

# The Road to Decentralised Education Management

The author describes the tensions he experienced as a manager having to hasten the process of decentralising education and the pressing need for better teaching quality and for reaching citizens more efficiently.

## La ruta de la gestión descentralizada en la educación

El autor explica la tensión que vivió entre el contexto, avanzar más rápido y descentralizar la educación como gestor de la educación, con el apremio de conseguir mejores resultados en la calidad de los aprendizajes y llegar de manera más eficiente a la ciudadanía.

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#### KEY TERMS:

Decentralisation  
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Modernisation  
Participation



**D**ecentralisation is a response to the need for a mechanism to enable the government to reach citizens more efficiently. One of the chief objectives of this process is to improve the quality of the service. In order to provide better quality education, power is transferred from the national to the regional and local levels of government with the idea that those who directly deliver the services are better positioned to resolve problems associated with these services.

However, there is no cause and effect relationship between decentralisation and the quality of the service. Álvaro Marchesi, for instance, maintains that decentralisation is not a sufficient condition to raise the quality of services if decisions about materials, curricula, or time at school remain the same at the national and local level. Other mechanisms are necessary.

Another goal of decentralisation is to make the service more equitable. Given that nations tend to be marked by marked socioeconomic differences and that these condition learning, decentralisation can be a mechanism for reducing inequity. Marchesi maintains that a good decentralisation process is one that incorporates measures that limit the risk of increasing inequities in the service. This takes on great importance when we talk about education in a country like Peru where the outcomes, as measured by learning achievement, systematically reveal a wide urban-rural gap.

## THE DECENTRALISATION OF EDUCATION

To understand the process of decentralising education in Peru it is important to note that education is a service that the state offers in a shared model. This is to say that multiple levels of government have quotas of responsibility for the service. This model demands greater coordination among the levels of government and precision as to the quotas for which each is responsible.

Strangely, the Education Act was passed just a few months after the 2002 Regional Government Act. It makes no mention of regional or local governments and only refers to the regional and local offices of the Ministry of Education (Minedu). This set the stage for chaos in the form of confusion, overlaps, voids and omissions.

This decentralisation process was an administrative process to transfer competencies and responsibilities from the national level to the regional and local level. It was understood as moving responsibilities from one level of government to another, but the way of doing business remained the same. There was no distinct plan to guarantee that those assuming new responsibilities had the minimum basic conditions to undertake them. Technical assistance was scarce or standardised and the relationship between the national and the regional government was largely vertical. In 2009, the Prime Minister's office endeavoured to shift from a model based on the transfer of administrative activities to one based on services and citizens. Raul Molina

maintains that what was, and is, needed is a model of public service provision that is based on the notion that national public policies can be adapted at different levels of government, according to citizen preference. Debate emerged about decentralised management, territory, service and citizens.

However, in the years that followed, the low rates of investment in improving the intermediate education institutions, the distant relationship between the different levels of government, and confrontations between the ministry and teachers spurred growing distrust between the ministry and the subnational governments. The regional and local governments made progress according to their own conditions, history and luck, which only served to increase inequality in their achievement outcomes. When the last administration came to power in 2011, the decentralised management faced four major problems:

a) There were no channels for coordinating among the different levels of government. There was a high degree of tension between Minedu and the regional governments. Minedu personnel avoided meeting with regional authorities and coordinated through regulations published in the public register. There was a generalised discontent across the regions.

b) It was not clear what each level of government should be doing. There were voids, overlaps and omissions with respect to the responsibilities of the ministry and the regional and local governments. There was a similar situation at the regional and local education departments. For instance, in the midst of the growth of the mining canon, municipalities hired teachers and financed the local education departments.

c) Education policies were implemented without regard for the specific characteristics of the territories and the regions and without consideration for the challenges they faced. One-size-fits-all policies were applied across diverse territories. There is currently still no talk of a territorial focus; the concept is foreign to the decentralised management of education.

d) The ministry closed down the intermediate level administration, which was stigmatised as inefficient, excessively bureaucratic and corrupt and created new parallel positions beyond the influence of the regional and local education offices. The closure was so complete

that there wasn't even a registry of the number of local education departments in the country.

Between 2011 and 2016 there was an effort to improve education management based on a framework of decentralisation. A first line of action was directed at establishing a set of clear rules to delineate the responsibilities of the different levels of government and their administrative agencies and to generate communication channels to disseminate it. This involved:

- The responsibilities of the different levels of government for managing materials, personnel and the maintenance of the physical infrastructure was established through a decentralised management matrix. This matrix was based on Supreme Decree 045.
- Proposals were drafted on how Minedu and the regional and local governments were to formulate, implement and evaluate policies and actions. These determined that the ministry defined policies and actions according to the characteristics of the territory. They defined the proper channels for regional governments to propose policies. They also established in which aspects of education municipalities could collaborate. These included safety, lunch, transportation of students and teachers, recreation services, library, and culture in general, among others.
- The hierarchical relationship between the regional and local education departments were defined, as were their specific responsibilities. This process required modifications to the Education Law's regulations.
- The creation of the local education departments was standardised and regulated to ensure that any new office that was constituted had the minimum, basic conditions needed to operate and provide services.
- For the first time, a census of the local education departments was conducted. It produced information on the conditions of personnel, equipment and the buildings.
- Local education departments were classified based on their territorial characteristics and their operational conditions, with the goal of implementing policies and technical assistance programs tailored to each department.

A second line of action sought to improve the relationship between the ministry and the regional and local





governments. Ministry officials met on a near-constant basis with regional authorities. At these meetings they made clear the need to share initiatives based on memoranda of understanding. Beyond establishing the Intergovernmental Committee—which was established by law and had been implemented in other sectors of government—the ministry decided to establish two new entities. These included a board of all of the education managers in the country and the Committee for Intergovernmental Administration. The latter is a bilateral meeting forum between the ministry and regional governments whose objective is to analyse and establish public policies in the region and to monitor and eliminate bottle necks in each territory. All this was institutionalised through rules that described the dynamic of each space and entrusted regional governments to do the same with their municipalities, although little progress has been made in this regard.

Despite the above-mentioned initiatives, the regions are critical of decentralised management. The adjectives that allude to recentralisation are common, as if the decentralised context has been taken away from them. This sentiment is based on the lack of room for administration within the intergovernmental agencies; the infrequent meetings of the boards and the Intergovernmental Committee; the strong presence of ministry teams in the regions; and the flight of talent from many regional and local agencies to Minedu. This loss of human capital is a result of the higher salaries Minedu offers, the ministry's direct management of new initiatives and the remoteness of

the possibility of influencing national policies. Indeed, with an increased budget for the sector, Minedu embarked on a process of designing, defining and directly managing new strategies such as Full School Day, Urban Teaching Support, School Monitor, English Plan, and Physical Education, among others. These involved the hiring of personnel in the regions directly from the national level and predominantly using the channels for intergovernmental relationships to provide information. The route towards a decentralised management became more complex. Criticism of the process can be summarised by the statement that the regulatory conditions and instruments for decentralised management have been created but not yet implemented.

According to the guidelines for decentralised education management, Minedu can implement temporary and exceptional policies for highly specialised reasons, equity or emergencies. In those cases, it needs to incorporate a strategy to create the conditions for regional governments gradually to take over the initiatives after a process to verify their capacity.

All initiatives are to be implemented with the prior knowledge and in coordination with the regional and local governments. For this reason, the Minedu has planned a gradual transfer of a set of clear rules about when, what and to whom the transfer can be made and what happens when a goal is not achieved. This task has been pending since 2017.

## DECENTRALISATION AND MODERNISATION

There is a false dilemma between decentralisation and modernisation. One of the recurring comments from experts is that the ministry has a greater tendency toward modernisation than decentralisation to the point that both courses of action appear to be at odds with each other. However, one cannot talk about decentralisation without a line of action that seeks to modernise the regional and local education departments. Talking about decentralisation without modernisation implies that we are only talking about decentralising problems. Our administrative agencies as they are currently designed and operate are incapable of fulfilling the role that they are commissioned with in the chain of service.

The term modernisation itself can refer to different lines of work. The Prime Minister's Public Management Secretariat has developed a National Policy for the Modernisation of Public Management and an implementation plan that defines its objectives. This framework contemplates the execution of an agenda of reforms in a variety of areas that seek to simplify internal procedures and the processes in public offices; improve attention for services and paperwork; and greater transparency and access to information for a government at the service of its citizens.

For the Ministry of Education, the umbrella of modernisation in the regional and local education departments can be summarised in two lines of action: i) improving operating conditions y ii) increasing number and skills of the personnel.

On the first point, reorganisation, deregulation and getting rid of red tape are very important and should involve the inclusion of basic teams for processing paperwork to reduce the administrative load. What does this mean? It seeks to give the local education departments more presence in the schools as opposed to the opposite situation which is the current reality. School principals and teachers spend more time in the local education departments because they have to do endless paperwork, both institutional and personal. Due to the excessive red tape, the local education departments are buried in administrative tasks. Because they do not have any systems for these procedures or any transparency, principals and teachers are obliged to leave their schools to go check up on their paperwork, a never-ending task. This is a poor allocation of time at the expense of teaching and learning.

Take the example of Metropolitan Lima's system of documentation. Each year a total of 670,000 pieces of paperwork are filed at its seven local education departments. To understand the scale of this workload, each local education department receives a filing every minute, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The volume of these administrative procedures at the department must be reduced because they consume time that would be better invested in monitoring schools. The experience in Lima is now set to be transferred to the regions.

In addition, there can be no organisational reform that does not include improvements in personnel. There are no good, local structures that work if they do not have a critical mass demanding efficiency, quality and results. There is no hardware without software. Not even the best car works without a driver. The intermediate offices are not only lacking more, higher skilled personnel but need to increase their ranks.

It is worth elaborating on this last point. Minister Saavedra maintained that if Peru wants to be a developed country it needs a bigger state. He gave various examples—France, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States—where the size of the state, measured in public spending as a percentage of the GDP, is greater than 35 per cent. In Peru, it is 18 per cent. In fact, while the budget and the number of schools and teachers have increased in recent five year periods the number of personnel in the regional and local education departments has remained stable. This is not an issue of growing for growth's sake, but of including meritocracy and rationality. In the wake of the Teacher Reform Law in 2017, nearly 2,000 positions for education specialists can be filled by competition, which means selection is based on merit, not length of tenure. This number was possible thanks to the fact that the Personnel Assignment Table financed 523 positions. Some 487 newly created positions are yet to be financed.

No reference has yet been made to administrative personnel. Since they are not regulated by the Teacher Reform Law, the only possibility available for the ministry is to transfer budget to hire an expected 1020 administrative specialists in 2017 using an Administrative Services Contract.

Are these numbers sufficient considering the size of the regional and local educational departments? Some estimate that this number is 60 per cent lower than the true figure. However this is not just about increasing personnel but about relieving them of responsibilities

and it is principally the local education departments that are indiscriminately burdened with the implementation of all kinds of new initiatives or policies that need to be implemented, including those of other sectors like health or social inclusion. Deregulation, the relief of responsibilities, and computerisation are three tasks that need urgent attention in the regional and local education departments.

## DECENTRALISATION AND PARTICIPATION

In Peru the decentralisation of education has emphasised participation over the autonomy of the decentralised institutions. As a result, far from empowering schools or the local education departments, it has privileged the creation of participatory councils with the presence of parents and community authorities, supposedly based on the notion that shared decision-making will improve services. Early on, and with encouragement from international cooperation agencies, the Participatory Regional Councils in particular gained strength with the creation of Regional Educational Projects. However, these subsequently withered under the progressive withdrawal of international cooperation. This outcome could be attributed to their dependence on volunteers and the regional education offices and a lack of funding. The local versions of these councils had less favourable results. One must understand that at the local level education cannot be separated from other services or public roles such as food aid, safety or health. In the local context, the lines between different sectors are blurred and the existence of a participatory council exclusively for education is unsustainable.

The relationship between participation and the reduction of inequalities in services have not had favourable results. However, participatory councils could be effective mechanisms for monitoring very concrete and yet-to-be defined tasks and as a means of public transparency and accountability. Currently, it is a pending task to establish guidelines for participatory management.

According to the constitution, decentralisation is a permanent, irreversible and gradual mechanism. Numerous times, 15 years since the implementation of decentralisation, better outcomes have been demanded from the process—something that paradoxically has not been achieved after nearly 200 years of history as a centralised republic. In part, the issue is ignited by both political interest and the current circumstances. It is important to mention the tight link between decentralisation and democracy. Decentralised management requires improvements that, at least partially, have to do with reforming institutions and attitudes. The decentralisation process should be judged on the gradual fulfilment of the stated objectives: improving the quality of the service and reducing inequalities in its provision. Both are challenges of enormous complexity given the diverse nature of the country, the low levels of liaison, weak institutions and a culture of mutual distrust between the different levels of government. On top of all this is the difficult challenge of reconciling both objectives, considering that the path to better quality may be more accessible at the cost of equity. It is important to understand that decentralisation is about how to make improvements. In this sense it is a means to an end and not an end in itself. **T**



## CONSTRUYENDO LA CARRERA DEL MAESTRO. PERÚ 2001-2014. ACIERTOS Y TROPIEZOS

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