formal — were geared to improving these examples of learning and not others, such as citizenship or science and technology, with a perspective of a more comprehensive formation for students. The former have become one of the most important achievements of school management, of the education management of the local education departments (*Unidades de Educación management Local*, UGEL) and the regional education departments (*Direcciones Regionales de Educación*, DRE). They are equally important for the national pedagogical strategies, be they pedagogical coaching or pedagogical support, as a criterion for evaluating teachers' and principals' performance, and for allocating monetary incentives in recognition of this capacity. To summarize, the education system lets it be known that the student census evaluation must increase at all costs in each school and that everything must be done in order to achieve this.

But the greater challenge is to improve students' educational achievement while at the same time closing the equality gaps, which are gradually increasing year by year. One example of this is the difference between the percentage of students who achieved second-grade learning in the urban area and the rural areas. The figures rose from 27.9 per cent in 2012 to 36.7 per cent in 2015. In maths, the figure rose from 11 to 16.8 points in the same period. This supports the case for a differentiated policy for rural areas.

There has been very significant progress in Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE). This is one of the few policies agreed with the parties involved —indigenous peoples, for example. It has a strategic plan, plans and implementation strategies incorporated into budget programmes, an allocated public budget, instruments for identifying IBE schools and teachers, a higher number of languages regulated, educational materials produced in original languages and in a second language, plus other basic conditions. In addition, forums for liaising with original peoples have been created — the National Intercultural and Bilingual Education Committee (*Comisión Nacional de Educación Intercultural y Bilingüe*, Coneib), with civil society organisations — technical committees on specific aspects of the IBE Plan — and with the Tinkuy, a strategy that has helped to make Peru's original peoples more visible, as also the need for a quality IBE for them. In addition, a higher number of regional governments and their education departments are incorporating this

policy into their agendas and the conditions for implementing it.¹

The greatest challenge facing this policy is probably the internal coordination of the Education Ministry for furthering its implementation. With the decisions taken, all the areas involved, headed by the Deputy Minister for Pedagogical Management, must act in tandem if they are to reach the milestones established by the policy. This involves putting greater effort into educating the civil servants of the Education Ministry in the ethical, political and pedagogical dimensions of the policy; identifying the specific roles of each area and incorporating the IBE Plan in their operating plans; coordinating implementation, monitoring and evaluation with regional governments and sharing the results. If this is done, the results of the Ministry of Education and the whole education sector will be enhanced, and its legitimacy will be reinforced among Peru's indigenous peoples.

DECENTRALISED EDUCATION MANAGEMENT

All the policies mentioned above require decentralised education management in order to achieve the expected outcomes and the objectives of the government policies to which they are linked. Each of them needs a specific design of this management model. The policy of access to basic regular education may be the one which has the best degree of liaison between government levels, because of its design and the outcomes pursued.

The CNE is composed of a number of organisations, including the *Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo* (Grade), TAREA, UNICEF, CIDA, the Fight Against Poverty Round Table (MCLCP), Solaris and Alternativa. On the basis of the proposals of the Prime Minister's Office, the progress of the Ministry of Education and the analysis of the experience in management of various regional and local governments (DREs and UGELs), they have helped to define the components of decentralised education management with a territorial perspective. These include the regulations, budget and planning, organisational development, capacity-building, inter-government and inter-institutional coordination and liaison forums and citizen participation.

¹ For example, the support of TAREA, the Fight Against Poverty Round Table (MCLCP), *Diálogos Ciudadanos*, among others, has entailed a consensus on a design for implementing the IBE policy in Ayacucho for the next few years.



In terms of *regulations*, The Ministry of Education worked with the regional governments on a variety of instruments that strengthen decentralised education management. These include the decentralised management guidelines and types of UGELs, the decentralised management matrix and the guidelines for inter-government relations. Furthermore, it established the procedure for selecting and hiring school principals in the framework of the Teaching Reform Act and issued regulations for specifying the hierarchy and roles of the DREs and UGELs for the development of the school year, in 2016 and now in 2017. This is progress in the architecture of the decentralised education management system for Peru. The effective implementation of the guidelines and mechanisms remains a challenge.

In *planning*, overall, the diagnostics available show that Peru has still not institutionalised a robust system of planning to guide the execution of national, regional and local policies. This function has been mainly replaced by the Ministry of Finance, through its approval of the results-based budget programme design. In other words, the budget instruments in practice are replacing development plans *de facto* because the former are allocated a budget but the latter are not. The budget is an instrument which facilitates the implementation of priority policies planned by government at its different levels. Hence if it is used rationally, efficiently and effectively it will guarantee the adequate supply of the public services that provide the public with wellbeing. This entails a budget management that gives priority to local service needs.

This is very limited, however. Reports from the MC-LCP, the National Regional Governments Assembly (*Asamblea Nacional de Regional governments*, ANGR) and the CNR find greater recentralisation in the direction of education policy and the control of procedures and inputs through the budget programmes; the recentralisation of the national budget and the small margin for action for implementing regional initiatives; a weaker capacity for forecasting local and regional government budgets, due to the conditioned and unconditioned cash transfers throughout the year; insufficient progress in establishment of the political and technical criteria for inter-government liaison and the management of the education sector's public budget, and the high priority regional governments give to investing in education (an area where their management enjoys more independence and discretion).

The novelty in this field is the transfer of pedagogical interventions and management instruments to the regional governments. This offers a new opportunity for regional governments to develop and demonstrate education management capacity. The question is in what conditions the transfer is made and if the regional governments will receive the resources the Ministry of Education used for implementing them.² Similarly, what the ministry will do

2 In the 2011-2016 administration transfer report, the Ministry of Education states that it has developed and implemented a series of strategic interventions which it lists. Some of these will be transferred to the regional governments (2011-2016 Ministry of Education Report on Mission Compliance. Administration Transfer Report).

so that the regional governments' management will be successful.

Organisational development involves the adaptation of the organisational structures of the three levels of government to exercise the roles ascribed to them in decentralised education management and improve the provision of education services according to their context and territorial area. The Education Ministry developed an initial proposal for a regulatory role for the sector and amended its Organization and Functions Regulations, reforming its organisational structure with a view to exercising its role as regulator and as the implementing agency of education policy. Similarly, some regional governments developed management models for governing education in their jurisdiction. Some of these did not survive, but others, such as the regional government of Piura, are encouraging the discussion about the route that must be followed if they are to become organisations that are more effective in achieving their education objectives. The experience of the Metropolitan Lima regional department, a deconcentrated body which comes under the Ministry of Education, has contributed information to this discussion. Again, experiences with designing an IBE policy management model such as those in the UGELs of Imaza, Quispicanchis, Atalaya and Huanta show the efforts that local and regional managers are making to adapt their entities to the challenges of education policy. The point of departure is clear. These challenges could not be addressed through public organisations which were designed — even before the decentralisation process — to comply with functions that are different from those now required of them, both in their territory and in education policy.

Capacity-building improves civil servants' work, the provision of quality public services to the customers, and as a result, the outcomes of their sectors' public policies. The information available about this dimension of decentralized education management shows that there is a favourable institutional context for improving the capacities of the civil service developed by Servir — even though a more robust system of capacity-building has still not been developed - and for the availability of tools— national guidelines and frameworks — for developing and building the capacities of civil servants in the education sector. At the same time however, there is uneven progress with capacity-building between national and regional governments; differences in professional capacities between

government levels; the lack of accreditation, coordination and evaluation of initiatives in capacity-building for improving the performance of civil servants and civil society players in the regions; technical assistance given by The Ministry of Education to regional civil servants as a core capacity-building strategy, and the loss of capacities due to the high turnover of civil servants in the regions.

Some progress identified includes the transfer of resources to the regional governments for hiring professionals who fit the UGEL Staff Assignment Table. More recently, in the context of the appointment of regional education and UGEL directors, the Ministry of Education, in coordination with Servir, developed a Senior Management Programme (PAG II) with the aim of strengthening and developing management competencies for optimizing education management, leadership in the transformation of the education system and improved student learning. In addition, the first steps have been taken for the DRE and UGEL civil servants to move into the new civil service system.³ This initiative has been welcomed by civil servants in the regions, because it will improve their salaries, enable them to enter a merit-based career and have access to training and capacity-building.

Citizen participation produces a variety of forms of co-operation and interrelation between the government and civil society. It makes it possible for the latter to be active in the whole cycle of the management of the public policies most relevant to people's needs, interests and demands. It develops a correspondence between people with their rights and the policies agreed to guarantee them, and strengthens the legitimacy of government action and the public policies it implements. From this perspective, the information available indicates that the forums for participation, while still active, are weaker, which discourages people from take an effective part in activities. The cycles of building agendas and setting priorities for policies, results and goals are good opportunities for promoting citizen participation. A variety of decentralised education management experiences in the regions enjoyed an active and committed participation by civil society, but this was weakened by being worn down, by a lack of the necessary conditions or because the processes themselves came to an end. Civil society monitoring and watch saw uneven processes and results, and the Regional Education Participatory Councils (*Consejos*

3 See Executive Presidential Resolution 117-2016-SERVIR/PE.

Participativos Regionales de Educación, Copare), Local Education Participatory Councils (*Consejos Participativos Locales de Educación*, Copale) and the Institutional Educational Councils (*Consejos Educativos Institucionales*, Conei) do not have sufficient conditions for doing their work in reaching consensus, representation and surveillance.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

Clearly, a description of the progress and challenges found in the components of decentralised education management shows on the one hand, uneven progress, mainly in the components of capacity-building, planning and budgeting and civil society participation; but on the other, the existence of conditions, (regulations, instruments, practices and experiences) which could be used as a foundation for redefining a path for extending their implementation and reach. Here it is necessary to recover and strengthen the channels for inter-government liaison, above all those of the Inter-government Education Committee, to discuss and agree a development agenda for education management connected between government levels and geared to the results of government policy which respects the independence and powers of each government level. This is particularly true if the aim is to overcome Peru's education deficits, achieve greater inclusion of rural and indigenous people, and improve the learning of all students in the education system.

Decentralized education management needs to be seen as a policy that supports the development of education policies for improving the wellbeing of the community. Hence it requires the leadership of the Education Ministry and permanent coordination with the regional governments, at both the design and implementation stages. Looking ahead, a management system needs to be jointly and gradually designed with the best possible performance in terms of quality, effectiveness and efficiency and the proper management of growing resources allocated to education, based on mutual trust, technical regulations, benchmarks of compliance, and instruments for management, monitoring and evaluation, and accountability.

This is where the regional governments must show their determination to govern education in their jurisdiction, which means assuming responsibility for education services with all the tensions and problems that this involves. Similarly, they also need to advance in the process of institutional adaptation in order to exercise

such government and determine the conditions to be created in order for it to be implemented. This needs to be done with due technical and political arguments. The instruments that must be used can be created on the basis of the agreements reached in the Inter-government Committee.

The regional governments will also need to update education in their territories, including the situation of their own organisations, using information systems and diagnostic instruments, to influence the design of education policies and the budget programmes which implement them; but above all, to define the aspects of the policy where they can play a strategic role.

Finally, the regional governments must endeavour to document education management best practices and innovations. Many initiatives (curriculum diversification for example, enrolment management or local monitoring systems) pass unseen because they are not systematized or they become management stories to tell. The competitions promoted by the Education Ministry and civil society bodies can be opportunities for this. The regional governments should take advantage of them.

In conclusion, decentralised education management should be encouraged; it should be decentralised and have a territorial focus, and above all the autonomy and discretionary powers of the subnational governments, as stipulated in the Constitution, in law, in government policy and regulations. All of this can strengthen the quality of the national education policy, and act as an incentive for the development of horizontal liaison that benefits better analysis of education problems facing the territories, the quest for original strategic responses to them, a more relevant response to the demand for the development of institutional capacities, and the generation of a social fabric that takes part with co-responsibility and sustains the progress in the improved results, agreed nationally and regionally. We can continue down this path. 