# Decentralization, Education Governance and Policy Capacity: Pre-School Reforms in the Philippines

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## Abstract

Decentralization is one of the most discussed and adopted public sector reforms in the world, yet there is little consensus on its substance or effects. In this paper, we argue that the existing understanding of decentralization is incomplete and even misguided. Instead of conceptualizing it in terms of goals or typologies, as is commonly the case, decentralization needs to be conceived as a choice of governance structure involving larger number of governmental and non-governmental actors and policy tools. To succeed, it requires more complex governance structures and processes that are often ignored by both scholars and practitioners. The lapse, we argue, lies at the heart of the unremarkable or disappointing results of decentralization. To make it work, theorization and practice need to understand and address the core functional imperatives: analytical, operational and political. We develop a governance framework for decentralization and then apply it to case of the Universal Kindergarten Program in the Philippines. We find that successive governments have sought to achieve their goals through successive ad hoc decentralization, resulting in fragmented education governance. What is needed is a more comprehensive understanding of the sector's functional requirements and addressing them adequately. Equally important is the need to ensure that the relevant agencies at different levels of government have the capacity to perform the essential required functions. Survey of 50 program coordinators at the Department of Education shows a function-capacity mismatch, particularly at the central government who is less capable in performing analytical, operational and political functions than their regional and division counterparts.

Keywords: decentralization, education governance, policy capacity, kindergarten, Philippines

## Introduction

Decentralization has been the subject of much policy and scholarly attention but its role in improving policy outcomes remains ambiguous at best (Busemeyer 2008, Parry 1997). This is particularly true in education, a policy area that has been historically at the forefront of decentralization efforts (Aoki and Schroeder 2014, Dunleavy and Hood 1994, Heyneman 1990, Thomas et al. 2004)). The large number of studies examining the impact of decentralization on education outcomes had done little to shed light on the subject (Wößmann 2003, Clark, Martorell, and Rockoff 2009, Prawda 1993, Naper 2010, Faguet and Sanchez 2008, Barankay and Lockwood 2007, Parry 1997, King and Ozler 2005). Education decentralization, for instance, has been found to reduce administration cost in countries like Chile and Argentina, an indication of administrative efficiency, but evidence from other countries shows an increase in cost due to the additional human resources required to deliver decentralized services (Fiske 1996). Similarly, while education decentralization is expected to increase education spending (Busemeyer 2008), comparative studies reveal that China, a highly decentralized country, spends relatively little on education (Wang, Zheng, and Zhao 2012).

The contradictory effects are not the result of poor implementation of reforms but rather misguided or partial understanding of decentralization (Hutchcroft 2001). Much of the ambiguity about its impact is rooted in viewing decentralization as a catch-all reform comprising numerous measures. The problem is exacerbated by a lack of empirical research explicating the mechanisms by which it shapes policy outcomes (for reviews of the literature see Scott 2009, Muñoz et al. 2017, Faguet 1997). Too often, scholars treat decentralization as a one-off decision on the depth and scope of authority to be distributed among different levels or units of the government when in reality it is a continuous process of matching and developing capacities of different actors and agencies at the national, intermediate and local levels (Faguet, Fox, and Poeschl 2014). In education, this on-going process of breaking apart and at the same time pulling together the authority and responsibility necessitate complex governance arrangements and capacity to make them work. It is vital to focus on the specifics of the transfer of functions, not just its depth and scope.

As a result of flawed thinking, decentralization efforts in education have been a concoction of privatization, delegation, devolution and deconcentration aligned with all three dimensions of authority. A better way of conceptualizing decentralization is to treat it as an organizational choice that structures how different actors, with varying levels of capacity, can better perform the key governance functions – analytical, political and operational – in the sector.

The paper seeks to advance the literature by education reforms in the Philippines where successive governments have sought to achieve diverse policy goals under the rubric of decentralization without considering which level or agency is best positioned to perform them, resulting in a patchwork of incoherent and fragmented governance. In recent years, the government has been aware of the shortcomings of its earlier efforts and is trying to make amends. However, its efforts continue to by marred by lack of comprehensive understanding of the governance imperatives in the sector. To succeed, it needs a fuller understanding of what

needs to be done to achieve policy goals and configure the governance arrangements accordingly while at the same time ensuring that they have the capacity to perform the functions.

Following the framework of policy capacity proposed by Wu, Ramesh, and Howlett (2015), the paper surveyed 50 program coordinators in the Department of Education who were asked to assess the skills and competences of their agency at the individual, organizational and systemic levels. The survey results show that program implementation forms the core work of the program coordinators. The results also show that the Department is endowed with high levels of operational capacity but is deficient in analytical capacity, particularly at the individual level. These findings confirm the usefulness of conceptualizing decentralization as a process of allocating governance functions based on policy capacity.

The paper seeks to answer the broad question: How can decentralization be designed to allocate functions based on functional necessities and the corresponding capacity of governments to meet them?

**Decentralization as a Governance Issue**

Since the 1980s, decentralization emerged to become one of the most implemented public sector reform programs in the world (Ahmad et al. 2005) but different governments, facing different constraints and motivations designed decentralization policies that are too heterogeneous to make any discernible conclusions about its effectiveness. The widespread adoption of decentralization comes from its rather broad definition: the transfer of authority, resources and responsibility from the central government to field units of national agencies and /or different sub-national level of the government (Falleti 2010, Rondinelli and Nellis 1986). The term has been used as blanket concept to capture efforts to rescale decision-making power without due regard to properly identifying the nature of the power that is being transferred.

Existing typologies of decentralization have usefully exposed that decentralization might differ in the depth by which authority is shifted. Rondinelli, McCullough, and Johnson (1989) suggests identifying decentralization from a territorial perspective as either privatization, devolution, deconcentration or delegation, one of the first suggestions that decentralization takes a variety of forms and depth of transfer. But this categorization reifies the varying arrangements that may coexist within a particular policy area. For instance, privatization and devolution, which involve relinquishing central government control to a private entity or locally elected governments (Rondinelli 1981, Rondinelli and Nellis 1986), may exist to some degree as governments turn to private schools and local governments to expand education financing. At the same time, central governments continue to require administrative offices outside the capital to provide technical assistance and supervision over politically devolved functions. Having different types of decentralization as contemporaneous with each other limits the ability to effectively tease out the effect of the different components of decentralization. This is particularly salient in the classical literature because of its tendency to equate decentralization with devolution like when noted decentralization expert Martinez-Vazquez (2011) argue that decentralization "generally means the devolution of decision-making powers."

A functional typology categorizes decentralization projects according to the different dimensions of fiscal administrative or political (Ugaz 1997). Most theorization and scholarly research on decentralization builds on the earlier works on fiscal federalism (Oates 1972, Tiebout 1961) that recognizes local government's ability to discriminate policies according to local preferences, which is thought to generate economic efficiency. Based on the American federalist experience, this set of classical literature have adopted a largely myopic view of 'federalism' and its twin concept of decentralization, failing to acknowledge its many forms around the world (Rodden and Wibbels 2002). Its strict assumptions, particularly on the degree of government's ability to intervene in the local economy, have proven to be of limited use to understanding on-the-ground realities faced by policy designers. While many governments may transfer revenue and spending authority to sub-national governments following the decentralization theorem (Oates 1993, 1985), most fail to account for the fiscal structure that affects how autonomy is actually exercised (Ebel and Yilmaz 2002). More importantly, fiscal decentralization may not be coupled with political decentralization, constraining the exercise of local autonomy in policy-making (Riker and Schaps 1957, Henderson 2000, Beck et al. 2001). While administrative decentralization on its own is suitable when the sector is one that is particularly sensitive (Pollitt 2005), this dimension of decentralization is usually adopted in parallel with the other forms of decentralization (Aoki and Schroeder 2014). What this suggests is that differentiating according to these dimensions may not be exactly meaningful as earlier contended since one dimension is an important precondition of the other.

These typologies have come a long way in advancing the understanding of how decentralization takes place, but the lack of a convincing evidence show either decentralization is not working or that it remains poorly theorized. Some have attempted to address this fundamental theoretical concern by conceptualizing the notion of 'decision space' of local government officials as a key measure of the effectiveness of decentralization Bossert (1998). The concept aims to capture the set of administrative functions delegated to local officials and their degree of choice in making decision, which expectedly varies across different decentralization arrangements (Bossert and Beauvais 2002). Examining 'decision space' brings forward the notion that actors face constraints within a decentralized structure but does not offer a more systematic view of how such constraints play out and how actors navigate through these constraints. More importantly, the focus on 'decision space' tends to emphasize the managerial dimensions of governance and glosses over its fiscal and political aspects, which as earlier mentioned, tend to co-exist independently of each other. The fact that no association is recently found between the depth of decentralization with reform success in the health sector (Muñoz et al. 2017) points to the typologies as analytically empty constructs of a complex phenomenon.

This fundamental conceptual concern can be addressed by essentially conceiving decentralization as a choice of organizational form (Seabright 1996, Garzarelli 2006), a product of multiple motivations and interests (Hanson 1997) that follows a continuous process of matching capacities of different governance actors at the national, intermediary and local levels of the government (Faguet, Fox, and Poeschl 2014). This makes decentralization deeply a governance issue, an "outcome of the tug-of-war between the role of the state wants to play and the role which the external environment allows it to play" (Pierre and Peters 2000, 26). As a result of this tug-of-war, Hutchcroft earlier argued that "administrative and political realms tend to coexist without interrelating" under a decentralized set-up (Hutchcroft 2001, 37). His

assertion stems from Fesler's (1968) lamentation about the inability of the literature then to explore the interaction of these spaces as a result of decentralization. Hutchcroft then suggested to view this interplay as a function of independent continua of decentralization-centralization of administrative and political functions. However, as earlier contended, governments tend to mix certain levels of decentralization and centralization of administrative, fiscal and political powers that are not entirely independent of each other, as in the case in China (Zhang 2006, Wu, Ramesh, and Yu 2017). Thus, from a policy design perspective, decentralization projects lead to 'policy bundles' (Milkman et al. 2012) or 'complex multi-level policy mix' (Del Rio and Howlett 2013) that requires an appreciation of the consistencies and contradictions created by the integration process. Such tensions necessitates decentralization to be assessed by the extent to which functions are appropriately matched with capacities.

Thus, for any government wanting to design decentralization policies, three critical tasks must be undertaken. First, core governance functions need to be identified. In the context of education governance, Kooiman (2000) offered a framework of distinguishing these governance activities according to 'governing orders'. There is a set of activities that involve management of day-to-day affairs called first-order governing. The second order of governing pertains to creating an appropriate environment for which opportunities are created and problems are solved in the first-order. The last set of governance activities is about how 'governing or governors are governed' or meta-governance, which is typically determined by the social-political system in place. Second, choosing how these functions will be undertaken and allocated to actors shall be guided by matching the capacities with the governing needs (Kooiman 1999). This issue is central to any government wishing to decentralize (Bird and Fiszbein 1996, Fiszbein 1997). Third, capacities need to be assessed whether the levels assigned with the function can perform such decentralized functions and build these capacities if necessary. However, decentralization, and governance generally, is often pursued without consideration of capacity, a phenomenon particularly salient in the education sector (Dale 2005). This is conceivably the reason why decentralization efforts do not produce desired results. Conferral of authority and responsibility in the absence of capacity is a recipe for failure. Policy capacity is understood as sets of analytical, operational and political skills and competences necessary to perform policy functions (Wu, Ramesh, and Howlett 2015).

**Decentralization of Kindergarten Education in the Philippines**

The Philippines is an interesting subject of case study in decentralized education governance. The country has a long history of centralized delivery of education as a result of its colonial history but its archipelagic geography suggests a more decentralized regime. Its basic education system is one of the largest in the world with over 20 million students enrolled in public schools. Another distinct aspect of the educational system in the Philippines is the mandatory kindergarten program requiring all 5 year olds to go through formal preschool education.

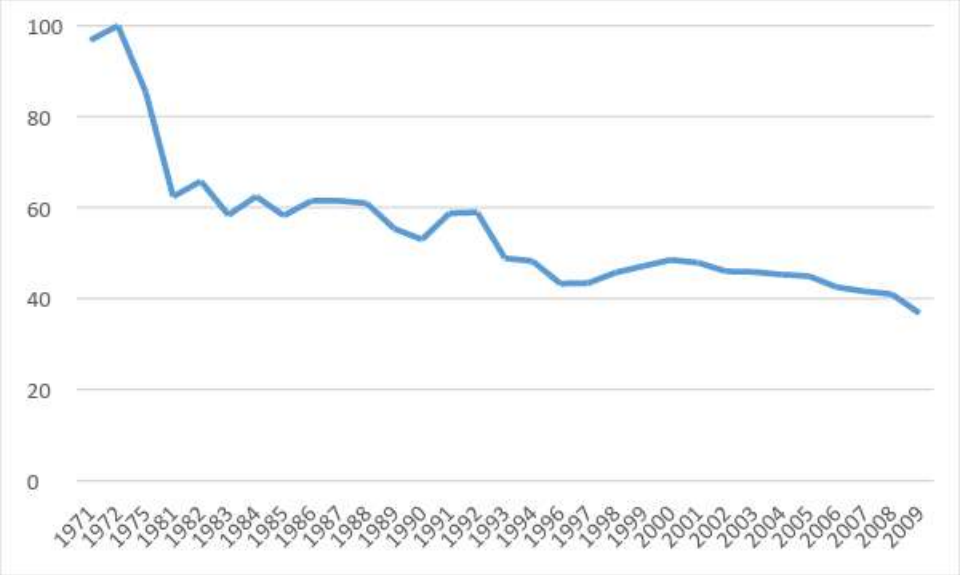
As will be shown in the section below, the Philippines' pre-primary education system is an example where different types of decentralization co-exist (privatization, devolution, deconcentration) and contradict each other, largely as a function of the unique historical development of the kindergarten program. To some degree, the history of preschool education

determines the extent to which functions are matched with capacities of the different levels of education administration.

*Privatization of early childhood education*

Pre-primary education in the Philippines, as in much of the world, is dominated by private providers. During the post-World War II period, private and civic organizations delivered the very first preschool education programs but on a very limited scale. Subsequent laws and decrees in the 1970s and 1980s[1] sought to establish public provision of pre-primary education but floundered due to lack of resources. As a result, pre-primary education remained private, with more than 85% of preschool students enrolled in private institution in 1975 (Figure 1). The Education Act of 1982 guaranteeing children's right to equality of access to quality education led to the gradual emergence of pre-primary in public schools. However, these classes are organized by parent-teachers associations or teacher's club. These self-supporting pre-elementary classes account for 52% of enrolment of three to six year old children, which are funded primarily by local governments (Mehra, Kurz, and Paolisso 1992). The post-Marcos period saw an exponential growth in gross enrolment in preschool from 13% in 1989 to 22% in 1991 (see Figure 2).

**Figure 1 Percentage of enrolment in pre-primary education in private institutions (%)**




Source: UNESCO (data.uis.unesco.org)

[1] This includes the Child and Youth Welfare Code signed in 1973 and an administrative code in 1971.

Buttressed by the earlier experience of local governments with preschools, the construction and management of day care centers were devolved to local governments in the early 1990s[2]. The Local Government Code (LGC) of 1991, or the devolution law, affirmed this role by mandating maintenance of a health center and day-care center as the prime responsibility of the *barangay* resulting in a remarkable growth in public day-care centers from 13,900 in 1991 to more than 32,000 centers in 1999[3]. The devolution of daycare centers was a part of larger set of reforms of social services wherein social welfare, environment and health were devolved to the local governments. However, the devolution excluded administrative decentralization of education. As part of the LGC's decentralization of construction and maintenance of infrastructure, public school buildings are now the primary responsibility of local governments. The law also provides for the financing of certain education spending on equipment, research, books and sports development but LGU have heavily focused on construction of buildings and classrooms and to some extent, teacher salaries and allowances (Behrman, Deolalikar, and Soon 2002). Local governments hold the primary responsibility for delivering social services through day care centers but not the delivery of pre-primary education, a public service conceived to be best delivered by local authorities.

Amidst rising enrolment, concerns over quality of education was raised by the educational assessment of Joint Congressional Commission to Study and Review Philippine Education or EDCOM, linking the high dropout rates particularly in the rural areas to the inadequacy of preparation among young children (Magno 2010). As a response, DECS introduced a six-week summer school for grade 1 entrants in 1991 and institutionalized preschool education but only to 19 priority schools divisions (later expanded to 20) in 1993. This marks one of the very first attempts at a centrally-coordinated delivery of public preschool program in the country.

At this point, the form of decentralization of preschool education is an uncanny mix of privatization, devolution of day care centers and delegation of authority to centrally-funded local schools. The over-all approach is largely fragmented and incoherent that it was not long for the policy-makers to recognize the need for greater government intervention.

*Early signs of administrative decentralization*

The highly privatized regime led to widening gap between those who could afford preschool and those who could not, which raised concerns in the light of increasing empirical evidence showing its lifelong effects (Tan, Lane, and Coustere 1997). As early as the 1970s, DECS recognized the importance of public preschools education but considered it to be too expensive. As the Education for All Assessment Report noted:

> "In January 1995, DECS conducted a survey to assess the preschools and one of the conclusions was that the Government could not afford to provide this service in all divisions. Thus, in March of the same year, DECS issued a statement on early childhood education that affirmed the importance of pre-schooling but also stated that preschools should be developed by the community to provide early childhood

[2] It was mandated by law through RA 6972 that all barangays (or villages) will have a day-care center, to be managed by barangay governments under the supervision and financing of the Department of Social Welfare and Development.

[3] http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/1200/Philippines-PREPRIMARY-PRIMARY-EDUCATION.html

development experiences for 5-year old children before they enter Grade 1" (DECS 1999, 26).

The constraints faced by DECS led Heaver and Hunt (1995) to suggest the conversion of day care centres into preschools. Day care are far more expansive than the 2,900 preschool classes that DECS runs every year and DSWD already has the necessary pedagogical capacity to carry out a universal preschool curriculum. In doing so, the community-level day care would have been the point of convergence of all ECCD activities, integrating disparate and vertical programs into the devolved functions of social services.

This conversion argument formed the underlying reason for the drive for more community-based preschools. In 1993, DECS called for more community-financed preschools, which are ran by either NGOs or private entrepreneurs (DECS 1999). The private share of preschools marginally increased by end of that school year to 36.8% (see Table 1), but the growing public investment is evident in the declining share of private preschools in student enrolment.

**Table 1 Number of Preschools and Enrolment in Preschools in public and private institutions (%)**

| Year | Number of Preschools | | | Enrolment in Preschool | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total | Public (%) | Private (%) | Total | Public (%) | Private (%) |
| 91-92 | 5,319 | 68.8 | 31.2 | 408,626 | 45.2 | 54.8 |
| 92-93 | 5,613 | 70.4 | 29.6 | 415,483 | 51.1 | 48.9 |
| 93-94 | 5,441 | 63.2 | 36.8 | 456,456 | 52.2 | 47.8 |
| 94-95 | 6,906 | 68.8 | 31.2 | 546,789 | 52.7 | 47.3 |
| 95-96 | 7,355 | 68.6 | 31.4 | 552,599 | 52.3 | 47.7 |
| 96-97 | 7,957 | 68.2 | 31.8 | 555,502 | 52.0 | 48.0 |

Main source of data: DECS Statistical Bulletin, Sys 1991-92 to 1996-97; DECS 1997-98 Factsheets

In 1997, DECS experimented with an 'alternative delivery system' of preschool by contracting non-government organizations, and private schools as service providers for the poorest municipalities (5$^{th}$ and 6$^{th}$ class municipalities), urban poor communities and relocation areas. The shift in governance arrangement comes in the financing of the delivery of a class of 20-25 pupils at a monthly rate of Php250 per pupil. The contracting scheme marks the first deliberate intervention of the government in the delivery of preschool education derived partially from the gains of the conversion of military bases into economic assets (De Guzman 2007). Non-formal education through this preschool package for under-privileged children is increasingly recognized as a necessary complementary program to formal education (Ordoñez and Maclean 2000).

In 2000, the Philippine government established a National Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) system that aimed to ensure children are adequately prepared for formal

education in 2000. The ECCD Act covers children who are aged 0-6 years old and refers to a full range of services on health, nutrition, early education and social services. The law defined a legal framework for the governance of early education that is based on the principle of shared responsibility. It distributes the roles and responsibilities between national government agencies and local government units following the system of decentralization provided by LGC. Different national government agencies, including the Department of Education, Culture and Sports (now called Department of Education or DepEd) and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) comprises a coordinating council responsible for setting policies and coordinating the ECCD programs. Local government units are made responsible for providing public ECCD services and financing compensation and training of service providers.

This highly delegated approach to curriculum development is increasingly being put to the test. The growth in number of children enrolled in preschool (59.3% in 2003) meant a higher proportion of students going into Grade 1 with experience with center-based learning. However, some of these Grade 1 pupils, as the former DepEd Secretary Jesli Lapus noted, "'un-learn' some of the things they were taught during their preschool year", indicating an unequal quality of education across these preschools (Lapus 2008). This led to the development of a standard curriculum for preschool.

*The Universal Kindergarten Program*

The development of a standard curriculum led to appreciation of a centrally delivered preschool program. By 2008, the preschool programs of DepEd was expanded to include all children who are in day care centers. This initial effort to universalize kindergarten foundered due to lack of financial and human resources given that the legal mandate was only delivered an executive order that requires resources to be sourced from existing budget and staff. More importantly, the definition of roles between key stakeholders - DepEd, DSWD and the LGUs - were largely unclear, leaving the universalization of kindergarten a largely unimplemented mandate.

Given this prior experience with universalizing kindergarten, the DepEd sought to institutionalize the pre-elementary schooling as the first phase of mandatory and compulsory formal education through the Kindergarten Act of 2012. The law serves as the backbone of the Universal Kindergarten Program, which is an ambitious program of the Department of Education (DepEd) to adequately prepare all Filipino children to enter the primary education system. The law essentially mandates the government to provide free kindergarten education to children who are at least five years old. The 2012 law builds on the prior experience in 2008 and appropriated the necessary funds for the program.

The program is ambitious for two reasons. First, the law also institutionalizes the adoption of a Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) where the mother tongue of a child shall be used as the primary medium of instruction in classrooms. The complexity of this component of kindergarten education comes from diversity of languages of the country. More than 180 living languages exist, 13 of which are indigenous languages with at least one million native speakers. Since teachers are required to adapt to the mother tongue of the learner in designing instructional materials, massive hiring Second, widening the scope of education entails massive mobilization of resources towards ensuring free education are delivered. Just right

before the enactment of the law in 2011, only 50% of eligible children are enrolled in a pre-primary school (UNESCAP 2011). While more than 60% of the kindergarten enrolment comes from public schools, the government still needed to build new classrooms and hire new kindergarten teachers in order to bring in the rest of the pre-primary children into the education system. Kindergarten should be offered in all 38,000 elementary schools all over the country. Since 2012, About 36,000 and 30,000 kindergarten teachers were hired in 2013 and 2014, respectively.

DepEd's efforts have been largely successful in enrolling eligible students into the program. Since 2008, enrolment in public kindergarten schools grew exponentially by 138% from 746,448 enrollees to 2.2 million in 2012. This largely public intervention have crowded out private schools with enrolment remaining stable at about 420,000 since 2008[4]. In the end, DepEd managed to increase enrolment by about 1 million in a matter of three years. This remarkable success occurred despite doubts on the capacity of the government to meet supply-side requirements of constructing classrooms and hiring teachers on time. Although the program still confronts many challenges like widespread use of makeshift classrooms estimated to be about 20% of schools in a division, the program is a perfect example of a well-coordinated reform.

Many factors could account for DepEd's impressive introduction of the universal Kindergarten program. The inclusion of "making education the central strategy for investing in our people, reducing poverty and building national competitiveness" into the Social Contract of President Benigno S. Aquino assured the program of continued political support through the president's six year term. The passage of the law in 2011 without significant political opposition is an indication of the President's astute ability to translate political agenda into legislation. The primary problem with the EO issued prior to the law is its inability to marshal resources to create permanent items for kindergarten teachers. Relatedly, the program piggybacked on a broader reform of extending the basic education cycle from 10 to 12 years. The government and international financing institutions and development agencies funneled huge amounts of financial resources into ensuring smooth transition, including the Kindergarten.

*Governance of The Universal Kindergarten Program*

The critical factor that shaped DepEd's capacity to design and implement the program is linked to the configuration of the basic education sector. The program, while highly centralized, follows DepEd's shared governance principle that delegates responsibilities to the most appropriate levels in the bureaucratic hierarchy. Inscribed in the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001, "shared governance is a principle which recognizes that every unit in the education bureaucracy has a particular role, task and responsibility inherent in the office and for which it is principally accountable for outcomes". It aspires to structure the basic education bureaucracy to promote democratic consultation, coordination and open communication between vertical units and across horizontal units by transferring authority and responsibilities to regional offices, divisions and districts as well as the promotion of school-based management.

[4] http://news.abs-cbn.com/nation/06/01/15/school-trivia-how-many-students-philippine-schools

**Table 2 Degree of Involvement by Governance Functions by Level of Government**

| **Governance Functions** | **Degree of Involvement** | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Central* | *Intermediate* | | | *School* |
| | | *Regional* | *Division* | *District* | |
| Political | High (*national educational policy and standards*) | Medium (*regional education policy and standards*) | Medium (*municipal coordination*) | Low | Low |
| Operational | Low (*assess outcomes*) | Medium (*ensuring compliance*) | High (*schools supervision*; *teacher recruitment*) | Medium (*curricula supervision*; *technical assistance*) | High (*program delivery)* |
| Analytical | Medium (*national research*) | High (*regional research; resource planning*) | Medium (*resource planning*) | Low | Medium (*recommend staffing*) |

The Central Office through the Department Secretary is mainly responsible for setting policies and standards. In the context of the Kindergarten program, the curriculum, implementing guidelines, instructional materials, and assessment methods are determined by the different national bureaus upon consultation with relevant officials from field offices. A recent change in the organizational structure have shifted the delineation of roles between these national operations bureaus from educational phases into functional units like learning delivery, curriculum development, instructional materials and learning assessment. The Kindergarten units, which was mandated by the Kindergarten Act, has been largely absorbed by the Bureau of Learning Delivery but different staff from other bureaus act as a focal person or coordinator for Kindergarten matters.

The Regional Offices (ROs) are largely responsible for localizing national policies and standards. Headed by a regional director, the regional office hosts counterpart offices of the functional bureaus in the national level. The licensing of schools has been devolved to regional offices who are responsible for approving the establishment of public and private schools in the region. The RO is administratively accountable for the performance of the units below the hierarchy, as such the RO supervises the schools divisions and districts in terms of complains to policies. The RO also has subject specialists, which include a Kindergarten coordinator.

The integration of a Kindergarten coordinator in all levels of the bureaucracy is a key accountability mechanism that gives DepEd the organizational muscle to implement the program. At the division level, the coordinator is responsible for providing technical assistance to the schools, recruiting Kindergarten teachers, and providing capacity development interventions to all relevant personnel. Rather than have one national program office, embedding

shared responsibility of the program into the different layers of the bureaucracy fosters a unique and optimal matching of capacities. ROs are better able to understand broader trends making them a suitable level to regionalize policies while the schools are empowered to cater the delivery and channel resources towards better management of the school. The existence of divisions and districts to provide technical assistance adds a layer that maybe perceived inefficient but fosters intra-organizational learning and vertical coordination of policies.

Each layer also shares the responsibility with other partners in delivering educational services. Schools Division Superintendents play an important role in the Local School Board, a multi-sectoral entity formed to determine how the Special Education Fund of local governments should be allocated. Regional Directors also liaise with the Regional Development Council while the Central Office negotiates with the Congress during budget hearings and establishes partnerships with other national government agencies. Schools on the other hand are at the frontline of service delivery and is responsible for mobilizing parents and teachers to augment any financial shortcomings of the schools. Not only do the decentralized units aim to create vertical synergies but also horizontal integration with other external stakeholders.

The shared governance principle also facilitates organizational learning by having the different layers responsible to capacitate the level they supervise. The ROs and SDOs provide technical assistance to schools districts and schools so that compliance to key policies is enhanced. Necessary to performing this function is training of the kindergarten coordinators at the regional and division level on the relevant policies to be implemented.

**Policy Capacity of Kindergarten Coordinators**

The central role played by Kindergarten Coordinators cannot be overemphasized; they form a large part of the success of the Universal Kindergarten Program. What kind of capacities do these coordinators have? This section summarizes the survey of 50 coordinators conducted in July 2017.

*Who are the Kindergarten coordinators and what do they do?*

The surveyed coordinators are specialists and well-educated with 93% having at least a graduate degree. They generally have professional qualifications as teachers or education graduates. An average coordinator is a 50-year old female with over 22 years of experiences under DepEd. Most of the coordinators (70%) do not have any experience outside the education bureaucracy.

Most coordinators consider themselves primarily as managers (30%) or analysts (29%) with around 70% performing other functions such as evaluation, monitoring, assessment and planning and development. This finding is corroborated by the activities they perform most of which are analytical and managerial. The most salient work among coordinators is managing the implementation of the kindergarten program. They are also equally involved in collecting information, evaluating the processes and prioritizing policy problems.

While they appear to perform analytical functions, their knowledge about the rational policy analysis is moderate while their knowledge of management practices and styles is high.

However, they are not managers in the strictest, where they are responsible for people and resource management. They are not too comfortable in leading a team, managing an office, or navigating through office politics.

Kindergarten coordinators are more likely to be program managers, not entirely responsible for service delivery but critical in providing support services to schools and districts. They also do not rely on other government offices to perform their tasks. Their work involves dealing with ordinary citizens and academia.

This profile paints a picture of highly professional coordinator who is located at the heart of the kindergarten program. They do not perform 'first order' governance activities of managing the day-to-day affairs of the program. Rather, they appear to be involved in the 'second order' governance, managing the various issues faced by schools and districts. They also perform three governance functions: while they primarily work on managerial concerns, they also perform analytical functions such as evaluating processes and outcomes. These functions are critical to program implementation as the coordinator's role involves rolling out standards and guidelines as well as providing feedback to central government on how to improve the guidelines.

*Do they have the capacity they need?*

Table 3 summarizes the Revealingly, operational capacity is appraised to be strongest at all levels. At the individual level, this is not surprising considering the nature of work of kindergarten coordinators; their role is largely ad-hoc and are assigned on top of their official designation, which is typically given to high performing individuals. Collaboration and quality management are at high levels at the organizational level but resources, particularly staffing, are warranting. The external environment appears supportive of the program but could benefit from some improvement.

Political capacity appears to be strong with kindergarten coordinators appraising their individual-level capacity as particularly high. Organizational-level political capacity is moderate while systemic capacity is the weakest in relative terms. This means that the program and DepEd as a whole operates in a sub-optimal political environment, particularly when the election results is considered.

**Table 3 Mode responses by Dimension and Level of Policy Capacity**

| | Individual | | Organizational | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Survey Question* | *Mode* | *Survey Question* | *Mode* | *Survey* |
| Analytical | Identifying data and information relevant for policy analysis or policy evaluation | 3 | There is an adequate supply of capable internal policy analysts | 4 | The population educated to mal decisions. |
| | Designing and administering surveys | 3 | There is an adequate supply of capable external policy advisers or consultants. | 4 | The public has necessary infor sector's service overall perform |
| | Collecting valid and reliable qualitative data | 3 | There is sufficient linkage with universities to foster exchange of ideas and learning. | 3 | Most decisions in my sector are evidence. |
| | Integrating existing research evidence with policy-related tasks | 3 | Policy-related data and information are regularly and reliably collected. | 4 | |
| | Conducting statistical analysis and other quantitative techniques | 3 | Top management is committed to using evidence in decision-making. | 5 | |
| | Conducting qualitative analysis | 3 | There is an adequate supply of capable internal policy analysts | 4 | |
| Operational | I am able to motivate others to care about work we need to accomplish. | 5 | Adequate budget is readily available to be utilized for our work. | 4 | Organizations i capable of impl effectively. |
| | I like to experiment with new approaches to work. | 5 | The organization is sufficiently staffed. | 3 | Agencies in my working with e |
| | I have an understanding of how things really get done at my work. | 5 | Appropriate controls on financial and other discretionary decisions are in place. | 4 | There is no cor policy sector of |
| | I try to work with others to find solutions to a problem which satisfy our expectations. | 5 | It is common practice to collaborate with other units to achieve common goals. | 5 | The governmen to make the rig |
| | I can translate mental plans into written targets, goals, strategies and actions. | 3,5 | A system is in place to ensure the quality of the organization's services. | 5 | |
| | I have the necessary skills for budgeting and expenditure monitoring. | 4 | | | |
| | I have the skills to assess and promote the performance of my team members. | 5 | | | |
| Political | I am able to communicate easily and effectively with others. | 5 | My organization receives the public recognition it deserves. | 4 | Election results preferences of t |
| | It is easy for me to develop good rapport with most people. | 5 | The organization considers stakeholders' inputs when necessary. | 4 | The policy sect organization is political leader our targets. |
| | I spend a lot of time and effort at work networking with others. | 4 | People within the organization has easy access to policy-makers | 4 | Political leader policy problem |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | outside the organization. | | compared to otl |
| | I have developed a large network at work who I can call on for support when I really need to get things done. | 4,5 | | | Civil society or able to participa decision-makin policy sector. |

Kindergarten coordinators appraise analytical capacity as the weakest among the three governance functions. The weak analytical capacity is largely driven by lower capacity at the individual level. While there are existing mechanisms that promote organizational analytical capacity, particularly top management support for evidence-based decision-making, the kindergarten coordinators do not find themselves equipped with the requisite skills and competence to conduct systematic policy analysis.

When level of government is considered, the central government generally consider themselves to be of low capacity across the three dimensions compared to the regional and division coordinators. This is an important finding considering their policy formulation and evaluation functions. Two reasons could account for this. First, the national coordinators only fairly recently assumed their delegation as national coordinators, which accentuated the function-capacity mismatch. Second, the recent reorganization may have displaced staff with previous working experience on political lobbying and negotiations and may have eroded prior organizational learning. While these reasons could potentially explain the function-capacity mismatch, the lack of policy capacity at the central level could partially explain the highly experimental (or 'projectized') approach (Bautista, Bernardo and Ocampo 2009) of DepEd, which is why many radical reforms came after the documentation of success of these projects.

**Table 4 Level of Capacity by Governance Functions by Level of Government**

| **Governance Functions** | **Levels of Capacity** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | *Central* | *Intermediate* | |
| | | *Regional* | *Division* |
| Political | Low (3.53) | Medium (4.13) | Medium (3.87) |
| Operational | Low (3.45) | Medium (4.14) | Medium (3.90) |
| Analytical | Low (3.12) | Medium (3.53) | Medium (3.37) |

In terms of political capacity, regional and division offices possess the expected level of capacities but central government coordinators have low political capacity. What this could point to is a central government that is generally less politically involved than their counterparts at the region and division. Negotiations with national politicians do not occur on regular basis as compared with discussing with governors or mayors by regional and division coordinators. In terms of individual capacity, regional coordinators have the highest (4.35) followed by division coordinators (4.11) and national coordinators (3.92). The same trend also holds true for organizational and systemic capacity, which points to a regional office that is more capable of performing political functions.

Central government coordinators and regional coordinators follow the expected the levels of operational capacity but division coordinators have lower levels than expected. Divisions appear to suffer more from lack of manpower (3.36) compared to regional offices (3.78). Moreover, system-level operational capacity is lower in division offices (3.80) than regional offices (4.10), driven particularly by the low perception (3.64) about whether there is no corruption in the policy sector.

With regard analytical capacity, only the division office holds the expected level of capacity, indicating that analytical capacity has more function-capacity mismatch than the other levels of the government. Central government coordinators assess themselves slightly higher in individual analytical capacity (2.89) compared to their regional counterparts (2.84) but lower than the division coordinators (2.94). However, these levels are below the 'neutral' level of 3 and actually indicate a general level of difficulty in performing analytical functions. Their environment is also not as conducive in performing these analytical functions, particularly at the system level of central government (3.00). This points to the function-capacity mismatch being largely based on the fact that many analytical tasks are outsourced by DepEd and data are usually collated only by the central government from regional and division submissions.

The Kindergarten coordinators, as intermediate players in the decentralized structure of the program plays a crucial role in ensuring its success. The assessment of their capacity shows a mismatch between the functions expected to be performed by specific levels of the government a self-assessment of their actual analytical, operational and political capacities. The mismatch is particularly salient in the central government, which has important implications to the fact that education service is still highly centralized. The low policy capacity of the central government, particularly in performing political and analytical functions, partially explains why many of the reform projects of DepEd foundered and the resulting organizational structure is an uncanny mix of privatization, delegation and devolution. The central government is largely experimenting with allocation of functions that may work, but a low analytical capacity indicates that they are not really able to truly assess the effectiveness only until projects fail. The policy capacity of regional and division offices are relatively robust, suggesting that a more decentralized structure may be feasible.

## Conclusion

This paper sought to examine decentralization as as a choice of governance structure that involves larger number of governmental and non-governmental actors and policy tools. Based on

an analysis of the decentralization experience of pre-school education in the Philippines, the paper finds that the unremarkable or disappointing results of decentralization can be attributed to the emergence of a policy mix that fails to address governance imperatives of education. Using these governance imperative framework, the capacity of the education bureaucracy was revealed to be lower than desired, particularly in performing analytical functions.

The study has important implications to designing decentralization. First, what is important to understand the governance functions that each levels of the government should be undertaking. Second, there is a need to better understand the levels of capacity before expecting these levels to adequately perform these functions. A mandate-driven approach, as in the case of the decentralization projects of DepEd, to allocating functions dismisses the role capacity has to play in ensuring policy success. Third, decentralization designs should be perceived more as a mix of various policies that have differing levels of centralization. This makes understanding the resulting actor and function configuration more accurate in the sense that whether they are doing is the fundamental policy concern but whether they can do it.

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