Decentralisation, Disadvantage & Incentives

Roy Carr-Hill, Caine Rolleston & Rebecca Schendel
UCL Institute of Education
Background

- Although there have been improvements, access to (and quality within) education systems in many low and middle income countries remains limited.

- National governments and international organisations have proposed a number of solutions to addressing these concerns.

- One particularly popular model of reform, given strong support from organisations such as the World Bank, has been *decentralisation*.
  - Within this, there has been a particular focus on the *devolution of decision making authority to schools.*
School-based decision-making

- Various models
  - *Devolved decisions*: financial; personnel-related; administrative; related to curriculum/pedagogy
  - *Decisions taken by*: individual principal or head teacher; professional management committee within a school; management committee involving local community members
  - *Decision-making process*: ‘Top down’ or participatory; Community members given lots of authority or very little

- Similar assumptions
  - Increased accountability, responsiveness to local needs and efficiency
  - Improved educational outcomes
Review questions

- What is the impact of school-based decision-making on educational outcomes in LMICs?
- What are the barriers to (and enablers of) effective models of school-based decision-making?

In this review, ‘school-based decision making’ defined as:

Any model in which at least some of the responsibility for making decisions about planning, management and/or the raising or allocation of resources is located within schools and their proximal institutions (e.g. community organisations), as opposed to government authorities at the central, regional or district level.
Methodology

- Mixed methods review, following guidelines developed by Snilstveit (2012), Campbell Collaboration and EPPI Centre

- Broad five-stage search strategy, incorporating: existing reviews, academic and grey literature (database searches, web searches, hand searches of journals), citation chasing, correspondence with experts

- Inclusion criteria

- Analysis: meta-analysis, with heterogeneity analysis, supplemented by framework synthesis
Description of included studies

- 26 ‘impact’ studies focused on 17 discrete interventions (4 ‘high’ decentralisation, 12 ‘medium’ and 1 ‘low’)
- Geographic diversity (12 from Latin America, with 5 of these from Mexico; 7 from Africa; and 7 from South or Southeast Asian contexts, with 5 of these from the Philippines)
- Mostly focused on primary level (23/26)
- Mostly classified as ‘medium’ risk of bias (18/26)

- 9 ‘non-causal’ studies (2 multi-country; 7 focused on four of the interventions discussed in impact literature)
Results of meta-analysis

- Somewhat beneficial effects on drop-out (statistically significant in middle-income contexts) and repetition
- Evidence does not suggest that effects on teacher attendance are significant overall, but there is evidence that effects are stronger in contexts of high decentralisation
- Effects on test-scores more robust, suggesting a positive and significant improvement in aggregate test scores on average, and positive and significant improvements in scores on separate language and maths tests.
- Further analysis suggests that these results pertain to middle income countries; we were not able to find statistically significant improvements in test scores in low income country settings, with the exception of one study in Kenya (now a middle income country).
Additional heterogeneity analysis

- Student Level Factors (e.g. gender, socio-economic status; grade level)
- School Level Factors (e.g. teacher characteristics)
- Community Level Factors
- Implementation Factors
Community level factors

- Only seven of 26 impact studies explicitly considered community level factors in their analysis, but results consistent across studies.

- Factors explored:
  - Level of development of particular communities
  - Level of parental education within communities
  - Level of community participation
Community characteristics

- Greater impact found in urban areas by one study (Skoufias & Shapiro, 2006).
- Four studies (Gertler et al., 2012; Murnane et al., 2006; Rodriguez et al., 2010; Skoufias & Shapiro, 2006) find that school-based decision-making reforms are likely to have a stronger impact on more advantaged (i.e. wealthier) communities.
- Other studies showing positive impact explicitly acknowledge having avoided including more remote areas in their analysis (e.g. Glewwe & Maïga, 2011, and Lassibille et al., 2010).
Two studies consider characteristics of community members (Beasley & Huillery, 2014; Blimpo & Evans, 2011).

Both find that communities with a higher proportion of educated school management committee members are more likely to see positive results of school-based decision-making reforms.
Two studies investigate the possibility that some communities will opt to participate more actively in school decisions, as a result of school-based decision-making reforms, than others (Jimenez & Sawada, 1999; King & Ozler, 2005).

Both find strong evidence that community participation levels are a critical factor.
Implementation factors

Small number of studies using experimental designs consider implementation factors by creating discrete treatment arms (Blimpo & Evans, 2011; Bold et al., 2013; Duflo et al., 2012; Pradhan et al., 2011; World Bank, 2011) – but most do not.

Factors considered include:
- Incorporation of a grant
- Incorporation of training
- Incorporation of a report card or other accountability mechanism
- Mechanism by which school management committee members are selected
- Relationship between schools and the surrounding community
- Implementing body.
Results from Pradhan et al. (2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Grant</th>
<th>Training</th>
<th>Elections</th>
<th>Linkage</th>
<th>Linkage + Election</th>
<th>Linkage + Training</th>
<th>Training + Election</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drop-out (n=517)</td>
<td>-0.005 (0.005)</td>
<td>0.007 (0.006)</td>
<td>-0.003 (0.006)</td>
<td>-0.002 (0.006)</td>
<td>-0.005 (0.011)</td>
<td>0.003 (0.006)</td>
<td>0.004 (0.006)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Repetition (n=517)</td>
<td>-0.004 (0.008)</td>
<td>-0.006 (0.005)</td>
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Providing grants

- Comparison of overall results of studies which do and do not include a grant component shows a mixed picture.
- Although a number of studies show positive impact of reforms including grants, others show mixed – or even negative – impacts.
- The studies investigating the AGEMAD programme in Madagascar and the early version of the SBM reform in the Philippines (neither of which included a grant), meanwhile, suggest that school-based decision-making reforms can be effective without providing grants to schools.
Providing training

In addition to Pradhan et al. (2011), three other experiments included in the review explicitly investigate the marginal impact of incorporating a training element into a school-based decision-making intervention (Blimpo & Evans, 2011; Bold et al., 2013; Duflo et al., 2012).

Both studies of ETP in Kenya suggest that training increases the impact of the programme.

However, this result is not replicated in Blimpo and Evans (2011), who find that, although training seems to increase the impact on teacher attendance, it does not appear to have a similarly positive effect on student learning (as measured through test scores).

In addition to this experimental evidence, also possible to compare studies of reforms with and without a training element.

As with the evidence relating to grants, the comparison presents a mixed picture.
Other implementation factors

- **Accountability mechanisms**
  - One study explicitly considers marginal impact of adding a report card to a school-based decision-making intervention (World Bank, 2011) and finds that the addition of the report card actually reduced the impact of the intervention.
  - Five other included studies discuss interventions which include school report cards but evidence is very difficult to synthesise.

- **Implementing body**
  - One study (Bold et al., 2013) shows that the ETP in Kenya – found to be quite effective when implemented by an NGO - had no impact when implemented by the government.
  - Studies of AGEMAD in Madagascar (Glewwe & Maïga, 2011; Lassibille et al., 2010) indirectly support this conclusion by acknowledging that the school-level trainings (found to have the greatest impact) were provided by an NGO.
Identified Barriers

- Poverty

- Low levels of ‘capacity’ within communities

- Limited desire for autonomy

- External factors, including strength of teachers unions, strength of teacher job market, centralised mechanisms (i.e. payment of salaries) and security
Identified Enablers

- Smaller schools

- Devolving personnel decisions (particularly in terms of teacher attendance)

- Additional elements (e.g. grants, training, etc) may be important – although more about particular characteristics than simple incorporation
Conclusions

- Devolving decision-making authority to the school level can have a positive impact on educational outcomes.

- However, this is only likely in more advantaged contexts in which community members are largely literate and have sufficient status to participate as equals in the decision-making process.
Implications for Policy and Practice

- School-based decision-making reforms in highly disadvantaged communities are unlikely to be successful.

- The involvement of school management committees in personnel decisions (particularly hiring and firing) appears to play an important role in improving proximal outcomes, particularly teacher attendance.
  - However, also likely to be linked to the overall teacher job market and the possibility of long-term employment.

- Specifics of programme design appear to be crucial

- Policy makers should proceed with caution when using the results from small-scale pilot programmes to inform national programming
Implications for Research

- General need for further robust analysis of national school-based management reforms
  - Within this, clear need to focus on potentially negative impacts

- Scope for further longitudinal investigation of how school-based management reforms play out over time

- Additional research needed into the relative impact of different models of school-based decision making

- Another review of the same topic, utilising a different review methodology, could usefully complement the findings of this study, particularly in terms of synthesising substantial qualitative literature in this domain
Full report available at:
http://www.3ieimpact.org/media/filer_public/2015/11/20/dfid-funded-decentralisation-review.pdf