

PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS ABOUT DECENTRALIZING EDUCATIONAL DECISION-MAKING IN TURKEY

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ABSTRACT

Decentralization has had a significant impact on education systems, in particular, on the organization of schools and management. In the last four decades, decentralization of administration in education has become a worldwide trend. In the last two decades, Turkish educational planners and policy makers have been struggling with the debate over centralization and decentralization. Turkey has highly centralized education systems compared to Europe and Central Asia as well when compared to other OECD and EU countries. In recent years, there have been numerous political and administrative reform initiatives in Turkey regarding education, including decentralization. The purpose of this study was to examine the decentralization of educational decision-making processes as perceived by educational planners, school principals, and educational stakeholders in Turkey, utilizing the Decision Making in Education Questionnaire (DMEQ) with 410 participants. Results revealed the participants felt the provinces should have a majority of the power by controlling the outcome of 17 of the 32 decisions queried. Respondents indicated that the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) should have control over 10 of the 32 decisions and school principals should have a minor stake with control over only five of the 32 decisions. It is expected that this study could contribute to the debates over the decentralization of education in Turkey. Namely, strategic approaches and consensus should be developed between the educational planners and policy makers before rethinking the decentralization decision making regarding education.

INTRODUCTION

In the last four decades, educational management and planning has become a worldwide trend (Rondinelli D. A., 1984). Since information and communication technologies (ICT) have made the world a smaller place and “ICT put people all over the globe in touch as never before” (Friedman, 2006), educational planners and policy makers in many countries decided to organize their education system by delegating the power and responsibility to the local education authorities and school boards.

As a result of globalization, many developed and developing countries are undergoing significant changes in the responsibilities of the education system and roles and responsibilities of educational stakeholders. As Shaeffer (2005) noted, decentralization—which is a major component of the modernization of public sector management—transforms the relationship between the central level, principally the Education Ministries, and local levels. Many provincial education authorities are now entrusted with new responsibilities for resource allocation and efficient utilization of human, material, and financial resources. At the same time, program-based approaches are increasingly applied in education planning and reform.

The supporters of decentralization strongly uphold the idea that decentralization contributes to increasing quality and effectiveness in public services. As many writers emphasized, education is one of the largest sectors in terms of personnel and recurrent expenditures and is also among the bigger public sectors in terms of capital expenditure. Recently, there have been strategies and activities aimed at the modernization of public sector management in developing countries. These strategies have had a significant impact on educational systems.

EDUCATIONAL PLANNING AND POLICY IN TURKISH CONTEXT

Reform in public administration as well as planning and managing the education system has long been required in Turkey. The study of required managerial reform in Turkey has been an on-going and seemingly never-ending topic. Since the 1960s, the restructuring of public administration bodies has been of the utmost importance on the government’s agenda, spawning several initiatives, including the *Central Government Organization Research Project* (1962), and the *Development and Restructuring of*

Public Administration Report (Sekizinci Klankinma Planı [Eighth Five-Year Development Plan 2001-2005], 2001).

In accordance with The National Education Principle Law No: 1739, the education system in Turkey consists of two main parts: formal education and non-formal education (MoNE, 1973). Turkish educational leadership has been struggling with the issue of centralization and decentralization almost since the founding of the Turkish Republic. According to MoNE's strategic planning document, there are 36 different central units and 81 provincial directorates carrying out the responsibilities for running and controlling 45,812 pre-, primary and secondary schools, which accommodate nearly 15 million students and 600,000 teachers (MoNE, 2006a).

The Constitution, education-related laws (National Education Law – law no: 1739 (MoNE, 1973) and five-year development plans are the legal basis of education in Turkey. Although decentralization is mentioned in the development plans, the desired progress has not yet been achieved. For instance, the legal and institutional arrangements needed for educational planning and management were mentioned in the Seventh Five-Year Development Plan as (DPT, 1995):

1. Restructuring the National Education System into a service-based system, transforming the central organization to supply top-level macro strategic planning, curriculum design, research development, and coordination.
2. Decreasing bureaucracy and empowering provincial organizations and local administrations.
3. Working cooperatively with the central organization to pass necessary laws so that local administrations and families can actively participate in the educational process.

Studies on the restructuring of public administration mostly focus on increasing the effectiveness and transparency of public administration. The need for improving and restructuring public administration was also acknowledged by the Coalition Government and outlined in the Eighth Five-Year Development Plan (DPT, 2001, p. 191) as follows:

The need for a holistic, radical and lasting change including human resources, administrative principles and functioning in the public administration continues. Accordingly, elimination of existing deficiencies and breakdowns in the objectives of public institutions, their duties, distribution of the duties, structure of the organization, personnel system, resources and the way they are used, present public relations system are the priority issues. Rapid developments in science and technology require reforms in central and local organization and functioning of the public administration established for meeting the needs of the society.

The supporters of decentralization (for example, the World Bank and the EU) strongly maintain that decentralization contributes to increasing quality and effectiveness in public services. In this context, it is an unquestionable fact that the quality and effectiveness of public services in Turkey is low. For this reason, the Ninth Five-Year Development Plan (DPT, 2006, p. 191) expresses:

In order to ensure effective management of the economic and social development process, it has become a requirement to provide public administration in Turkey, which has a centralized structure, with a contemporary understanding, structure and operation, where citizen oriented and high quality services can be provided in an effective and rapid manner and concepts such as flexibility, transparency, participation, accountability, responsibility and predictability are emphasized.

The tough centralized administrative approach utilized by the government is regarded as the main reason for the problems faced by Turkey's public administration (Çoker, 1995, p. 75), which in turn causes problems (Bursalıoğlu, 1999; Başaran, 2006) in educational planning and administration. Çoker stated that decreasing the centralized administrative role and reinforcing the concept of decentralization are a couple of solutions among several that should be implemented in order to reduce the problems in public administration. Similarly, Başaran (2006) suggested a contributive balance between central and local administration to increase the quality of education. Başaran sees decentralization as a necessity to make good use of the materials as well as human resources in education. According to Bursalıoğlu (1999, p. 124) “decentralization of education in Turkey is an administrative matter, not an educational one.”

The biggest barrier blocking the implementation of decentralization in Turkey is the existing centralized system itself. Usluel (1995) pointed out that educational administrators commonly believe

the decentralization of education would harm the unitary state and result in political disunity. Changing the existing centralization of the education system will bring about certain problems (Çoker, 1995). The possible obstacles that local governments could face when trying to improve the quality of education can be summarized as: (a) centralized management itself, (b) habits revealed by centralization [red tape, bureaucratic obstacles], (c) distrust of local governments [nepotism], (d) expectations of the central government for as provider of everything (TÜSIAD, 1995), (e) public expectations of the central government rather than from municipalities for sanitation, transportation and public utility operations (Emiroğlu, 2000), (f) lack of confidence in local administrations (Özdemir, 1996), (g) lack of qualified personnel among local authorities (Duman, 1998), (h) lack of resources (TÜSIAD, 1995), and (i) political habits [political pressure] (Çoker, 1995).

In recent years, MoNE undertook various educational initiatives in order to improve the quality of education in Turkey. For instance, the Basic Education Project was implemented by the MoNE to support the implementation of decentralized reforms in Turkey's basic education system in 12 disadvantaged provinces in eastern Turkey. The project aimed to provide direct support to empower those directly responsible for the delivery of basic education and non-formal education at the provincial level to make quantifiable improvements in the teaching and learning process (MoNE, 2006b). Currently, the Capacity Building Support Project for the Ministry of National Education (MEBGEP) is under development. The objective of the project is to evolve an action plan that is going to facilitate improved capacity of MoNE in the areas of administration, management and organization, managing financial resources, and monitoring and evaluation in order to make the system more effective and productive during the process of restructuring. The activities within the scope of the project include: developing policies and strategies at the central and regional level regarding the structuring, management and functions of MoNE; redefining the roles, responsibilities and communication rules of the central and local units of Ministry; presenting alternative models and/or action programs by analyzing the efficient use of existing financing and resources (MoNE, 2008).

In summary, the Turkish education system is highly centralized and the conventional belief among educational management is still "central government knows best." School principals consider themselves primarily as executors of regulations and decrees issued from above. All educational activities for each school function within a framework of regulations set up by the MoNE. MoNE is responsible for appointing, assigning, disciplining and firing both principals and teachers. In addition, MoNE allocates money for construction, educational materials, equipment and operation of all schools. Therefore, the education system in Turkey is highly centralized, in which all the policy-making and administration of schools is conducted and regulated at central level.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The term decentralization is comprised of a variety of concepts which must be carefully analyzed. Hanson (1998) and Bray (1999) stress no clear examples of completely decentralized educational systems, but rather mixtures of centralization and decentralization which change over time. Many analysts define decentralization as shared decision-making at progressively lower levels of educational systems. Brown (1991), Bimber (1993), Wohlstetter (1995) and Williams et al. (1997) agree that decentralization moves decision-making authority from state educational agencies and school districts to the schools. Hatry et al. (1993) and Williams et al. (1997) hold that decentralization moves or delegates responsibility to the level at which the learning activity takes place. Similarly, OECD (1992) and Jacobson and Berne (1993) argue that it gives authority to "those who must implement and are affected by programs and decisions" (Williams, et al. 1997 as cited in Walberg, at al., 2000). Hanson (1998, p. 112) offers a useful general definition that is appropriate for the Turkish case: "Decentralization is defined as the transfer of decision-making authority, responsibility, and tasks from higher to lower organizational levels or between organizations." This implies the shift of authority over administrative, financial, organizational, personnel, curriculum, assessment and evaluative matters to the lower levels of government (Fiske, 1996). Bray and Mukundan (2003) define decentralization as "redistribution of powers within the government machinery from the redistribution of functions between government and non-government organizations."

Decentralization takes many forms. It varies by the level of government to which decisions are devolved. Rondinelli (1981) argued that decentralization can be manifested in different forms as deconcentration, delegation, and devolution. These are adapted to education by Winkler (1989): (1) **Deconcentration**, called administrative or bureaucratic decentralization, is the term used when decentralization takes the form of a transfer of functions from the center to regional or branch offices, since real decision-making is retained at the center; (2) **Delegation** is the term used when the transfer of function is to a non-governmental or private sector entity (privatization) or it could even be to a government agency, over which government exercises limited control; (3) **Devolution** occurs where the transfer of any function or responsibility involves both administrative as well as political/decision-making authority.

The locus and the domain of educational decisions by category of decisions vary. For example, a study conducted by Rideout and Ural (1993), cited in and Welsh (1999) described the location of decision-making across 10 countries at four levels as central, regional, district, and local; and decisions are listed by their categories as (a) governance, (b) school organization, (c) financing, (d) personnel training, (e) curriculum and instruction, (f) monitoring and evaluation, and (g) research. The OECD (1992) classified the fields of decision-making under four main categories: (a) organization of instruction, including school day time and length of school year, text-books, grouping pupils, student assistance, teaching methods, and evaluating pupils; (b) planning and instruction, including managing schools, curriculum, subject choice, course content, qualifying exams, and credentialing; (c) personnel management, including hiring and firing personnel, and staff salaries; and (d) resource allocation and use, including itemized costs, resource use, and maintenance and operating costs. OECD's analysis provides clear and comprehensive framework for a detailed understanding of educational decision-making.

The level to which educational decisions are decentralized ranges from regional and local government to the community and the school. The literature about educational decentralization indicates a variety of arrangements for sharing authority regarding decisions about education (McGinn & Welsh, 1999). In Zimbabwe, Senegal, Malaysia, France and Namibia central and local organizations make most of the decisions about education. In Mexico, Nigeria and India, authority is shared primarily between central and regional organizations. In the UK, decisions about the curriculum are made by the central government; while in the USA, they are shared between state and district organizations. In Latin America, state governments are given control of primary and secondary education and share control of higher education between the elected officials in state government and in the municipal government. For example, in the UK and New Zealand, each school is managed by its own elected boards, which hire and fire staff; however, salaries are set at the national level. The boards choose or develop curriculum (with national objectives), set language of instruction, choose or develop instructional materials, including texts, and manage block grants of funds from the national government. The ministry uses achievement tests to assess school performance (Perris, 1998).

In no country are all the decisions made at one single level. Even in highly decentralized countries such as Ireland and New Zealand, significant proportions of decisions are made at different levels. In Spain, schools enjoy considerable autonomy; however, the central government still makes many decisions. Ireland and New Zealand have highly autonomous schools; Belgium and the USA, autonomous districts. Decisions are shared between schools and districts in Denmark, Finland, Germany, Norway and Sweden. Switzerland allocates the responsibility between districts and regional governments. Some countries, Austria, France, Portugal and Spain make decisions across three levels of government (OECD, 1995). Levels of decision and the decision-makers about resource allocation, personnel management, restructuring and planning, and organization of education were evaluated in the "Education at a Glance" report analyzing 21 member countries (OECD, 2004). A look at the report's results reveals that decisions regarding education in Turkey are made by the central government organization as opposed to the 20 other countries, where the schools make most of the decisions.

Numerous studies (Çinkır 2002; Duman, 1998; Köksal, 1997; Usluel, 1995) have attempted to explain the decentralization of the education system in Turkey and a little work has been done on extending it to locus and the levels of educational decision making (Bozan, 2002; Gülşen, 2005). The importance of "locus" is a crucial one because of the structure and the nature of Turkish educational policies. It should

be noted that all educational activities including teacher and school staff salaries are paid by the Ministry of Education in Ankara. There is little local financial support with respect to public education. Studies indicate that educational administrators at the center have controversial opinions about the results of implementing decentralization when national unity, integrity, and national standards of education are concerned (Usluel, 1995). Duman (1998) has proposed a three-step process for decentralization of the education system in Turkey. According to Duman (1998), before decentralizing the system, democratic and participative local councils, regional education committees and head departments, and democratic and effective school-based management should be formed. Bucak (2000) and Gülşen (2005) conducted a similar research study about the levels of educational decisions. They found that MoNE should make decisions related to the aims and policies regarding the educational system. The basic principles and content of the national curriculum (especially the content of the core subjects) should be determined at the center. Also decisions about determining personnel policies and school maintenance should be made at the local level. Bozan (2002) performed a similar study and reported that educational administrators at MoNE, local education authorities, and educational supervisors found it essential that regional education authorities should be established so that some of the authority might be transferred to the regio

Rationale for the Decentralization of Powers

Much of the decentralization which has taken place in the past decade has been motivated by political concerns. According to McGinn and Welsh (1999, p. 27) recent developments in politics, economics, globalization and ICT have heightened the need for decentralization. McGinn & Welsh (1999) and Friedman (2006) argue that especially the economic and financial globalization has weakened central government. McGinn and Welsh (1999) explain this as “supranational organizations have reduced national sovereignty . . . and . . . a shift towards market-based decision-making has strengthened local groups.” McGinn and Welsh (1999, p. 28) claim that “The emergence of new information and communication Technologies has made it possible to achieve high levels of control over [the] system, with decentralized management.” Gershberg and Winkler (2003) claim education decentralization involves improving efficiency, effectiveness and democracy. According to the World Bank (2004) the main advantages of decentralization are education finance, increased efficiency and effectiveness, redistribution of political power, improved quality, and increased innovation.

A number of reasons have been advanced for the decentralization of power. Lewis and Loveridge (1965, p. 23; cit. Maha, 2004, p.181) argued that the first person who becomes aware of the need to make a decision should take action. Similarly, Wolfers et al. (1982, p. 5) stated that decentralization increases the efficiency and the responsiveness of the administrative system by reducing delays and thereby making of decisions relevant to local needs. Educational units that will be established can make the communication lines shorter between the central level and the regional level. Bloomer (1991) noted that local control encourages responsiveness to local needs. Decentralization is also credited with releasing human potential: people respond to increased opportunities to use their talents and energies productively (Bloomer, 1991). Also, decision-making is faster with decentralized management. According to Başaran (2006), the curriculum would be more suited to the students’ and communities’ needs if decentralized management practices are put into place within the scope of the educational system. On the other hand, decentralization of educational management may have disadvantages as well. Başaran (2006), argues decentralized management forms a new chain of command and brings about standards that cannot be removed in the future. A common problem for all educational systems is the lack of qualified staff at the regional and central level, which may cause problems during the implementation of the decentralized management process (Lewis, 1965).

METHOD

Sample

This study sample was a “purposeful sample” composed of 127 teachers, 142 school administrators, 107 educational administrators (from the Ministry of National Education and provinces) and 30 academic staff (working at the Department of Educational Management and Policy) and four representatives of a nongovernmental organization. All the respondents participated willingly.

Research Instrument

The locus and the domains of educational decisions by category of educational decision vary. The distinction between domains of decision-making in educational systems bears some resemblance to Bray's use of the term "functional decentralization," which refers to the dispersal of control over particular activities (Bray, 1994, p. 819). Based upon OECD's (1992) taxonomy of decentralization, the "Decision Making in Education Questionnaire" (DMEQ) was developed. The DMEQ has six main domains: (a) governing, (b) organizing school, (c) managing human resources, (d) organization of instruction, (e) assessment and evaluation, and (f) resource allocation and use. Within the six domains, altogether 32 types of decisions were examined. The participants were also asked two open-ended questions related to the advantages and disadvantages of decentralization.

Each of the questions in the questionnaire was designed to identify the level at which decisions should be made in the education system (the "level" of decision making) and the way decisions are made (the "mode" of decision making). Four "levels" of decision-making were set out in the questionnaire these include: (a) Ministry of National Education, (b) provinces, (c) towns, and (d) schools.

In consideration of the definition, rationale, and problems indicated by the previous studies related to decentralization of education systems, the researcher made the use of data collected by OECD which compiled comparable information on 31 aspects of educational decisions under four categories of 14 OECD countries during 1990–1991. In the final questionnaire form there were 32 aspects of education-related decisions under six categories. For each locus of decision-making categories, there are four specified levels where decision-making takes place: a) the Ministry, equivalent to central government, b) province level, equivalent to regions, c) town level equivalent to local municipalities, and d) the school level. The upper (central) level is Ministry of National Education and composed of general managers of personnel, inspection, international affairs, and primary and secondary education. The upper-intermediate level represents an appointed provincial educational authority. The lower-intermediate level refers to municipal authority in most countries, as in Turkey, the city or town educational authority. The school level refers to the responsibilities of school principals or head teachers, and a school's governing body.

Procedures

The main questionnaire was sent to 500 people during the 2008-2009 academic year. Each of the participants in the study was mailed the questionnaire with a cover letter describing the study and requesting their participation. The response rate was 82%.

The data gathered in the questionnaires were analyzed in Microsoft Excel® by using a specific formula parallel to the aim of the study. To analyze the data collected by the open-ended questions, content analysis was used. To maximize validity of interpretations, all responses were first examined independently by the author of this study and a colleague with the purpose of summarizing the main ideas into a series of categories. The author of the study and an academic then discussed the categories and came to an agreement on a common set. Three independent judges checked the reliability of the researchers' application of categories.

RESULTS

The findings of the study are presented below. The perceptions of the educational stakeholders' about decentralizing educational decision-making are presented in Table 1.

The first decision categories were about the "governing" of the education system. As can be seen in Table 1, respondents felt that the Ministry should have control over two of the three decisions including determining educational policies and plans, and the organization of education systems. In contrast, implementing educational policies and plans should be transferred to education authority in the provinces.

Respondents preferred that provinces have control over two of the four items related to the "organization of schools" including, establishing and closing down schools, and determining the school calendar. Schools should have control over two of the four organizational items, including determining school vision-mission-aims, and setting rules for student registration and transition.

Table 1:
Combinations of Educational Stakeholders' Perceptions on Locus and Levels of Educational Decision-Making

Locus of Decision-making	<i>Levels of Educational Decision-making</i>									
	Single				Combinations					
	All respondents (N=376)				All respondents (N= 376)					
	MoNE	Province	Town	School	MoNE- province	MoNE- School	Province- Town	Province- School	Town- School	
A-Governing										
1. Determining educational policies and plans	229				37					
2. Organization of education systems	228				34					
3. Implementing educational policies and plans		189						46		
B-Organization of Schools										
1.Establishing and closing down schools		193								
2.Determining school calendar		240			34					
3.Determining school vision, mission aims				225	30					
4.Setting rules for student registration and transition				210					26	
C- Managing Human Resources										
1. Hiring and firing principals		208			31					
2. Hiring and firing teachers		174			25					
3. Setting work terms for personnel	217				35					
4. Establishing and setting personnel salaries		176			34					
5. Providing in-service training for personnel		197			35					
6. Setting and monitoring discipline polices		169			21	21				
7. Inspection and evaluation of schools and teachers		180					50			
D-Assessment and Evaluation										
1. Setting necessary qualifications (competencies, accreditation)	272				27					
2. Student selections tests and placement	262				28					
3. Setting database system for education and training	196				53					
4. Determining success criteria	181				41					
5. Monitoring and evaluating students achievements				200			56			

(Table 1: continued)

E-Organization of Instruction										
1.	Setting content of the curriculum	210				53				
2.	Determining course names and subjects		214			48				
3.	Determining and selecting text books	173				19				
4.	Selecting supplementary texts and materials		154						49	
5.	Setting instruction time		211				27	27	27	
6.	Providing extra-curricular activities		193						29	
7.	Deciding teaching and learning methods				194					
8.	Preparing and developing education programs		187			43				
F-Resource Allocation and Use										
1.	Financing of schools and other buildings	183				27				
2.	Financing the maintenance of school buildings (heating, water, etc.)		159			23				
3.	Establishing the school's overall budget		175					28		
4.	Amount of budget for educational supplies and materials		185			32				
5.	Deciding on budget allocation within the school				148			39		
a)	<i>Highest results for each level and combinations</i>	10	17	0	5	21	2	2	4	4
b)	<i>Total for each level (n = 6332) and combinations (n = 1135)</i>	2151	3204		977	710	48	134	112	131
c)	<i>Percentage (%)</i>	34	50.6		15.4	62.5	4.2	11.8	9.9	11.6

Note. Total numbers of opinions exceed 376 since stakeholders checked more than one response in each level.

When respondents were asked about the level at which decisions should be made in the “managing human resources” category, respondents preferred that provinces should have control over six of the seven items including hiring and firing school principals, hiring and firing teachers, establishing and setting personnel salaries, providing in-service training for personnel, setting and monitoring discipline policies, inspection, and evaluation of schools and teachers. Respondents preferred that the Ministry should have control over setting work terms for personnel.

With regard to the “assessment and evaluation” category, respondents generally felt that the Ministry should have major control over four of the five items, including setting necessary qualifications, student selection tests, and placement (such as University Entrance Exam (ÖSS) and primary school Placement Exam (SBS), setting up a database system for education and training, and determining success criteria. Respondents also preferred that schools should have control over monitoring and evaluating student achievement.

As far as the “organization of instruction” category is concerned, the respondents preferred that the Ministry should have control over two of the eight decisions including setting the content of the curriculum as well as determining and selecting text books. Respondents preferred that provinces should have control over five of the eight decisions including determining course names and subjects, selecting supplementary texts and materials, setting instruction time, providing extra-curricular activities, and preparing and developing education programs. Respondents also preferred that schools should have control over only one decision, which is deciding teaching and learning methods.

Respondents generally felt that provinces should have major control over three of the five decisions in the decision categories of “resource allocation and use” including financing the maintenance of school buildings (heating, water, etc.), establishing the school’s overall budget, and amount of budget for educational supplies and materials, while the ministry should have control over only one decision, which is the financing of schools and other buildings. Respondents preferred that school should have control over deciding on budget allocation within the school.

In summary, the respondents preferred that provinces should have control over the majority of the educational decisions (17 of the 32 decisions; 50.6%); while the ministry should have control over 10 of the 32 (34.0%) decisions. Meanwhile, the respondents preferred that schools should have control over only 5 of the 32 (15.4%) decisions.

Qualitative Findings of the Study: Advantages and disadvantages of decentralization of educational decision-making

Many analysts and countries have defined the advantages and disadvantages of decentralization of educational decision-making in their own particular cases. In this study, questionnaire respondents were asked “What are some advantages and disadvantages of a decentralized education system?” Analysis of responses suggested themes identified by Bloomer (1991) and Başaran (2006) as the advantages and disadvantages of educational decision-making were similar to the researcher’s categories created from the respondents’ opinions. In each case, the examples quoted are just the parts of responses relating to the category in question.

Table 2:

*Perceived advantages of decentralization of educational decision-making
(Open-ended question)*

CORE RELEVANT NARRATIVE FORMED FROM QUOTATION (Key content summarized through relevant quotations and linked by formulated meaning statements)	EMERGENT THEMES (Initial themes arising within Quotation)	Total Points
<i>-Red tape can be reduced and bureaucratic obstacles can be eliminated.</i> (Teachers, Principals)	1. Bureaucratic obstacles	8
<i>-Local and regional oriented educational services can be produced which are appropriate for their needs.</i> (Teachers, Principals, Educational Administrators, Academicians and Representatives of .NGOs)	2. Regional and local requirements are met	23
<i>-Curriculum may be adjusted accordingly with reference to the needs of the local environment</i> (Academicians)		
<i>Problems can be better detected and solved quickly.</i> (Teachers & Academicians)	3. Identifying and solving the problem	8
<i>Enables local organizations, schools and school communities to participate in educational decisions appropriate for their local needs.</i> (Teachers & Academicians)	4. Participation in decision-making process	4
<i>Resources can be used more efficiently and will prevent extravagancy.</i> (Teachers, Principals & Academicians)	5. Effective and efficient use of educational resources	11
<i>Local organizations' contributions to education and training can be increased.</i> (Educational Administrators)	6. Local support to educational services	4
<i>More realistic educational plans will be prepared and implemented.</i> (Educational Administrators & Academicians)		
<i>-The quality of education and training will increase.</i> (Teachers)		
<i>The needs of schools/teachers will be met promptly.</i> (Teachers).	7. The quality of education and training	7
<i>-Decisions will be applied more practically.</i> (Principals)		
<i>-More functional school calendar can be prepared</i> (Principals & Educational Administrators)		

As can be seen from Table 2, the study revealed that with delegating educational decision-making “regional and local requirements can be met best” by those who have responsibility for implementing the decision and “effective and efficient use of educational resources” can be obtained by giving schools more authority to control educational resources, effective management by “participation in decision-making process” and “the removal of bureaucratic obstacles” were the four major benefits of the decentralization efforts.

Table 3:

*Perceived disadvantages of decentralization of educational decision-making
(Open-ended question)*

<i>CORE RELEVANT NARRATIVE FORMED FROM QUOTATION (Key content summarized through relevant quotations and linked by formulated meaning statements)</i>	<i>EMERGENT THEMES (Initial themes arising within Quotation).</i>	<i>Total Points</i>
<i>-Regional differences may harm the unity of the country. (Educational Administrators)</i>	1. National unity	13
<i>-The national unity and integrity may be harmed. (Educational Administrators & Academicians)</i>		
<i>-Unification of education and training can be damaged. (Teacher, Educational Administrators)</i>	2. Unification of education and instruction	14
<i>-Local education administrators are not fully equipped with necessary knowledge and skills. (Teachers, Principals, Educational Administrators, Academicians)</i>	3. Recruitment, selection and appointment of staff:	9
<i>-Local administrators may show favor for their own relatives. (Teachers & Academicians)</i>	4. Political, ideological and local pressure	24
<i>-Political and other pressure groups may affect the education system. (Teachers, Principals, Educational Administrators & Academicians)</i>		
<i>-Local education administrators may not perform their duties well. (Teachers & Educational Administrators)</i>	5. Use and delegation of authority	14
<i>-Educational administrators are not ready for decentralization and willing to share their power. (Educational Administrators & Academicians)</i>		
<i>-Equal educational opportunity may be violated (Students cannot be served with equal opportunities in every region.) (Academicians)</i>	6. Quality of Education and Instruction	10
<i>-It is difficult to stabilize educational finance through local sources due to regional differences. (Academicians & Teachers)</i>	7. Finance and the use of educational recourses	9
<i>-The financing of education may be expected from parents. (Academicians)</i>		

Potential major problems of decentralization efforts as cited in Table 3 include: an increase of political, ideological and local pressure; fear of damaging the national unity or unification of education and instruction; local education authorities not being ready, resource unavailability or insufficiency; lack of commitment by educational administrators; reluctance to delegate; and a lack of qualified staff.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study show that educational decisions should not be made at just one level, and there should be a variety of arrangements for sharing authority for decisions about education between the MoNE, province, municipality, and schools. The educational administrators in the study sample focus mainly on the Ministry-Province-School triangle with respect to decentralization and matters concerning the delegation of power. The most important finding was that respondents preferred that local education authorities should have more control over the majority of items in most of the decision categories except for capital expenditure, assessment and evaluation, and curriculum and instruction. Another interesting finding was that the majority of respondents generally felt that the heads of schools should have less control in most decision categories. One unanticipated finding was that, although the majority of the sample was composed of teachers and school principals, respondents stressed that schools would be a competent authority only on matters of implementation, supervision and assessment, and determination of school policy. This result may be explained by the fact that the lack of qualified staff within the regional and central level may cause problems during the implementation of the decentralization management process.

The most striking result to emerge from the literature review is that in 21 OECD countries, among the 32 educational decisions, only the “assessment methods of students’ regular work” is made at basic education schools in Turkey (Gershberg & Winkler, 2003). Based on an overall analysis of the findings, it can be said that educational administrators are not willing to transfer authority and responsibility to the provinces, towns [municipalities] and schools. These results are in contradiction with the aim of decentralization, which is delegating decision making to those who have responsibility for implementing the decision and giving schools more authority to control educational resources (Bloomer, 1991). This finding may be explained by a number of different factors. Educational administrators may have misconceptions and lack information about decentralization and the delegation of power; the Ministry not being ready to delegate, unavailability or insufficient resources, lack of commitment by senior administrators, inadequate incentives, lack of qualified staff at lower levels and an overall reluctance to delegate.

Research findings have important implications for the Turkish Ministry of Education. The results of the study indicate that the educational stakeholders suggest the provinces and the Ministry are the competent authorities regarding decision making for the basic principles and characteristics of education. Since Turkey has a highly centralized education system, it is necessary to be more careful when decentralizing the system. As mentioned earlier by Bloomer (1991), any system of educational management depends on effective monitoring, even in highly centralized systems. Although the recent development in ICT has altered the advantages and disadvantages of both the centralization and decentralization, as indicated earlier it is necessary to have qualified staff at the regional and central levels during the implementation of the decentralized management process. This is not an easy task, as Bray (1996) points out, a decentralized management experience without providing the school principals and educational administrators the necessary skills and knowledge can bring about demands that cannot be met by the education administrators. One interesting issue that emerges from these findings is that without having the necessary knowledge and understanding about decentralization, the educational administrators at the sub-units may not accept the authority and responsibility that will be transferred to them with the implementation of decentralized management.

The respondents in the present study pointed out that creating a balance between the central government (MoNE) and the local education authorities in terms of sharing educational decisions is crucial. In order to achieve this, Fiske (1996) noted, the necessity of having consensus about a shared vision for the educational decentralization reform between the stakeholders of education suggesting the

following eight steps: a) identify stakeholders and their interests, b) build legitimate interests into the model, c) organize public discussion, d) clarify the purposes of decentralization, e) analyze the obstacles to decentralization, f) respect the roles of the various actors, g) provide adequate training, and h) develop a monitoring system. Further research on this topic needs to be undertaken before the association between centralization and decentralization is more clearly understood by the local community as well as the nongovernmental organizations. Further study with more focus on the readiness of local management authorities is therefore suggested. Conyers (1982) summarized her observations on decentralization of education in the developing countries. Education planners and policy makers in Turkey can take them into consideration. These are as follows:

1. Even though decentralized management of education seems to achieve many targets, it should not be seen as a tool for solving all the problems.
2. The targets to be reached with decentralization are related to the type and level of decentralization.
3. Most of the targets planned to be achieved with decentralization, for instance development of rural areas and participation of community, cannot be achieved with only decentralized management.
4. Depending on the education systems and problems of the countries, decentralized management itself can cause problems.

Considering the mentioned-above comments, decentralized management alone cannot be thought as a solution if the decision-making, authorities, and responsibilities are not shared between different levels of the system and are not made clear. As many analysts pointed out, decentralization aims at increasing responsibilities for efficient resource management and improvement in the quality of education at levels below the central level. However, decentralization also calls for greater responsibility for policy making and implementation monitoring at the central level, in particular, by the Ministry of Education.

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