

Decentralization of Education: Participation and Involvement of Parents in school governance: An attempt to explain limited-involvement using Bourdieu's theory of social practice.

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Abstract

The discourse over the role of decentralization in bringing about development has been on-going for decades. The arguments advanced for decentralization have been both political and economic. The 1999 Annual World Bank Conference on Development in Latin America and the Caribbean for example focused on discussing the problems that implementation of decentralization was going through. Zimbabwe followed the example of many other countries that were decentralizing their education systems. In the case of Zimbabwe it decentralized education functions rather than political power. Different governments in Africa and Asia have expressed commitment to policies of decentralization as a development strategy, and in Africa alone there were more than twenty five countries that have been involved in launching different decentralization policy initiatives in the 1980s and 1990s (Adamolekun, 1991). The major concern now has been the extent to which decentralization can be credited with bringing about economic and social development within a country. There have been several studies to examine the role of decentralization in development, more so in educational development. Most of the findings have indicated lack of involvement and limited involvement of parents and communities in school governance and management. This paper whilst not justifying the exclusion of parents and communities in key issues of school governance makes an attempt to explain the factors that contribute to lack of involvement or limited involvement parents and communities using Bourdieu's theory of social practice.

Keywords: *Decentralization, Implementation, Development, Education functions, Decision making, School governance and management.*

1. Introduction and Background

The advent of independence in Zimbabwe in 1980, brought with it policy changes and reforms in many areas. Education was one such area. The government policy on education promoted growth with equity. As such there was a corresponding increase in the number of schools and enrolment. The number of primary schools increased from 2401 in 1979 to 4234 in 1985 and 4549 in 1991 and the enrolments in the years cited were 819 586; 2 216 873 and 2 294 934 respectively (Secretary's 1991 Annual Report). Later in 1987, the Zimbabwe government passed a new education act, the 1987 Education Act.

The Act stipulated, among other things, that every child in Zimbabwe should have the right to school education. It also declared that education would be compulsory and free at primary school in Zimbabwe. It further placed education in the category of human rights and viewed it as a vehicle for social transformation (Government of Zimbabwe, 1987). However, there was an amendment to the 1987 Education Act in 1991. The Amendment reintroduced school fees at primary school, and classified schools as either Government or non-Government (Government of Zimbabwe, 1991). Statutory instruments to support the amendment were put in place. These included Education Statutory Instruments 87 of 1992 and 70 of 1993.

Education Statutory Instruments 87 of 1992 and 70 of 1993

The two statutory instruments decentralized the school governance system in Zimbabwe. They stipulated that School Development Committees (SDC) and School Development Associations (SDA) were to manage schools. They decentralized education functions. The education functions which were decentralized included recruitment and management of personnel, procurement of resources, resource management, financial management, maintenance, and school development in general. The SDCs and SDAs were to become bodies corporate capable of suing and being sued in their name (Government of Zimbabwe, 1992). They were to exercise functions and regulations so as to achieve the following objectives;

- (i) to provide and assist in the operation and development of the schools,
- (ii) to advance the moral, cultural, physical and intellectual welfare of pupils at the school,
- (iii) to promote the welfare of the school for the benefit of its present and future pupils and their parents, and its teachers,
- (iv) to promote, improve and encourage the development and maintenance of the school, (Government of Zimbabwe, 1992; Govere, 1995).

Parents were expected to make decisions about school governance issues, elect representatives and implement the decisions for the good of the school. They also had to advance and promote the welfare of children in both curricula and co-curricula activities. The SDCs and SDAs were to form finance sub-committees comprising of the school head, deputy head, the chairperson and the vice chairperson. The decisions on charging of levies were to be made by voting in a parents' meeting. A majority of the parents present at a meeting called for the purpose of reviewing levies would have the power to charge or impose a levy payable in respect of each child enrolled at the school (Government of Zimbabwe, 1993). To achieve the stated objectives, the SDCs and SDAs had to perform and exercise the following powers: assist in the operation, extension and development of the school; assist in the organization and administration of secular and non-academic activities of the school; engage or hire staff; and do all things that, in the opinion of the committee or association were necessary or expedient for the operation, extension and development of the school in the best interests of its present and future pupils, their parents and its teachers (Government of Zimbabwe 1992,1993).

The Zimbabwe government advanced a number of arguments for decentralizing education functions. The arguments advanced were both political and economic. The economic arguments were two-fold. Firstly, it was said that the Act aimed at cost reduction on the part of government as part of the austerity measures supported by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Through this initiative, current and capital costs were to be shared between the government and the community. Secondly; it was said that it aimed at cost recovery, whereby the tuition paid would generate revenue for both the government and the schools. Shared responsibility was envisaged to improve quality of education by making resources available through collective effort, maintain high standards and embrace community participation in school governance. The political arguments advanced for decentralization, in general, included the promotion of more balanced development; more co-ordination of development activities; and increase of people's participation to boost mobilization of resources and the promotion of democracy (Nziramanga Commission Report, 1999). Hence, it was hoped that decentralized decision-making would give local voter-consumers greater voice and power in the service mix and thereby raise their welfare (Winkler and Gershberg in Burki 2000). Thereafter, decentralization as a mode of operation was instituted.

By so doing, Zimbabwe was following the example of many countries that had decentralized their education system, albeit for different reasons. For some, it had been within the context of a federal system, like in Nigeria and for others within the confines of a unitary system of government (Adamolekun, 1991). Different governments in Africa and Asia, for example, have expressed commitment to policies of decentralization as a development strategy, and in Africa alone there were more than twenty five countries that have been involved in launching different decentralization policy initiatives in the 1980s and 1990s (Adamolekun, 1991). In New Zealand, for example, local schools are

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run by boards of trustees, consisting of five elected parents, the principal, an elected staff representative, and in secondary school a student and four other people chosen to provide expertise or balance (Fiske, 1996). Countries such as South Africa have gone to the extent of creating School Governing Bodies (SGBs) in an endeavor to strengthen the democratic process (Dieltiens, 2005; Chilshom, 2004). This has resulted in decentralization of school finances and governance which are viewed as prominent illustrations of efforts to promote social change since the advent of democracy in 1994 (Chisholm, 2004). However, he notes that decentralization as a concept is rarely used in South African education policy documents, but the discourse is framed within the conceptualization of governance, democracy and equity. Within the South African context for example, there is general agreement that decentralization in education as a policy was underperforming. The major problems and differences have been why this has been the case, with one school of thought attributing it to macro-economic policies that result in insufficient resources being made available to support policy intentions, and the other being lack of capacity to implement such policies (Jansen, 2002). On the other hand, the problems with the implementation of decentralization at school level has been associated with the intentions of decentralizing in the first place. In cases where decentralization policies have been motivated by the need to extend participatory democracy, concerns have been the extent to which such democracy would be attainable in an educational setting (Sayed and Carrim in Dieltiens and Enslin, 2002). Other examples, of countries embarking on decentralization in education include Malawi (Davies, Harber and Dzimadzi 2003), Ghana (Osei and Brock, 2006) among others.

Implementation of such a policy has been at times supported by legislation and in others there had been no such legislation to support its implementation (Blair, 1995). As noted by Blair (1995) in a number of African countries for example, the transfer of service provision to local levels and the community has been more de facto than de jure due to central governments' failure to exercise their responsibilities, resulting in them passing such responsibilities by default. As a result, citizens have ended up providing services in order to fill in the gap. Another approach was the use of presidential ad hoc decrees and directives as strategies to implement the policy of decentralization, as was the case in Zimbabwe in 1984 (Fiske, 1996). This resulted in district councils running education departments. However, there were disputes between the Ministry of Education and the district councils which fell under a different ministry, the Ministry of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development (Chikoko, 2007).

Despite the different approaches, the implementation of decentralization has been characterized by a number of problems. These include issues of lack of clarity in the policy statements themselves, contributing to ambiguity and ambivalence in the policy itself, a situation that is at times taken advantage of by politicians (Jansen, 2002). Another of the problems emanates from the school of thought that is critical of the implementation of decentralization as a policy. Smith (1985) in Makumbe (1998) for instance, argues that its implementation can be divisive and separatist in character and effect, which may lead to a negation of national unity and integration. This may lead to segregated development in education, where one school is better resourced than the other, as much would depend on the economic status of the parents that constitute the parent body (Dieltiens and Enslin, 2002). There are also fears that such a development could defeat the whole purpose of equality and equity in education as the poor may end up sharing nothing, but their poverty.

The Law and transformation Centre for Applied legal Studies (2003) in its submission to the Ministerial Committee on School Management and Governance also expressed its fears about school governance in South African schools. They expressed the sentiments that the implementation of decentralization had occurred not to empower people and communities but to shift on them the responsibility of payment and sustenance of educational provisions. This has in fact resulted in the opposite effect of promoting privilege and exclusion, rather than the democratization of the education system or facilitating more inclusion or empowering the disadvantaged (Sayed and Carrim, 1998).

In addition to the problems noted above, there is the issue of the distribution of power within the implementing agencies. Florestal and Cooper (1997) in a study of decentralization in Chile, noted that problems may arise if existing local entities are poorly suited to carry out education functions and if responsibilities are not clearly delimited. This has resulted in local school authorities competing for power. Further to that, they note that when it comes to decentralization it is “crucial at the beginning to ensure that all implementation issues, are dealt with in order to avoid the risk that the reforms will be made in an institutional vacuum and suffer from lack of experience, infrastructure, and implementing bodies” (Florestal and Cooper, 1997:9). They also note that there is need to establish the objectives of the decentralization programme, following which, the legal instruments guiding implementation have to be defined. This brings into the fore a number of issues that have to be considered when we are to assess the implementation of such a programme as the decentralization of education functions. Thus implementation and assessment of the same have to be done within a given context. Secondly, care has to be taken to specify the respective roles of the various bodies involved, so as to clarify the lines of responsibility (ibid).

As noted earlier, there are many factors that have influenced policy formulation and implementation. For example, from 1980 social policies in Zimbabwe were imperatively determined by the need to address the social inequities and imbalances created and perpetuated by the colonial governments. Within this context, the major determinants of social policy in Zimbabwe over the years have been racial segregation issues, ideological issues, and availability of resources, politics, culture and multinational agencies (Kaseke et al 1998). Despite the problems associated with some of the determinants of social policy noted, and the teething problems associated with implementation, such services as education were made universal and decentralization of the public service was within the framework of the unitary system of government (Fiske 1996). As noted by Fiske (1996) up to 1987 the rural and district councils operated three-quarters of the schools in Zimbabwe, employed teachers and received a direct grant from the Ministry of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development. However, there were differences between the Ministry of Education and the councils which led the Education Ministry to seek an amendment to the 1987 Education Act (Fiske 1996). He further notes that this amendment allowed the Education Ministry to bypass the local authorities and deal directly with School Development Committees (SDC) and School Development Associations (SDA) in which the parents had the majority of seats. However, the major debate is now how this direct involvement of parents has influenced parental participation and involvement and the education system as a whole in relation to issues of quality, accountability and efficiency. This is happening at a time when the problem of the implementation of decentralization policies has also become a global concern. The 1999 Annual World Bank Conference on Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, for example was aimed at discussing the problems that implementation of decentralization was going through (Burki et.al 2000).

In addition to the above there have been studies about decentralization in Zimbabwe. The studies have not been conclusive, and have tended to focus on fiscal decentralization and sectoral decentralization (Conyers, 2003) with little consideration of the legal framework within which the policy attempts to function (Chikoko, 2007).

Decentralization of education functions and democracy

Most studies on the role of decentralization in development and democratizing the education system have been disappointing. Decentralization within the Zimbabwean experience was aimed at giving parents the platform to contribution to school governance through the committees. In South Africa a similar arrangement came about through the establishment of School Governing Bodies. These had to make decisions on fees, school policy and curricula issues. At high school level student representatives were included in the School Governing Bodies.

Globally, there is much debate and desire for democracy (Fiske, 1996). On one hand this has contributed to a shift in communities’ positions on the extent to which they can participate in school affairs. On the

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other, experiences have also shown a shift by central government to decentralization (Cheema and Rondinelli, 1983). This has been done for several reasons, as noted earlier. What is not clear in most of the instances was whether the desire to democratize such institutions as education was deliberate, coincidental or circumstantial. However, there are two factors that could be used to explain this. One could be attributed to changes in public opinion about the role and ability of government and the second is that it would be the spread of democracy and popular participation, thereby contributing to the shift towards democratization of institutions such as schools (Gaynor, 1998).

In the euphoria for democracy, it is therefore not surprising that decentralization has been linked to democratization. This might not be surprising as both terms include participation and involvement. In some way, this has contributed to the overuse of the term democracy in both world politics and education discourse. There has also been debate on whether democracy in national governance automatically transcends into democratization of such institutions as schools (Naidoo, 2002). Another question has been whether it was possible to democratize institutions within an autocratic government system (Lauglo, 1995; Davies, 2002).

The concept democratization tends to be at times bound by issues of culture and practices in the society, as authoritarianism in schools seems to be reproduced from the macro-culture (Davies, 2002). Education has the responsibility of the simultaneous democratization of both itself and society (ibid). There has been a tendency to equate decentralization with democratization. In fact, these are concepts that can exist independent of each other. As noted by Crook and Manor (1998) decentralization after all, does not even necessarily imply democracy. Furthermore, the outcomes of a decentralization policy will also depend on their combination with important elements, for example, the kind of legitimation and accountability adopted (ibid).

It would appear that trying to use decentralization and education as an agency of democracy has its shortcomings, due to a number of factors. Decentralization for instance, is not independent of the social, economic and political structures of a society. In some of the cases, as noted by Crook and Manor (1998) decentralization is a policy forced to carry an unrealistic burden of expectations regarding its ability to transform whole societies dominated by authoritarian or patronage politics. As such, its implementation has been characterized by a number of problems. Among these problems, it would appear democratization did not seem to be the main agenda.

In an attempt to democratize institutions such as schools through decentralization, education functions such as personnel management, financial management, resource management, supervision, curricular issues and school governance in general have also been decentralized (Winkler and Gershberg, 2000). These are viewed as characteristics of a decentralized school system in which decisions are made and implemented at local level (ibid). However, having these in place is not a guarantee for democracy, as much depends on the extent to which those affected make decisions. Haggard (2000) noted that there was a tendency to guard resources and decisions at the centre. This had the effect of defeating the same democracy that decentralization was meant to promote.

This therefore raises interesting issues about participation as a tool to democratize institutions such as schools. Participation is defined as the mental and emotional involvement of a person in a group situation that encourages the individual to contribute to group goals (Owens, 1995). Participation of parents and communities could also be viewed within the context of achieving educational objectives and improvement of the quality of education. Whilst this might hold true, the level and extent of community participation and involvement is not always easy to measure, though studies in participation seem to give credence to the claim that participation benefits both the school and the community. Adedeji (1990) concluded that participation accelerates the process of change. Zvobgo (1997) concurs and further argues that it maximizes consensus in decision making, ensures maximum accountability, acceptability of decisions, and thereby facilitates effective implementation of decisions in circumstances of enhanced co-

operation. In that regard participation and involvement can be viewed as tenants of democracy. Their promotion is most likely to contribute towards democratic practices.

In adding voice to the concern about the democratization of the schooling system, Brinkerhoff (1998) also notes the benefits of participatory democracy. According to Brinkerhoff (1998) the benefits that can accrue through parental and community participation are many. They include firstly, the ability of participatory democracy to lead to better policy targeting. Secondly, he notes that participation was able to provide a closer fit between the needs and demands of beneficiaries and the design of policy objectives and modalities. Thirdly, participatory democracy had the possible effect of building ownership of policy solutions and better conformity. Lastly, he noted that participation facilitated greater sustainability of policies which had an empowering effect.

In that respect, it can be argued that participation can promote democracy. The major area of concern to emerge is how best a heterogeneous grouping such as a school community can be reconciled and thus ensure that the decisions taken at any level are representative enough. The schooling system, which is composed of many players that include students, teachers, parents, principals, and other education ministry officials, and policy intentions, may be a mammoth task to reconcile. Another area of concern would be how this could be done without compromising education policy and standards (McGinn and Welsh, 1999).

Contrary to the views expressed above, Dieltiens and Enslin (2002) argue that participatory democracy in education, as articulated by the deliberative democrats, ignores the cost of participation especially where communities have different capacities and unequal resources at their disposal. They challenge the above assumption that participatory democracy is more democratic and therefore more desirable than representative democracy. Further to that, they challenge the notion that participatory democracy leads to improvements in education. Their argument is that education is a “special case” and as such, is an inappropriate sphere in which to try to broaden participatory democracy (Dieltiens and Enslin, 2002).

Dieltiens and Enslin’s (2002) view is also shared by Sayed and Carrim (1998), though they advocate for different forms of democracy. For Sayed and Carrim (1998) within the South African context, the school governing bodies were still not representative enough to be considered democratic. Duku (2006) in a study of parental participation in South Africa, observed that there was unequal participation of the community constituencies. This was so as participation was still influenced by gender and social status, among other factors as noted earlier (ibid).

The major concern is that participatory democracy could lead to major differences in the provision of quality of education because of the varying endowments, natural resources and ability to raise revenue by various sectors of the population (Nziramasanga Commission Report, 1999). On the other hand, there appears to be no mechanism to guarantee equal participation among those in the different committees and school governing bodies. For example, it has been observed to increase the participation of individuals such as principals (McGinn and Welsh, 1999; Whitty and Seddon, 1994). Once again, demonstrating the uneven nature of the distribution of power even within the participatory democracy structure. Davies (2002) reviewing governing bodies and parental participation in South Africa, also noted that principals played a dominant role with parents reticent and evidencing low participation. Implementation even the representative structure (i.e. the governing body form) appears insufficient to democratize schooling (Karlsson, 2002). Another question though, is whether institutions such as schools can be democratized and if so to what extent?

The above views tend to suggest the limitations of participation and involvement of communities in school activities. There also appears to be the underlining assumption that all people would want to participate and that people will always do so positively (Owens, 1995). However, there is the danger that people may be asked to participate on matters that they had little or no knowledge about. This may be as

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a result of lack of training in the area, which in itself may lead to frustration and despondence. In a way, this has contributed to a gap between policy intentions and the actual implementation process, a situation which Morris and Scott (2003) describe as "implementation myopia". They explain this gap in terms of the symbolic nature of policy, making the important observation that educational policies and reforms serve a primarily symbolic purpose. According to them, this tended to show the critical function of policy as that of demonstrating the government's concern to address educational issues rather than to offer solutions.

The contributions by Morris and Scott (2003) say much about the characteristics of policy making and implementation. This is a view also expressed by Gustafsson (2004) who noted that there had been an increase of political symbolism and pseudo policy ingredients, resulting in many policies that are either not intended to be fully implemented or are characterized by unsatisfactory usage of 'available' knowledge regarding pre-conditions for implementation. Decentralization of a symbolic and /or pseudo type is a strategy often used to muddle through the present difficulties (ibid).

Decentralization has also been criticized for a number of reasons. Decentralization in education was expected to address issues of quality and efficiency which would then have effects on educational improvement, administrative efficiency, financial efficiency, meeting political goals and equity needs. Contrary to this view, Haggard (2000) in studies of countries in Latin America, made the following observations about decentralization of education in some of these countries. That there was a continuing tendency to guard resources at the centre; that there was lack of commitment by governments to transfer both the responsibility and the accompanying resources; that there was lack of clarity in the definition of responsibilities across levels of government, and that there were political conflicts over which ministry or agency will oversee the design and implementation of the decentralized process (ibid).

In a similar vein, Saito (2001) identifies some of the major criticisms leveled against decentralization. Concerns have been that decentralization may foster more loyalty to regional identities than national identity (Saito 2001). Secondly, notes that the autonomy granted to different levels may be abused by those in positions of authority at the expense of the general populace, and therefore negate the whole essence of democracy (ibid). This in a way, may result in the opposite effect of promoting corruption instead of accountability. The third problem that is associated with the implementation of decentralization as argued by Saito (2001) is the problem of scarce resources which may jeopardize equity within communities.

Democracy has to be viewed in terms of how communities participate in issues that affect their lives, at the same time there is need to consider how they are involved in the decision making process. Participation has been viewed as a political instrument that has been used to demonstrate the democratization of institutions. To a large extent, that assumption has been based on the 'collective' action theory. The collective action theory encompasses a variety of models which have common assumptions and emphases (Pollitt, Birchall and Putman, 1998). From the assumptions, it can be noted that the models place emphasis on the rational decision making process. At the same time the collective action theory seems to focus on the decision making process of the individual, which emphasizes the democratization of institutions and society at large.

The concept democratization has been characterized by its own problems. Such problems have included the problem of the indices used to establish the dimensions and levels of democratization. Vanhanen (1990) noted that democratization included two important factors, which are public contestation and the right to participate. Participation in education has to be defined within a given context. For instance, within the South African context, it had to be viewed in terms of School Governing Bodies (SGBs) whose membership comprised parents, teachers, principals and students in the case of high schools (Sayed, 1999). Within the Zimbabwean context, participation could be perceived in the form of the school committees which comprised of the school head, teachers and parents (Chikoko, 2007). The Zimbabwean

arrangement does not include students. In the case of South Africa, studies have shown practices that inhibit participation. Sayed (1999) argued that unqualified commitment to educational decentralization in countries marked by gross disparities in educational opportunities and access did not enhance participation among citizens. These disparities that exist within society raise major concerns in terms of ensuring equal participation in school governance. The idea of participation also raises the issue of collective action. The “collective” action theory appears to run contrary to Weber’s action theory (Ritzer, 1992). For Weber, action theory was “to focus on individuals and patterns and regularities of action and not on the collectivity” (Ritzer, 1992:126). Weber, though, further concurs that in some instances it may be necessary to treat collectives as individuals (ibid).

Within the concept of participation is the issue of shared decision making (Musaazi, 1982). In decentralized school governance, much of the decision making process revolves around issues of participation in solving problems and making decisions, which should increase the individual’s capacity to contribute to group goals (Owens, 1995). In decentralized school governance, decisions in a school are achieved through committees, task forces, study groups and review panels (Bowora and Mpfu, 1995). Such shared decision making is argued to be rational. As such, it has to follow a rational process. Such a process involves diagnosing, defining and determining the sources of the problem, gathering and analyzing the facts relevant to the problem, developing and evaluating alternatives and converting them into action (Stoner and Freeman, 1992).

The rational decision making model as posited by Stoner and Freeman (1992) appears to suggest that all decision makers are rational, despite the problems at stake. It also prescribes a pattern which the decision making process has to go through. Whilst it might be applicable in as far as individual decision making process, questions have been raised about its application in diverse groups such as school committees and school governing bodies. It tends to portray the decision making process as following a predictable pattern and there is also the assumption that those who take part in the group are operating at the same level. On the other hand participation should not be a number game, but the extent of power and influence deployed by those who participate.

Apart from the problems associated with the implementation of decentralization as noted earlier, another problem appears to be how to measure decentralization itself (Ndengwa, 2002).

Findings on studies on decentralization of education functions

Lessons from South Africa and other developing countries have demonstrated different positions about the distribution of power in decentralized arrangements. For example, Karlsson (2002) noted that in South Africa, the Education Act did not provide mechanisms for avoiding and overcoming a re-enactment of the traditional power relations in terms of gender, class and race. In some cases elected representatives have ended up representing state interests rather than the community and in others governing bodies became centres of conflict and contestations (Sayed, 2002). As such, power relations become central to understanding of the practices and processes of school governance (Deem, Brehony and Heath, 1995).

On the same note, Davies (2002) observes that the good governance and empowering discourse has been exclusionary in that it has failed to incorporate the periphery, the poor majority, in any meaningful way. The power and influence of the centre remains extraordinarily high (ibid). Studies in Zimbabwe have also shown lack of involvement of parents in key issues of school governance (Chikoko, 2007; Samkange, 2011). Dieltiens and Enslin (2002) noted that participatory democracy in education ignored the cost of participation especially where communities have different capacities and unequal resources at their disposal. Davies (2002) in a study of School Governing Bodies (SGBs) in South Africa also noted that principals played a dominant role with parents reticent and evidencing low participation.

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Bourdieu's theory of social practice

Bourdieu (1977) attempted to explain social action in terms of a theory of social practice by focusing on the relationship between agency and structure. For Bourdieu (1977) social action could be explained in terms of *habitus*, *field* and *capital*. To function in the relationship the agent has to internalize roles in a *field* (ibid). These internalised relationships and habitual expectations and relationships form the *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990). This becomes part of the socialization process in a field, which then allows the agent to perform various roles. The theory therefore focuses on both the structure and the agency and places emphasis on reconciling structure and agency (ibid).

Habitus

There is need to examine the concepts habitus, field and capital so as to relate them to the study. Bourdieu uses the concept habitus to challenge some conceptions of agency and structure (Crossley, 2005). Of note is the argument that how we act, perceive things and feel is influenced by the past experiences, which is part of the habitus (ibid). In essence, this would mean that what we are today and what we do is very much controlled by our past experiences. Considering that in most cases social groups may not share the same experiences, how then are they expected to act in a common way? In this regard, Bourdieu points out that habitus not only enables us to organize our own behaviour, but appreciate the behaviour of others as well (Allan, 2006). Bourdieu viewed habitus in terms of how it could be used to address issues of objectivism, subjectivism and disposition (Bourdieu, 1977).

The agent is expected to develop dispositions in relation to the encountered objective conditions, so as to inculcate objective social structures into the subjective, mental experience of agents (ibid). The habitus is therefore the product of the work of inculcation and appropriation which is necessary in order for those products of collective history, and the objective structures to succeed in reproducing themselves more or less completely, in the form of durable dispositions (ibid). As a result, the organisms are lastingly subjected to the same conditionings, which place them in the same material conditions of existence (ibid). The paper deals with different players in the implementation of education functions. These include school heads, senior teachers, parent governors and education officer. In examining how the school committees work, the concept of *habitus* was found relevant in many respects. Habitus has a bearing on how we act and secondly, it reconciles structure and agency and thirdly, since according to Bourdieu our habitus defines the way we act, it would be of interest to see how the different stakeholders played their part in relation to issues of school governance *inter alia* participation and decision making.

Field

Bourdieu uses the concept of *field* to analyze social action (Allan, 2006). Field is a structured social space with its own rules, schemes of domination and legitimate opinions delineating parameters (Bourdieu, 1990). On the field, the positions can be filled by individuals, groups or organizations and it is the relationships between these positions that set the parameters of a field (Allan, 2006). "These relationships are sites of active practices; thus the parameters of a field are always at stake within the field itself" (ibid: 182). If we are to use Bourdieu's analogy of field and game we have to take cognizance of the fact that there is a collective responsibility among players of the same team, at the same time each field is characterized by conflicts and struggles for power (Farnell, 2000). Bourdieu (1990) cites some of the main fields in modern societies as the arts, education, politics, law and economy. For Bourdieu, it is not the rules of the game that determine action on the field but rather the 'feel of the game' steered by habitual competence and know-how (Crossley, 2005).

In trying to find answers to the question on how the provisions of the statutory instruments which stipulate that SDCs and SDAs should manage schools are being implemented, it is necessary that we interrogate the actions of the different players in relation to their habitus and the field of education governance. School heads, teachers, parents and education officers have their experiences, how then are they to play their roles in the committees and the decentralized arrangement? In cases where the other actors might lose power and influence, how then are they to handle the change? Another problem is that

parents are coming to participate in a field of education that has its professionals and experts. Such questions pose for a close relationship between habitus and field if a diverse group such as the committees is to work together and have all members participate meaningfully. The practices of the dialect are performed through habitus (Allan, 2006). Bourdieu sees the relationship between habitus and field as a two-fold. First, the field exists only insofar as social agents possess the dispositions and set of perceptual schemata that are necessary to constitute that field and imbue it with meaning, secondly, by participating in the field, agents incorporate into their habitus the proper know-how that will allow them to constitute the field (Bourdieu, 1977). As such, the relationship between habitus and field is that, habitus manifests the structures of the field, whereas field mediates between habitus and practice (ibid).

Capital

Capital can be classified as economic capital, symbolic capital, social capital and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1992; Crossley, 2005). Economic capital refers to the agent's income, wealth and monetary value of the goods they possess and is generated in the economic field (Crossley, 2005). One of the distinguishing characteristics of economic capital is that it is quantifiable. This is a major difference from the other forms of capital. Bourdieu places emphasis on the other forms of capital. For Bourdieu, "social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition." (Bourdieu and Loïc, 1992: 119). There are at least two forms of social capital, the first being reference to social networks which are treated structurally and from the point of view of the network and the second conceptualizes networks as resources from the individual point of their members (Crossley, 2005). Another form of capital is symbolic capital. This is capital that has much to do with status or recognition (ibid). For Bourdieu symbolic capital has to do with prestige, honour, attention, and as such is a crucial source of power (Bourdieu and Loïc, 1992). On cultural capital, Bourdieu suggests that it may assume one of three forms (Crossley, 2005). It could be in the form of literature, books or paintings that an individual might own, thus assuming an 'objectified' form, it can assume an 'institutionalized' form in the form of educational qualifications and lastly it could assume an 'embodied' form as an individual might possess the culturally valued competences (ibid).

Despite the denoting of capital in various forms, what stands out though is that capital is able to empower the agent in various fields. What is important to note is that Bourdieu's concept of capital categorizes the different resources that social agents can mobilize in pursuit of their projects (ibid).

Bourdieu's theory of social practice has been criticized for a number of reasons. One of the criticisms was its focus on the dichotomous relationship between the agency and structure, which others argue to be a pseudo-problem. In spite of that, the theory helps in understanding and explaining social action and practice in such diverse groups as school committees and decentralization in education .

Relating Bourdieu's theory of social practice to lack of involvement and participation in school governance

Participation and involvement of the lower levels in school governance issues can be viewed as promoting the democratization of institutions such as schools. At the same time participation of the periphery is intended to promote the bottom-up approach to school governance in decentralization. However, most of the studies referred to in the paper suggest that there was no absolute decentralization in most of the cases. It could be noted that the enactment of the two statutory in Zimbabwe had legitimized parents' direct participation and involvement in school governance issues. It could also be noted that the statutory instruments had played a pivotal role in mobilizing parents to contribute directly to the development of their schools through the committees. In practice, the balance of power and the distribution of the same power among stakeholders tended to work against the spirit of both democracy and decentralization. There are a number of factors that could be used to explain this. The first could be the dichotomous situation that at times exists between policy intentions and practice. It is argued that policy makers are at times not very clear on their intentions. Such intentions are at times determined by

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the implementing agency. The second possible explanation could be found in how individuals and agency exercise power, thus how they deal with issues of domination, hegemony and resources. This has been used to explain theories of power and why the centre at times fails to let go the same power it is supposedly granting to the periphery. The third explanation could be attributed to how individuals perceived their roles and the role of others in society, which could be explained in terms of *habitus*, *field* and *capital* as noted by Bourdieu in the theory of social practice. On the other hand, the issue of power relations remains central in our effort to understand school governance (Deem, et al, 1995).

Such social practices tended to explain why in some cases committee members and parents were not only limited in their participation in some areas, but at times limited their own participation and contributions. Once again, resulting in lack of accountability and efficiency which are key components in the decentralization discourse. In his argument Bourdieu argues that dominant groups had the power to impose 'meanings and impose them as legitimate'. Through this, according to Bourdieu, those that have the power impose their will and their reality on the weaker. In this case the parents in the School Development Committees and School Development Associations were found to be weaker than the school heads in many areas. These included the interpretation of the statutory instruments and decision making in key governance issues. The behavior of the school heads could also be explained by the dominant culture which he classifies as some form of cultural capital. Bourdieu also concludes that the education system, regardless of the level makes a contribution to social inequalities and education continues to perpetuate the dominance of one group over the other.

2. Conclusion

The paper focused on decentralization as a policy meant to improve quality and accountability in education. The Zimbabwean experience of establishing committees was also meant to decentralize education and make parents and communities more involved in school governance. Other such examples include the establishment of School Governing Bodies in South Africa. Studies in the committees and school governing bodies have shown exclusion of parents in key issues in education with school heads making most of the decisions. It has shown that the enactment of statutory instruments had not helped improve the situation. It was also noted in most of the studies that the decentralization of education and education functions, had not had the empowering effect in the studied schools and communities. The class structures have continued to be maintained. The last part of the paper used Bourdieu's theory of social practice to explain cultural reproduction in the form of cultural *capital*, *field* and *habitus*. It may be concluded that we have to address both the agency and the structure if we are to improve decentralization in education.

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