

AN APPROACH TOWARD THE STRENGTHENING OF THE MANAGEMENT OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN ALBANIA

Suzana Papadhopulli, Heliona Mico

The Institute of European Studies, University of Tirana, Albania,
spapadhopulli@hotmail.com

The Institute of European Studies, University of Tirana, Albania,
heliona.bellani@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Educational management is a field of study concerned with the operation of educational organizations. There are two dominant trends in educational management around the globe. The first trend is the decentralization of responsibilities to lower levels of government mainly applies to primary and secondary level of education. The second trend is to grant educational institutions a very significant degree of management autonomy, applies to all levels of education.

In this contest we will be focused on the management of education system in Albania and lessons learnt during the last years, especially during the implementation of the project regarding the Education Excellence and Equity, financed from donors, through the piloting of SWAP, sector wide approach, where one of its priorities was the strengthening of management, leadership and governance of the education system.

The paper will be focused in the following topics:

- Planning, by defining the strategic goals based on the National Strategy of Pre-university Education, the emergent needs for change based on a series of preliminary studies, the operational priority areas with the specific objectives and each sub-priority objective for realizing the priority areas as well as the relevant institutions responsible.
- Monitoring the realization of the decentralized approach in the management of the education system in Albania.
- Evaluating the changes set forth by the sector wide approach in the education system and analyzing the national capacities for decentralizing the education system.

The essence of this methodology and the key to success is to improve the quality of management of the Ministry of Education and Science, dependent institutions, decentralized units, de-concentrated units, creating an interaction and coherence between them.

Keywords: Education, management, policy, legislation, Albania.

INTRODUCTION

The performance of the education sector is a key determinant of Albania's future competitiveness and economic growth. Given Albania's aspirations to maintain its growth, narrow regional disparities and join the EU, the main challenge in the education sector is to develop a system and institutions which prepare school graduates to function effectively in labor markets, become active citizens and contribute to strengthening Albania's competitiveness. The importance of investing in human capital is especially pronounced in resource-scarce Albania.

The paper will submit the path where the development of the management of the education system in Albania is performed. By analyzing the needs of the system for the implementation of the Education Excellence and Equity Project (EEE-P), the paper will shed light on the developments done toward a better managed education system and on the profits provided by this new approach. In continuity of the analyses, the objectives and the priority areas of the project will be presented, as well as the steps taken for realizing the objectives, the monitoring-evaluation indicators set forth and the extension of the management autonomy applied to all levels of education.

In this paper we will give brief analyses of the needs for changing of the management in education system towards strengthening the leadership and management capacities, and enhancing governance and accountability of the education sector. The general part of the analyses considers the policies implemented and the activities that are associated with the decentralization in every part of the education system, starting from central level, ending at school unit, strengthening the leadership, professional development of school principals, decision making and resource management at the school level, increasing the communities' participation, introduction of performance-based management system, and full utilization of the Education Management Information System (EMIS) for decision making.

The last part of the paper is focused on a brief comparison of the policies and standards set forth in 1995 and 2012 laws on Pre university education system, by giving a resume of the completed steps towards strengthening of the management of the education system in Albania. Finally the paper summarizes the values of the efficient management for providing a systematic control of the education service, increased accountability at all levels of the system, with the sole purpose of achieving higher standards.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The way the school was managed during the transition period has nothing in common with a decentralized approach of governing. Albania's education system in spite of its multiple levels of government is appeared to be a very centralized one. Most decisions are made at the center or by

its de-concentrated branches, thus many decisions that have a clear impact at the school level are made by people far removed from the school's reality¹. While regarding the school principals, they were not responsible for managing either teaching staff or financial resources. But in the developing society the principal of the school must assume responsibilities for student learning and must be accountable for those results to parents and the community. All these urged changes in management approaches in the education system in Albania, towards strengthening leadership, management and governance of the education system, improving conditions for teaching and learning, improving and rationalizing education infrastructure, and setting the stage for higher education reform.

Decentralization of the education system management and service delivery at pre-university level is a core aspect of the county's ongoing broader efforts. Under the decentralization system, schools are required to take increased responsibility for planning and managing the development of services they deliver along with the associated quality improvement procedures.²

THE AIM OF THE STUDY AND METHODOLOGY USED

The overall goal of study is to present the developments occurring towards the strengthening of the management in the education system, aiming the good governance of the system in order to raise institutional performance in the delivery of the education services.

Through this study, we analyze qualitative indicators of the education sector while the methodology used is related to the analyses of the policy documents, which comprises the examination of the normative frameworks, national key documents and includes an analyses based on the review of academic and policy papers and materials on education system management and its importance in achieving a performance-based management.

ANALYSES

A National Education Strategy 2004-2015 for pre-university education was developed by identifying four priority areas, and establishing related objectives, indicators to measure achievement and the timetable for implementation. Building on the NES 2004-2015, the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) started the systemic reforms which would cover from early childhood development to tertiary education. In this way the New National Education Strategy (NES) would provide a framework for a sector-wide reform.

¹ Decentralizing education in transition societies. Case studies from central and eastern Europe. World Bank March 2001

² World Data on Education, 6th edition, 2006/2007 (compiled by UNESCO-IBE <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/>
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The National Education Strategy (NES) forms the basis of the Education Excellence and Equity Project, financed from Albanian government and international partners based on the annual reform programs (ARP)' developed within the framework of the NES.

Why a SWAP was chosen for supporting education sector in Albania?

Sector Wide Approaches (SWAPs) in education aim at enabling development partners at the country level to work jointly with the Government to review national education sector plans and priorities, as a basis for pooling support through a sector budget or a general budget support process.³

Sector-wide Approaches, or SWAPs, as they have come to be called, were developed in the second half of the 1990s as one of several means for development agencies to achieve greater coherence in *their* approaches to providing development assistance. More concretely to support the governments of the developing countries with limited planned budget for education in order to allocate the foreign resources for funding of capital projects in education such as projects for textbooks, teacher training or curriculum development etc., that have an important impact in the improvement of education quality and results.

So, SWAP makes sense: it comprises a means of consolidating the support, the review, the monitoring and the evaluation of different development partners (donors) for the *sector-wide education development plan* of a country.

This new approach, called Sector Wide Approach, was chosen for EEE-P implementation because it was expected that this project would strengthen the government ownership, facilitate cooperation and coordination among partners, strengthen sectoral management capacity, enable the government to address strategic issues, and reduce transaction costs of multiple reporting and procedures. The SWAP addresses the issues of a systemic education reform in Albania.

In 2000-2004 a project of World Bank focused in the Education Reform in Albania was implemented. The document of the education strategy was developed and its implementation needed stronger governmental ownership and adequate monitoring arrangements to be carefully established.

There was a need for technical assistance, capacity building and efficient capital investment to implement the National Education Strategy. A sector-wide approach, therefore, was considered as an effective instrument for addressing the current needs and opportunities in the education sector in Albania.

The objective of the Education Excellence and Equity Project (EEE-P) was to improve the quality of learning conditions for all students and increased enrollment in general secondary education especially for the poor. The intermediate goals were that leadership, management and

³ Education Sector-Wide Approaches (SWAPs) Background, Guide and Lessons, UNESCO
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governance of the education system are improved, teachers use new methods of teaching and wider variety of learning aids in schools, the quality of school infrastructure and the efficiency of its use are improved, and the initial steps of higher education reform are taken⁴.

In this context the EEE-P has provided financial and technical support to the Government over a period of seven years (2006-2013), covering seven full cycles of government fiscal years. The EEE-P has used the Government's financial management and procurement systems during its implementation. The donors, namely the World Bank (WB), the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEDB), have pooled their funds with the MoES annual reform program budget.

There were four priority areas of the project as follows: (i) strengthening leadership, management and governance of the education system, (ii) improving conditions for teaching and learning, (iii) improving and rationalizing education infrastructure, and (iv) setting the stage for higher education reform.

In this paper we will try to be focused and analyzed the priority one that aims to **strengthen the leadership and management capacities**, and to **enhance governance and accountability** of the education system. This priority included activities that were associated with the decentralization, strengthening the leadership, professional development of school principals, decision making and resource management at the school level, increasing the communities' participation, introduction of performance-based management system, and full utilization of the Education Management Information System (EMIS) for decision making.

To achieve all the above mentioned objectives MoES in collaboration with all its dependent institutions as the main implementing units, assisting time after time by international and local expertise has undertaken the following actions:

- **Prioritize four areas and sequenced reform activities** by developing a reform program with all the activities defined generally per each priority to achieve the goals and objectives during the project life in accordance with the National Strategy for Pre-university Education; Although the project was organised into four priorities, its objectives and actions were prepared, implemented and monitored as part of MoES six programmes under the Medium Term Budget Plan (planning and management, basic education, secondary general education, secondary vocational education, higher education, science).
- **Set the medium-term and annual targets** by defining the strategic goals in accordance with the National Strategy for Pre-university Education. The most important and urgent

⁴ Education Excellence and Equity Project – Project Appraisal Document (PAD)

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needs were defined based in a series of preliminary studies developed during the preparation phase of the project by international and local experts.

- **Develop detailed implementation plans.** An initial planning was finalized upon an intensive dialogue that MoES developed with different stakeholders. Every year Ministry prepared the detailed annual reform program that included the activities needed to be performed during the time period of one year in the framework of the reforms undertaken to achieve its main goals.

The Annual Reform Program was revised annually during its implementation in June and in October, allowing a certain degree of flexibility in the choice of objectives and activities, changing some of the activities initially planning and replacing them with some other new ones in order to make more compatible the program with the activities needed and to be in the same line with the ongoing implementing reforms. This process made the Ministry to improve and strengthen the planning process year after year.

- **Clarify the responsibility and accountability framework.** The project had 4 priority areas and for each priority the objectives and sub-objectives had been defined. Activities to be performed in order to achieve the objectives had been planned along with monthly time period, the expected outputs, cost estimations and the responsible implementing units.
- **Set the monitoring-evaluation indicators.** A set of evaluation and monitoring indicators was developed since the beginning of the project to monitor the performance of overall project implementation and the performance of the education system itself. The system of indicators was evaluated by the MoES on yearly basis and presented to the meetings that MoES organized with the education partners.
- **Perform the monitoring and evaluation of the project implementation.** During the project implementation the monitoring process was realized internally by weekly and monthly reporting of the heads of implementing units to senior officials of the MoES, reporting of MoES to Steering Committee of project on the implementation of the project for ongoing year and on the planning of the reform program for the coming year. At the same time regular meetings with the stakeholders were organized by MoES in the frame of the reforms undertaken in the frame of project implementation. It was also another monitoring mechanism that was used under this project was the semi-annual meeting with local and international education partners as a monitoring mechanism to increase the participation of key stakeholders in education and enhance transparent planning and reporting by the education authorities.
- **Strengthen leadership in schools and institutions.** This was realized at two levels, so **at national level** the restructuring of MoES and dependent central institutions was concluded for a clearly division of responsibilities between the central and local level (decentralized and de-concentrated) and school.

The restructuring included the creation of new administrative or scientific units providing clearer definition of roles, better division of responsibilities and fulfillment of the accountability mechanisms. The new regulations were drafted to these institutions. So decisions of the Council of Ministers were adopted on new structures of MOES, National Institute of Educational Development (IED) and National Examination Agency (NAE). The National Education Inspectorate (NEI) was established, a new institution, outside the structure of the Ministry and regional education departments (RED) thus providing a special body for inspection, monitoring and evaluation of pre-university education quality advice and functionality of its managing structures (schools, regional education director, education offices). It was developed and is under implementation the Regulations of Inspectorate and Inspection Manual, on the basis of which this institution performs its standardized activity. NEI is part of the European network of educational inspectorates. The REDs/EOs were also structured by creating new units, especially for the information and communication technology and inspection and by suppression of inspection unit. It was developed and is actually implementing the new regulations of RED/EOs in which their role, responsibilities and accountability mechanisms are clearly defined.

While **at local level** the school leadership, autonomy and accountability were increased. So school autonomy reforms were implemented through which school principals, teachers, students and their parents make more decisions than before the implementation of Education Excellence and Equity Project.

a) In the area of curriculum

- Reform of alternative texts gave teachers the right to decide which text to use during the school year.
- Reform of the "10%" gives teachers another opportunity to make decisions in the teaching-learning process. According to the reform, a subject teacher may develop a chapter or subject line less or more classes determined by how this freedom is subject programs and professional boundaries is [-10%, +10%].
- Reform of the "free hours" opens wide opportunities for curriculum at the school level. A special body at the school, the curriculum team, plans to use the free hours which accounts for 10-15% of each subject program for curriculum projects, teaching modules, elective subjects, activities such as community engagement, competitions, etc..
- Reform of the gymnasium where students select a list of optional subjects.
- Reform of state graduation where students, in collaboration with parents, select the optional subjects that will pass through exam.

b) In the financial area

- The library of the school, according to which a fund is separated from the state budget, according to the formula "per students' and teachers who are deciding which books the school library should be equipped with.
- Fund "teaching tools" lock the transparent and abusive situations and ensures the long-standing principle of equality of opportunity between schools. Under this reform, each school's instructional fund predetermined passage by formula "per student" is sent to the list of learning resources that can be offered to the school, together with the respective reference prices. School instructional sets itself to which she herself needs and specifies their respective number.
- The law provides for a significant expansion of financial autonomy of schools giving the right to use public funds for minor maintenance and to reward teachers for professional merit, as well as the school incomes from the services to third parties for payment of teachers or specialized assistance on optional subjects.

c) In the area of personnel

The new law on the pre-university education system define the appointment the school director by the head of RED/EO's selecting between two candidates proposed by a committee with broad representation. Teacher is not appointed by the head of the RED/EO but by the director of school after two candidates have been proposed by a special commission.

d) In the field of management

Reconfiguration of the school board in which the school principal is no longer part of it but he reports to the board for the medium term and annual plan. New Law-on Pre-University Education System provides board involvement in the appointment and dismissal of the school principal and teachers. In 2006 to 2% of school boards were functioned, whereas in 2010 about 90% of them were functioned instead of 70% that was planned to function under the EEE-P.

Undoubtedly, the management was the most sensitive challenge of this very ambitious project which was expanded at all levels of the education system from pre-school to higher education, furthermore in our education system has traditionally dominated the administration over the management. The project brought a culture of performance-based management for institutions, their units, up to each individual. This is the result-based, output and outcome-based approach. Thus in this way the performance indicators, the standard procedure of planning, reporting and evaluation monitoring of the institutions, units and individuals were processed and put in place gradually. This led to a significant increase in effectiveness and efficiency of human resources, coordination and interaction among institutions and within institutions, and the consolidation of Accountability Mechanisms.

The significance of educational leadership and management in nowadays is increasing more because of the challenges that the system has actually to face in terms of supporting an expanding knowledge-based economy, contributing to the single labour market for qualified personnel and widening access to higher qualifications.

There is great interest in educational leadership in the early part of the 21st century because of the widespread belief that the quality of leadership makes a significant difference to school and student outcomes. There is also increasing recognition that schools require effective leaders and managers if they are to provide the best possible education for their learners. Schools need trained and committed teachers but they, in turn, need the leadership of highly effective principals and support from other senior and middle managers.⁵

To better understand the changes that this approach brought to the education management a comparative perspective on the management of the education system in the legislation of 1995-2012 periods will be provided here below.

During 1995-2008 the relationship between the MOES and the district education directorates has been one of the de-concentration⁶. Financing for the sector has been entirely centralized, being distributed to districts in a ‘conditional’ transfer and to municipalities and communes in block grants that were expected to cover non-education as well as education expenses. The center in the form of the Council of Ministers, Ministry of Finance, or the MOES and their dependencies made almost all policy decisions, tendering and contract decisions and disbursements. Local government had very limited power; schools had less, while parents and communities have entered into the process though private funding⁷.

Regarding the fact that Ministry of Education and Science was responsible for the content of education, in reality there was no room for the Ministry of Education to concentrate on strategic and management issues. At the same time broad consensus had been achieved to decentralize central government competences and powers for a better management in education system. But the decentralization has taken place very slowly into the education system and the reason for this was that while perceptions and legislation have changed, the system of finance and decision making have not⁸.

National Education Strategy 2009-2013⁹ has made a genuine analysis of the need for improvement of the management process of the education system, stressing the importance of reforming and strengthening the policy, management and decision-making capacities through

⁵ Educational leadership and management: theory, policy, and practice Tony Bush tony.bush@ntlworld.com

⁶ Law no. 7952, dated 21.06.1995 “On pre university education system in Republic of Albania”

⁷ Berryman, S. “Albania’s education sector: Problems and promise”, May 2000 World Bank

⁸ OECD – Thematic review of national policies for education –Albania; 15 July 2002, pp 15-16

⁹ National Pre University Education Strategy 2009-2013

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decentralization of responsibilities and decision-making authority from central to the local pre university education level.

Despite the developmental steps taken under the "Education Excellence and Equity Project", a challenge for a better management in education system remains the functioning of the performance's management system at all levels of educational governance. The strategy also aims the decentralization of the education sector for expanding the participation of stakeholders for a continuum of educational projects, and increasing the accountability of schools towards planning, management and improvement of quality for provided services.

Another point of view to the management of the education system is given by the law of 2012 "On pre university education system"¹⁰ where the administrative and financial decentralization as well as the autonomy of educational institutions are associated with increased competences and responsibilities of the school.

The main functions of the central government are related to legislative aspects, political analysis, evaluation of the quality of educational services provided, as well as the implementation of development policies for teaching staff. The central government approves the curricular documentation, pre university education budget, the structure of the school year, teaching load, number of students per class, the main regulation for educational institutions and is engaged in assessing the quality of educational services.

The local government is mainly focused on the infrastructure's maintenance of educational institutions (construction and reconstruction of buildings), on insurance of the integrity of the educational institutions, including the collaboration for students' dropout. It is important to emphasize the clear division of competences and responsibilities between central and local government realized by the law, aiming the development of educational services.

In the framework of changes, the school is empowered with management responsibilities and gradually will play a more autonomous role regarding the management and financial activity, establishing case by case in the form of a public legal entity. The educational institution has the right to benefit for small expenses of maintenance and for emergency interventions from local government funds, as well as to compete with projects for improving the quality of education services.

The financial autonomy entitles the public educational institutions not only the right to manage the funds respecting the financial management rules, but also the right to benefit funds or material support from legitimate sources. The autonomy to educational institutions comes along with the new role of the director of the institution, who does not only direct and control the

¹⁰ Law no. 69/2012, dated 21.06.2012 "On pre university education system in Republic of Albania"
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implementation and development of curricula in the school. The director of the school will be responsible for the management of the institution, including financial management, law enforcement, improving the quality of educational services, personnel management, and so on.

This approach is built in accountability mechanism toward the school and community, which is represented by the board of parents, providing incentives for the director of the school to take responsibility for the impact of his decision making process.

By performing these actions, the school level will be strengthened its capacities to manage resources and will increase the parental and community participation by enhancing accountability. All these steps will provide better learning opportunities for all students.

Conclusions

Strengthening of managing and human resources capabilities is needed for planning system reforms and implementing them as well. There is still a huge gap between the reform as a concept, the acts for its implementation, and the reality on the ground. There can be no efficient management without a systematic control of the education service for the entire population, of the quality of such service, and of the accountability at all levels of the system.

During the project implementation many activities have been performed to make the Education Management Information System be fully functional and used for decision making at the MOES and Regional level. But the EMIS system is not fully functional until now and this fact has harmed the quality of the system's management based on the complete and objective data in order to achieve the mid and long term goals. It is necessary to develop this system as soon as possible.

The control of the education process quality requires great attention as well. In order to further develop the mechanisms for providing quality, the system of central inspection has been established but it needs to be expanded at local level, so the system of local inspection to be established in order to make it a guarantor of the performance of our educational body and of the success of our education reforms, as well as of each school and each individual teacher.

Based in the new law the position of school director as school manager has been enriched with proper competences because if school is successful, all the education system will be successful as well. But still greater attention should be paid to the improvement of managerial capacities in the central level as well as in the local and school levels. In the meantime, collaboration with the local communities and the local government is an extremely important element for a successful school management.

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