E-ISSN: 2997-9439

American Journal of Education and Evaluation Studies

https://semantjournals.org/index.php/ AJEES

| Research Article

Check for updates

Reflection on the Levels of Action of Actors in the Cameroonian Education System in a Context of Decentralization: Collective Construction or Power Games in Secondary Education?

Dr. Dorine Flora NDOUMBA NDOUMBA

Department of Education, Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences,

University of Ebolowa, Cameroon

Abstract: This study provides an insight into the nature of the relationships and interactions of the actors involved in the decentralization process in Cameroon's education sector. Decentralization as a governance modality takes into account the development of relations between the center and the periphery in the management of local affairs (Abouem à Tchoyi & Mandou ,2021). This model of governance brings a new player to the fore: decentralized local authorities, including the regions responsible for secondary education. This new form of State is accompanied by a set of principles and mechanisms, enabling legislators to perceive it as the fundamental axis for the promotion and development of democracy and good governance at local level. The State is no longer the sole and exclusive actor in a decentralized system. The main question is whether decentralization promotes collective construction, or is it merely a representation of the power play between stakeholders in secondary education? The process of subjectivation brought about by decentralization should be addressed, with an emphasis on the interactions between the various players involved in the decentralization process in secondary education. The required methodology is based, on the one hand, on a theoretical framework outlining the principles of decentralization and the powers devolved to the regions in terms of education: and, on the other hand, on an analysis of the texts on decentralization in order to highlight the forces at play, the possible interactions and the interplay of the actors in the educational chain.

Keywords: decentralization - power - game – construction- education.

This is an open-access article under the CC-BY 4.0 license

Introduction

Decentralization is the gradual transfer of powers from the State to decentralized local authorities, accompanied by adequate human, technical, material and financial resources (Ntuda Ebode, 2020, p.4). It took full effect with the promulgation of Law no. 96/06 of January 18, 1996, article 1 paragraph 2 of which established the Republic of Cameroon as “a decentralized unitary State”. As such, in addition to the communes, a second category of decentralized territorial authorities was

created: the regions. The aforementioned Constitution not only modifies the form of the State of Cameroon, but also implies a change in the institutional organization of the Republic, and in the new public management of the State. In the spirit of Law no. 2019/024 of December 24, 2019 on the General Code of Decentralized Territorial Authorities, decentralization consists in the transfer of powers by the State to decentralized territorial authorities with appropriate means and resources (art5CGCTD). As a governance modality, decentralization takes into account the development of relations between the center and the periphery, organizational arbitration, managerial breakthroughs and the empowerment of citizens in the management of local affairs (Abouem à Tchoyi & Mandou ,2021). This form of governance reflects a new way of exercising power, akin to governmentality. The latter is based on techniques of domination exercised over others and techniques of self; techniques of power, interactions between self and others and, finally, techniques of individual domination (Foucault, 1988). Governmentality taken here as a form of exercising power unequivocally includes taking into account the interactions or power games involved in the decentralized governance model. The decentralization process currently underway in Cameroon has prompted us to reflect on and analyze the roles of the various actors involved in the education sector, particularly in secondary education, in an attempt to answer the following question: does decentralization promote collective construction, or is it merely a representation of the power game between stakeholders in secondary education?

1. Decentralization of the Cameroonian education system

This section will highlight the legal framework for decentralization, the powers transferred in the field of education and present the guiding principles associated with decentralization.

1.1. The legal framework for decentralization

Decentralization is seen as a transfer of powers by the State to decentralized local authorities, with appropriate powers and resources. As such, it constitutes the fundamental axis of local development, good governance and democracy at local level (art. 2 Law No. 2004/17 of July 22, 2004, on the Orientation of Decentralization). In other words, the aim of decentralization is to promote local development and enable local populations to acquire the best possible skills in the management of public affairs. This objective is based on article 55 of the January 18, 1996 constitution, which stipulates that the State transfers powers to decentralized local authorities with a view to the economic, social, educational, cultural and sporting development of the region. In 2019, the law on the general code for decentralized local authorities and specific laws such as the 2004 laws on the rules applicable to regions will provide further details on the powers to be transferred in matters of education, literacy and vocational training (art. 271a,b,c CGCTD).

Later, implementing decrees were issued, further specifying the scope and areas of competence transferred. For example, Decree no. 2023 of April 24, 2023 sets out the terms and conditions for the exercise of certain powers transferred by the State to the Regions in the field of secondary education. This decree sets out the powers transferred by the State to the Regions in terms of secondary education (art. 2):

- Participation in drawing up and implementing the national school map at regional level;
- the construction, extension, equipment, upkeep and maintenance of the region's lycées and collèges;
- the recruitment and management of support staff for these establishments, according to the budgetary resources available;
- the acquisition of school materials and supplies;
- the distribution and allocation of grants and subsidies in the region's lycées and collèges;
- representation on the management and dialogue bodies of the State's lycées and collèges

- supporting the work of local authorities in primary and nursery education.

It also defines the prerogatives and responsibilities devolved to the State (art. 4), such as :

- drawing up and implementing national policy on secondary and normal education;
- -drawing up and implementing the national school map ;
- drafting legislation and regulations governing the creation, conversion, opening and operation of schools
- defining and monitoring standards for school construction, equipment, upkeep and maintenance;
- recruitment and management of secondary school teaching staff
- the moral, civic and intellectual training of school-age children, as well as the synthesis of support staff and teacher requirements;
- the definition and adoption of objectives and general guidelines for national education and training programs;
- the development of curricula, including training plans, programs and content;
- approving textbooks and other teaching materials;
- the organization of national examinations and competitions, as well as the awarding of diplomas in the education sector;
- drawing up a schedule of activities for the national statistical campaign in the education sector;
- determining the main indicators for the education sector;
- dissemination of the national statistical yearbook for the education sector.

For full implementation, in addition to the decrees, a specification is signed between the State and the region. These specifications will provide answers to the following questions: what should be done to improve the quality of education?

For full implementation, in addition to the decrees, a specification is signed between the State and the region. These specifications will provide answers to the following questions: what needs to be done? when? and how? To answer these questions, we will draw on the principles of decentralization.

1.2. The guiding principles of decentralization in the Cameroonian education system

Law N°2004/017 of July 22, 2004 on the orientation of decentralization highlights three principles: subsidiarity, progressiveness and complementarity (art. 9 paragraph 2).

1.2.1. The principle of subsidiarity

Derived from the Latin subsidiarii, meaning reserve troop, and subsidium, meaning reserve, recourse, subsidiarity is the character of that which is subsidiary. In politics, subsidiarity is the principle that a responsibility should be taken on by the lowest level of public authority competent to solve a problem. In terms of public action, it's the search for the most relevant level, closest to the citizen. In terms of decentralization, this principle leads the State to delegate certain powers to local authorities, which are sometimes considered to be better equipped to assume a responsibility, given their proximity to citizens. In our case, decentralization in Cameroon applies this principle to powers transferred by the State to decentralized local authorities.

1.2.2. The principle of progressivity

In its relationship to time, this principle reflects the fact that the principle of transferring powers requires the State to relinquish certain powers in order to transfer them to local authorities. In effect, these powers are distributed progressively. This justifies the very definition of decentralization as a gradual transfer by the State of appropriate powers and resources to decentralized local authorities. On the basis of this progressive approach, the decentralization process was gradually announced in 1998, and put in place through laws accompanying the creation and implementation of decentralized entities, such as the regional council in 2020. This is followed by the texts determining the powers transferred (in 2023 in the case of secondary education), as well as the implementing decrees and the transfer of resources for more or less effective decentralization. Time is therefore a decisive factor in the decentralization process.

1.2.3. The principle of complementarity

Given that article 15 (2) of the 2004 law on the orientation of decentralization stipulates that "the competences transferred to local authorities by the State are not exclusive", it is clear that the principle of complementarity must be taken into account. It also advocates collaboration between local authorities and the State if this contributes to the harmonious development of the region on the basis of national solidarity, regional potential and inter-regional balance (art.55). This principle also calls for collaboration between local authorities where necessary, or even consultation. 2. Analysis of the levels of action taken by the various players in relation to the general code of decentralized local authorities

This analysis will take into account the action taken by the region and that of state entities.

2. Regional Council action in secondary schools

Referring to the General Code of Decentralized Local Authorities (art. 271), Regional Council action in the field of education can be broken down into three stages:

2.1. Participatory action

This highlights the degree of intervention of decentralized local authorities in the field of education. Decentralized local authorities will be involved in the following areas: school mapping through the regional level. All modifications will be made following consultation and advice from the technical departments of the decentralized State services. The formulation of opinions on the creation, transformation and extension of high schools and colleges.

Decentralized local authorities have a consultative role, requiring the opinion of the regional council in which the facility in question is located. Decentralized local authorities are therefore empowered to express their staffing needs at regional level, on the basis of their regional database. In consultation with the Delegation of Secondary Education, they should indicate their needs, so that the decentralized services can take them into account, given that the transfer of secondary school teachers is still an exclusive prerogative of the central government. However, it is up to them to decide on the recruitment of temporary staff.

2.1.1. Direct action

The regional council has direct competence in a number of areas, including the construction, transformation, upkeep, maintenance and rehabilitation of works and equipment in schools; this responsibility falls directly to it in compliance with the construction standards for classrooms, workshops, administrative blocks and specialized rooms laid down by the Ministry of Secondary Education. In the same vein, the Region is responsible for drawing up a plan for the management of school property and for the supply of water and electricity, either by rehabilitating old structures or installing new ones based on new energy sources such as solar power. The region is also responsible for setting up and running school gardens and canteens on school premises, in

strict compliance with the health and nutrition specifications laid down by government departments, with an emphasis on hygiene and sanitation in the school environment.

With regard to the recruitment and management of support staff, the issue of recruiting and managing part-time teachers to meet teaching needs was raised. Depending on needs, these staff will have to be recruited on the basis of a fixed-term contract, which presupposes that the State will make the necessary resources available to the regions for the remuneration of these staff. It's not out of the question for the education partners to support this initiative.

The regions are also responsible for acquiring school supplies and textbooks, also known as the "minimum package". These supplies will be acquired in proportion to available resources. Depending on resources, the region is responsible for allocating scholarships to reward the most deserving, and emergency aid for children in need and vulnerable situations in public schools. However, the distribution of grants and subsidies is carried out in conjunction with the decentralized services of the State. With regard to participation in the management and administration of secondary schools, the region appoints a representative, either a regional councillor, a local elected official or a citizen who is a member of the educational community, and mobilizes the necessary resources to improve the quality of teaching and life in the school.

2.1.2. Support for communes

As support for communes in the area of nursery and primary education is linked to the basic education sector, further details will be provided in the terms of reference, which are still awaited. Nevertheless, we can specify that, on the basis of needs, support in terms of supplies, materials, human and financial resources to communes will follow the logic of equalization.

2.2. The posture of state administrations in a context of decentralization

The decentralization process that has begun in Cameroon requires the State and its representatives to leave the limelight to decentralized local authorities in the managerial process at local level. The decentralization process thus highlights three postures: supervisory control, advisory support and direct action.

In the first posture, and in application of the supervisory control recognized by the legislator to the central State (Title V art. 72 to 83 of the CGCTD), the State can intervene through its representatives, the governor and the prefect, in accordance with Decree no. 2008/377 of November 12, 2008, establishing the attributions of the heads of administrative districts and the organization and functioning of their services. If the situation cannot be resolved at this level, the central authorities may be called upon to intervene, while respecting their respective spheres of competence. In this case, MINESEC, acting as a sort of educational guardian over the regions, can exercise control over their management strategy when the need arises. At the highest level, the Prime Minister, head of government, ensures that the transfer of powers and resources is effective. He is the guarantor of the implementation of the State's education policy. At the highest level, the President of the Republic, as guardian of the institutions, can act as a last resort and exercise his supervisory control over local authorities.

With regard to the State's second role, in which it provides advisory support to decentralized local authorities, Article 84 paragraph 1 of the General Code of Decentralized Local Authorities stipulates that "The State and its decentralized bodies provide advisory support to local authorities". The support-advice in question (paragraph 2) consists of providing advice, opinions, suggestions and information to Territorial Authorities in the exercise of their powers. However, this advice comes with certain requirements. Indeed, the authorities responsible for providing assistance are recommended to ensure the smooth running and harmonious development of the Territorial Authorities and their establishments, as well as the efficiency, sound administration, good management and quality of local services (art. 85). Finally, with regard to their scope, the

law specifies that “the opinions, advice and suggestions given within this framework are of a consultative nature” (art. 86 paragraph 2).

As a last resort, the State or its branches can directly influence national policy on child training, school mapping, management of teaching staff, orientation of programs and curricula, school textbooks, control of building and equipment standards, organization of official examinations and competitions at national level. What's more, thanks to its power of substitution, which has been willingly retained (Mvogo, 2020), it is recognized that it can act when regions fail to do so, and after formal notice has remained without effect and has been duly noted, or if there is a need for harmonization (art.18 paragraph 2). It should be noted, however, that this direct intervention derogates from the principle of the exclusive exercise of powers by the regions.

3. Discussion

Decentralization brings new players into the national political arena: the State and its branches on the one hand, and decentralized local authorities on the other, all of whom contribute to the national edifice in one way or another.

3.1. Collective construction...

Decentralization is a fundamental means of promoting development, democracy and good governance (art 5 paragraph 2 CGCTD). As such, it is a public policy tool for ensuring effective governance of resources and people for local development (Arrey, 2020). Over time, therefore, the State, finding it difficult to manage all the concerns of the population at grassroots level, created a second category of local authorities, the regions, and transferred to them the necessary powers in certain sectors, such as education. The involvement of decentralized local authorities in the management of public affairs means that the concerns of local populations can be integrated into national development initiatives. Decentralization thus makes it possible to identify the problems specific to the territory concerned and those of the grassroots population, in order to strike a balance between local appropriateness and global coherence (Retour, 2011).

In secondary education, the involvement of local authorities is well established. Its contribution is clearly linked to the different functions that the regional councillor represents:

In its political dimension, the regional councillor performs a representative function. As such, he or she is the conduit between the population and central government, and thus the spokesperson for the problems and demands voiced by the population. They are also mandated by their constituents to participate in building their well-being through local development, and represent the regional council in all the structures in which they have been mandated to defend the legitimate regional and local interests of their constituents. In schools, this representative function is further enhanced by participation in school management and administration through dialogue and consultation structures. On these occasions, this representative is able to put his finger on the real problems in the field, bring the message to the regional level, and work with the school administration to find solutions to the problems identified, within the limits of the powers assigned to him.

In his managerial role, the regional advisor acts as a mediator in administrative, financial and budgetary matters. He can therefore rightly manage negotiations with private committees or civil society to mobilize the necessary development funds on the one hand, and ensure useful mediation activities to manage internal conflicts falling within his remit for local development and the blossoming of all. This accountability function is fully in line with the objective of rationalizing public action with regard to the State, the regional council, local elected representatives, school management committees and even grassroots populations. Building for local development is no longer the preserve of the central government, but everyone's business.

3.2. To the power plays of the stakeholders involved in the decentralization process

The power play is an integral part of any decentralized system. It manifests itself in the right to interfere and the supervisory control granted to the State over decentralized local authorities.

3.2.1. The State's right to interfere with decentralized local authorities

With regard to the 2004 laws on decentralization, which set out the principles of subsidiarity, progressiveness and complementarity (art.9 Law No. 2004/17 of July 22, 2004, on the Orientation of Decentralization), it has been observed in practice that the principle of complementarity subtly imposes the presence of the State in the exercise of powers devolved to decentralized local authorities. Indeed, Lado (2014) defines decentralization as the transfer by the State of powers and resources to elected local authorities that enjoy financial and legal autonomy. This means that the exercise of all transferred powers should be the exclusive domain of local authorities, which benefit from the principle of autonomy and self-administration.

Regarding the principle of progressiveness, delays are visible: since the promulgation of the creation of the regions in the constitution of January 18, 1996, the electorate was installed more than twenty years later, in 2020. Similarly, these delays are observed in the implementation of the specifications in the various sectors affected by decentralization. In this vein, the Prime Minister's delays in adopting the documents making the transfer of powers effective are ambiguous. To date, in the area of education, only the Ministry of Secondary Education has submitted specifications.

3.2.2. From State Supervision to Latent Conflicts of Authority Between Stakeholders

Supervision is a form of control exercised over the activities of decentralized local authorities. As such, the 2004 Decentralization Framework Act stipulates that no local authority may exercise supervision over another. Only the State is responsible for ensuring supervision over its local authorities. Thus, through its representatives, the State ensures supervision over local authorities through legality control (art.72). Furthermore, the State's powers of control over local authorities and their institutions are exercised, under the authority of the President of the Republic, by the Minister responsible for local authorities and by the State representative in the local authority (art.73). This means that this law encourages a certain interference by the State in the governance of decentralized local authorities, which distorts the principle of their autonomy and promotes conflicts of authority between these actors. Speaking of State representatives, the Governor appointed by presidential decree ensures State supervision over the region in addition to his basic functions. He represents the State, the government and all its ministerial branches in the region. Thus, "Actions taken by local authorities are transmitted to the State representative at the relevant local authority, by registered mail or by deposit with the competent department, against acknowledgment of receipt" (art. 74, paragraph 1 of the CGCTD). In other words, the region's actions must be approved by the State representative in the region, in this case the governor, to be validated and subsequently transmitted to the local head of the Ministry responsible for local authorities with regard to budgetary, financial, and public procurement management.

On the other hand, the slowness observed in the provision of resources for the proper functioning of local authorities reflects a latent conflict resulting from the reluctance of members of the government to implement this decentralization, at the risk of having to share the budget allocated to their sector.

Furthermore, at the level of educational establishments, the powers devolved to local authorities in matters of education would encourage the passivity of school heads with regard to the rehabilitation, construction and maintenance work of high schools and middle schools, school aid and scholarships, etc. In addition, the position of regional councilors within the committee and structure of dialogue and consultation would encourage mistrust on the part of school heads who would feel spied on in their management. Also, they wait for the financial manna from the sky

from the latter to resolve all the infrastructural problems of their establishment, forgetting that it is a fusion of ideas, resources for the good and harmonious development of all.

Conclusion

This study aimed to present the nature of the relationships that prevail between the actors involved in the decentralization process in Cameroon. After analyzing the texts relating to decentralization, it follows that the levels of action of the actors involved in the decentralization process contribute to a collective construction of actors for harmonious development at the local level. However, this decentralization stimulates underlying conflicts between actors that manifest themselves in a power struggle. It would therefore be wise for the State to organize more immersion seminars for the various actors in order to dispel ambiguities regarding the understanding of this governance model and to remove the obstacles related to psychological, political, and individual considerations regarding the art of governing in a context of decentralization.

Bibliographic References

1. ABOUEM'ATCHOYI, D. & MANDOU, A. "CGCTD-Central Region Appropriation Seminar" [conference]. Yaoundé. (November 15, 2021).
2. ARREY W.H. "Government Corruption, Politics of Prebendalism and Democratic Governance in Quebec, Canada", International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS) |Volume IV, Issue X, October 2020|ISSN 2454-6186, pp. 169-184.
3. KEUDJEU DE KEUDJEU R., "Research on the Autonomy of Decentralized Local Authorities in Cameroon", Doctoral Thesis, FSJP, University of Douala, 2012.
4. LADO P., "Local Partnership, Intercommunality and Decentralized Cooperation", ASDEG, 2014, Bafoussam.
5. FOUTEM T.M. & ARREY W.H. "Is the Cameroonian State Afraid of Effective Decentralization? Analysis of the Weights Established by the State Since 1996 to Curb Effective Decentralization (1996-2020)" Les cahiers de l'ACAREF (2021) https://revues.acaref;net
6. Law No. 2004/019 of July 22, 2004, establishing the rules applicable to the regions.
7. Law No. 2004/17 of July 22, 2004, on the Orientation of Decentralization.
8. Law No. 2008-1 of April 14, 2008, amending certain provisions of Law No. 96-6 of January 18, 1996, revising the Constitution of June 2, 1972.
9. Law No. 2019/024 of December 24, 2019, establishing the General Code of Decentralized Local Authorities.
10. Decree No. 2008/377 of November 12, 2008, establishing the responsibilities of heads of administrative districts and the organization and operation of their services.
11. Decree No. 2023 of April 24, 2023, establishing the modalities for exercising certain powers transferred by the State to the Regions in matters of secondary education.
12. NTUDA EBODE V. "Cameroon in Decentralization: Opportunities and Challenges." [Inaugural Lecture]. Commencement Ceremony of the Batchenga Institute of Technology. (October 30, 2020).
13. Draft Minutes of the 2nd Ordinary Session of the Central Regional Council for the 2024 Fiscal Year, Central Regional Council, Ongola Room, (August 13-14, 2024)
14. RETOUR D., "Autonomy and Decentralization of Human Resources Management." FACEF PESQUISA. (2011) Special Issue 21-30. Periodicos.unicef.com.br>view.