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Teacher-Tool Relationship of Maldivian ESL Teachers: A Multiple Case Study

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***Abstract**: A major curriculum reform was implemented in Maldives in 2015. Little is known about how the new curriculum has been used and implemented in classroom teaching. This qualitative multiple-case study aims to examine the teacher-tool relationship of six teachers teaching sixth grade English and the factors that shape the teacher-tool relationship. The teachers were situated in four schools with distinct contexts – a densely populated urban context, a sparsely populated island with multi-grade classrooms, an island dependent on fishing and an island dependent on tourism. Data collected include three video-recorded observations of each teacher as well as post and pre-observation interviews. Brown's Design Capacity for Enactment Framework (DCEF) was used as a basis to see whether teachers offload, adapt or improvise the curriculum. In addition, an analysis of the descriptive data, across and within the cases was done to identify factors that shape the way teachers use the curriculum. The analysis revealed that teachers use the curriculum in distinctive ways and included multiple layers of offloading, adapting, improvising and omitting. The way teachers use the curriculum varies from one teacher to another, from one lesson to another, and from one activity to another. Curriculum tool features, individual characteristics as well as the island context played significant roles in shaping how teachers use the curriculum in their teaching. The results of the study can provide curriculum developers with a different perspective in designing curriculum tools, particularly to create flexible affordances within the curriculum to allow for differing teacher and locational characteristics.*

***Keywords:** curriculum use, teacher-tool relationship, curriculum tools, curriculum*

Introduction

Maldives is an archipelago of 1200 coral islands grouped in a double chain of 26 atolls about a thousand kilometres southwest of the Indian subcontinent. The 200 inhabited islands have a population of 338,434 people (National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2015). Four of these islands have a population of more than 5000 people and 72 islands have fewer than 500 inhabitants (NBS, 2015).

While Maldives has succeeded in providing greater access to education, calls to improve the education system in Maldives have increased over the years. Aturupane and Shojo (2012) stated that "evidences from varieties of sources show that education quality in the Maldives is weak and needs urgent improvement" (p. 1). The low average scores from the national assessment suggest that the primary and secondary education is weak and unsatisfactory (Shiuna & Sadig, 2013). Moreover, students who graduate from schools seemed to lack the skills and competency expected by employers as well as higher education institutions. Mounting pressure to improve the quality of education in Maldives, combined with the needs of nation-building, led to major curriculum reform in 2015. New policies to guide assessment and inclusive practices came alongside the new curriculum. The age-level grades were changed to key stages. New subjects as well as new curriculum tools, such as

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syllabi, textbooks and teachers' references, were introduced. However, little is known about how the new curriculum tools are used and implemented by the teachers in their classroom teaching.

Yan (2012) argued that the success of curricular reform is unpredictable as teachers engage in a complex relationship in implementing the curriculum in real practice. Brown (2009) illustrates the complex relationship between teachers and the curriculum tools by using a jazz metaphor. The same song written as sheet music can be performed in significantly different ways by different jazz musicians. Sometimes the distinction can be so great that listeners have difficulty in recognizing that it is the same song. Brown argued that curriculum and sheet music are similar in that both eventually manifest in "live performances" which "heavily rely on the interpretation" of the users (Brown, 2009, p. 21). In both situations, the competency of the users – the musicians or the teachers – contributes to the eventual quality of the performance (Brown, 2009). In this regard, when the new curriculum is enacted in Maldives' classroom, the teachers may use the curriculum in various ways, leading to different instructional outcomes. Brown (2009) observed that the features of the curriculum and the teachers may contribute to shape the differences in the instructional outcomes of the teachers.

In framing this study, the unique characteristics of Maldives as a small atoll-nation were taken into account. Since Maldives is made up of small isolated islands, the distinctive features of island life may also shape the interaction between the curriculum and the teacher (Di Biase, 2015). Seeing through the lens of islandness (Lisle, 2012) and of small state theory (Crossley, 2010), one can begin to anticipate how a school situated in its self-contained socio-economic enclave can magnify the impact of how teachers interact with the curriculum. Hence, the specific aim of this study was to examine and describe how teachers used the newly introduced competency-based English curriculum in their teaching, in light of the context of the teacher and the school.

Conceptual Framing of this Study

Reviews of past research on curriculum use suggest four different perspectives in studying the relationship between teachers and the curriculum (Brown, 2009; Collopy, 2003; Freeman & Porter, 1989; Remillard, 2005; Smith, 2000). One perspective is to view the written curriculum as something to be followed by the teacher (Freeman & Porter, 1989: Synder et al, 1992). A key question often asked from this perspective is: is the teacher subverting or faithfully following the curriculum? This view — generally referred to as the fidelity perspective (Snyder et al, 1992) — assumes that the curriculum is fixed and the teacher is a conduit of the curriculum, with few other options to translate content to students (Remillard, 2005). Seeing teachers as a mere conduit not only limits creativity and responsiveness to different needs and contexts, but it also limits effective classroom instruction and student learning (McLaughlin, 1978; Remillard, 2005).

Another perspective focuses on curriculum use as drawing on the text (Remillard, 2005). In this perspective, curriculum materials are considered helpful tools for teachers but, unlike cultural tools or artefacts (Wertsch, 1991), they do not have the power to shape human activity. Conversely, Sosniak and Stodolsky (1993) have argued that teachers actually view curriculum materials as "props in the service of managing larger agendas" (p. 271). This gives rise to a third perspective – one that focuses on the larger agendas of curriculum use and the teacher-curriculum relationship. Through this lens, the teacher is viewed as the agent or interpreter of the text in the curriculum process (Lloyd, 2008; Ramillard, 2005), but the nature of the relationship is unilateral. A fourth perspective that emphasizes a more bilateral teacher-tool relationship emerged. This study draws upon this fourth perspective.

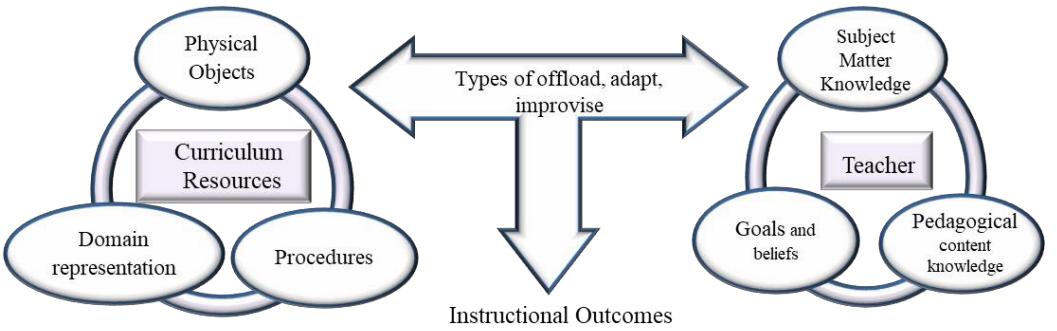
Central to this fourth perspective is the assumption that teachers and curriculum engage in a dynamic interrelationship that involves participation on the part of both the teacher and the tool, known in the relevant literature as a teacher-tool relationship (Brown & Edelson, 2003; Remillard, 2005). This perspective allows for a closer examination of the relationship teachers forge with curriculum tools, and how teachers react to and use these tools, the factors that influence this reaction, and the effect that this relationship has on the teacher and on the implemented curriculum.

The conceptual basis of this perspective comes from Vygotsky's notion of tool and mediation, which emphasized the use of tools as a sociocultural product in all human activities (Remillard, 2005). Artefacts as mediational means refer to products of social and historical development that people use to facilitate activities (Vygotsky, 1978). The key features of artefacts according to Vygotsky (1978) are that they assist people in achieving goals that otherwise might not be achieved and they mediate action in explicit ways. Wertsch (1991), for example, used the 'half-full' and 'half-empty' expression to emphasize the enabling or limiting potential of mediating artefacts. The half-empty view has the potential to constrain activities. In this study, the curriculum tools are regarded as cultural artefacts with the potential to enable, extend, or constrain what teachers do in classroom. The way the teacher interacts with the curriculum tool can place important enablers or constraints on the teacher's effort to help students learn.

Remillard and Bryan (2004), Sherin and Drake (2006), and Brown (2009), amongst others, have focused on this participatory approach in curriculum use to examine teachers' participation with the text. They have developed frameworks to characterise how teachers use the curriculum. In this regard, Sherin and Drake (2006) have suggested that teachers have specific ways of using curriculum tools at different phases of teaching, that is, prior to, during, and after the lesson. They categorise curriculum use in terms of reading, evaluating, and adapting. Remillard and Bryans (2004), on the other hand, developed three broad categories of curriculum use based on their analysis of the role that curriculum materials play. These are thorough piloting, adopting and adapting, and intermittent and narrow use. However, it was Brown's (2009) Design Capacity for Enactment Framework (DCEF in short, see Figure 1) that provided the initial grounding to frame this study.

The DCEF's conceptualization of teacher-tool relationship provided the initial lens to focus the inquiry, particularly concerning the way teachers use curriculum (i.e. offloading, adapting, and improvising), as well as the factors that shape this teacher-tool relationship. Teachers who offload from the curriculum rely significantly on the curriculum materials to support instruction, effectively shifting the curriculum design responsibility to the tools (Brown, 2009; Brown & Edelson, 2003). On the other hand, teachers who adapt from the curriculum adopt certain elements of the curriculum design, but also contribute their own design elements to the implementation, effectively "sharing" the responsibility of curriculum design between themselves and the curriculum tools. Finally, teachers who improvise, based on the curriculum, pursue instructional paths of their own making. The curriculum tools may provide a 'seed' idea, but the teacher contributes the bulk of the design effort required to bring the activity to fruition. Figure 1 shows the Design Capacity for Enactment Framework originally developed by Brown (2009). The DCEF captures the elements of the teacher-tool relationship and shows the different types of interactions — offloading, adapting and improvising — that occur between teacher-resources and curriculum resources.

Figure 1: The Design Capacity for Enactment Framework by Brown (2009)



The DCEF provided an initial lens to examine and describe the teacher-tool relationship, and the concept of "islandness" allowed for deeper examination of how the unique features of the Maldives' landscape can shape the interaction between the teacher and the tool.

Research Methodology

Adopting the teacher-tool relationship lens, this study aimed to describe Maldivian teachers' relationship with the new English curriculum and the factors that shape this relationship. The questions it sought to answer were:

1. What are the experiences of a selected sample group of teachers from the Maldives regarding the teacher-tool relationship in delivering the English curriculum?
2. What are the important influences identified by these teachers regarding their experiences of the teacher-tool relationship in delivering the English curriculum?

To address these research questions, a multiple-case study design, informed by an interpretivist paradigm (Merriam, 2009), was employed. This design allowed the researcher to gain an insight into the teachers' relationship with the curriculum in their respective settings, by contrasting and comparing the results within and across the cases.

The multiple-case design also permitted the research to focus on the four relatively distinct Maldivian island contexts that formed the basis for the sampling. Six teachers teaching Year 6 English in four schools situated in distinct contexts — three teachers from a densely populated urban context, one from a sparsely populated island with multi-grade classrooms, one from an island dependent on fishing income, and another from an island dependent on tourism income — agreed to be part of this study. A description of the four schools and the six teachers is presented in Tables 1 and 2. The six teachers gave their informed consent, after permission had been obtained from Ministry of Education (MOE) and the school principal. Measures such as assigning pseudonyms to each participant were used to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of the research participants.

To provide for trustworthiness (Merriam, 2009), member checking was done by sharing the interview transcripts with the participants. Triangulation of methods allowed for interviews to be checked against video-recorded observations and document analysis. Data for the study were collected from the participants over a period of four months, over multiple interviews and observations. In addition, thick description was employed when reporting the findings. During data collection and analysis, peer debriefing was done with a colleague of the first author, as well as with the second author.

Table 1: Description of the Selected Research Sites

Schools	School A	School B	School C	School D
Characteristic of context	Urban, capital city	Situated on an island dependent on tourism. Surrounded by many resorts	Situated on a sparsely populated island. Main employer is the civil service. Subsistence fishing	Situated on an island highly dependent on fishing. Larger scale fishing is lucrative, and thus an attractive career pathway
Number of students	1200 Students from Grade 1 to 12	529 students from Grade 1 to 10	75 students from Grade 1 to 10 (multi-grade classrooms)	337 students from Grade 1 to 10
Teacher population and their academic qualification	Around 90 teachers. All the teachers have a Bachelor's degree and above	Total 51 teachers (of which, 15 teachers have never done teacher training)	Total 20 teachers (of which, 10 teachers have never done teacher training)	37 teachers; all with Bachelor's Degree and above

The person who monitors and guide curriculum implementation in Grade 6	A qualified Leading Teacher with English teaching background	A Leading Teacher not having English teaching background	A Leading Teacher who supervises all the grades	A Grade Leading Teacher; responsible to supervise all the subjects in Grade 6
Job opportunities	Advanced economy in the urban area provides a vast number of employment opportunities from various fields	The surrounding tourist resorts provide lots of job opportunities	Only a few jobs in the government offices	Fishing industry provides career options with good income

Table 2: Information of the Research Participants

Participant (Pseudonyms)	Experience	Teaching context	Teaching qualification
Ashia	7 years	School A: Urban context	Diploma in TESOL and Bachelor's degree in Educational Management
Becky	17 years	School A: Urban context	Bachelor's Degree in English
Kadhy	Less than 1 year	School A: Urban context	Doing the final year in TESOL
Daisy	8 years	School B: On an island dependent on tourism	Master's degree in English
Edmon	24 years	School C: On a rural, sparsely populated island	Masters of Arts in English
Faiha	7 years	School D: On an island dependent on fishing	Diploma in middle school teaching of English and Social Studies, Bachelor's degree in Primary Teaching

Each teacher was observed and video-recorded three times. The video data helped capture the lesson contents and the verbal interactions and events in detail (Tee, Samuel, Mohd Nor & Nadarajan, 2016; Jacobs et al, 1999). Each observed lesson was accompanied with pre-observation and post-observation interviews. The pre-observation meetings were carried out to better understand the teacher's planned lesson activities and their rationale, and to determine the curriculum objectives and related segments the teacher was planning to implement.

The post-observation interviews enabled discussion about each teacher's intention and goals in using a particular curriculum implementation approach, lesson activities, exercises and interactions. It also helped the researcher to understand the reasons for their actions and to better understand the teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge, views and beliefs. In addition, the researcher also observed the subject coordination meetings. The discussions during these meetings

gave insights into the teachers' plans in teaching particular topics, lessons and activities, as well as the ways they interacted with the curriculum.

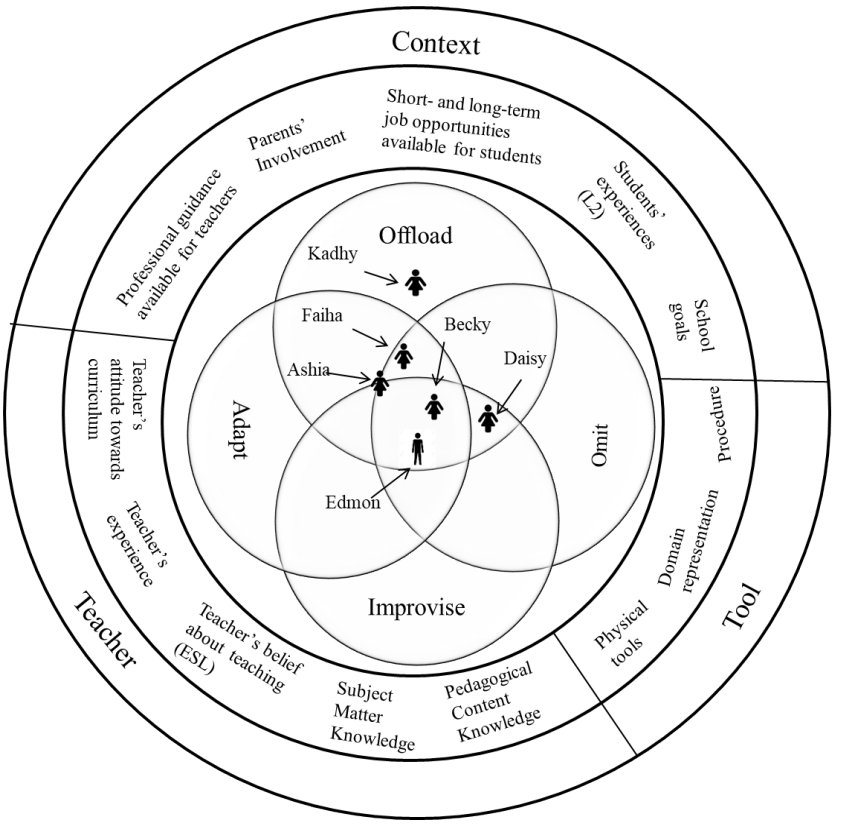
Documents such as lesson plans, unit outlines, curriculum documents and meeting minutes were also collected. These permitted a better understanding of what was prescribed and intended in the curriculum.

The data were analysed – within-case and cross-case – initially through the lens of the DCEF model, but with open coding to allow a comprehensive range of themes to emerge from the data (Merriam, 1998). The within-case analysis provided for comparing and contrasting how teachers within the same school use curriculum tools in different lessons. Meanwhile, the cross-case analysis allowed for comparison of the teacher-tool relationship across the different teachers situated in different schools.

Results

Based on the analysis, a number of similarities and differences in the teacher-tool relationship were identified. A summary of the findings is presented in Figure 2, followed by a discussion of how teachers used the curriculum and the factors which shaped the teachers' behaviour. The Venn diagram in the centre of Figure 2 locates where each teacher was in terms of a relationship with the curriculum tools. One of the teachers, Kadhy, for example, faithfully offloaded from the curriculum. Another teacher, Edmon, had a greater tendency to omit, adapt or improvise. The items in the grey circle are teacher-related, tool-related or context-related features that shaped the teacher-tool relationship.

Figure 2: The Teacher-tool Relationship and the Factors that Shape this Relationship



Offloading

The analysis of data revealed that all the teachers offloaded the tool to a certain extent. For example, all the teachers used the reading text and listening exercise as given in the textbook. However, Ashia, Kadhy and Faiha offloaded more than Edmon, Becky and Daisy, contributing very little of their own ideas to the curriculum implementation process. These three teachers followed almost all the tasks given in the tools, with little adaptation.

While Kadhy offloaded the most, Ashia and Faiha seemed to share a similar teacher-tool relationship. Kadhy, who has been teaching for nearly a year, depended significantly on the instruction and teaching resources prescribed in the tool without any change. She followed the curriculum faithfully – not adapting or improvising any of the tools, instructions or tasks. For example, in the lesson where students were supposed to make a leaflet, Kadhy gave exactly the same instruction and made students follow the same steps given in the student book, while other teachers adapted.

Much of the offloading behaviour of all the teachers was shaped by their positive attitude towards the new curriculum. The teachers seemed to recognize that the curriculum was improved to provide better teaching and learning opportunities for the students. Ashia, for example, explained that *"the new curriculum is based on eight key competencies which are important and it clearly filled the inadequacy of the old curriculum."* The teachers also highlighted that teaching had become more learner-centered, making students more responsible for their learning. As Faiha explained, *"The old curriculum was very much teacher-centered and textbook-based but the new curriculum is student-centered and makes students more responsible for their learning."*

All the participants agreed that the new curriculum supported teachers in their implementation of the new curriculum. The teachers viewed the curriculum resources as tools which must be used in their teaching. Talking about the suitability of these tools during the interview, the teachers explained that the new curriculum is very useful as MOE has designed, printed and disseminated all the learning materials needed to implement the new curriculum. Faiha, for example, said that *"the good thing about the curriculum is, everything is provided. The textbook is based on the learning outcomes and, we are recommended to use the exercises in the textbook. Resource materials are also given in the teachers' guide."*

However, it is important to highlight that some teachers, particularly Becky, Edmon and Daisy, had a different perspective about the tool. They viewed the tool as a guide to support their teaching, but not as exclusive resources which must be used in their teaching. The three teachers were educated and trained overseas, and their views seemed to be different from those of the other teachers. Daisy explained, *"I understood that all subject texts are designed on the basis of syllabus. But the textbook alone is not satisfying as a tool to teach the present curriculum in the classroom. So, we need to use other interesting tools [depending on] the concentration of the students."*

There were other significant forces that shaped how the tools were used. Faiha, from the school situated on an island dependent on large-scale fishing, said that the parents and school management emphasized using the textbook. Parents will complain if they find exercises which are left incomplete in the textbook. According to her, *"the parents and the school management want something that they can actually 'see' to measure the 'learning'. There are 18 units in the new syllabus for grade 7. By the end of the last semester, I was [only] able to cover 9 units… so parents complained about it."* On the other hand, Becky, Ashia and Kadhy from the urban school explained that their parents were very much aware of the new curriculum; hence they did not expect teachers to teach exactly what was given in the tools. Most of the parents wanted their children to have more diverse learning opportunities. This encouraged teachers to use other tools. Ashia explained that *"Our parents know a lot about the new curriculum content, the teaching strategies and assessment methods due to the various parents' awareness programs conducted by the school. So they don't bother even if the textbook work is not completed."*

Adaptation

The teachers also adapted, contributing their own knowledge and skills. Edmon, Becky, Ashia and Faiha adapted some of the tools when they implemented them in their classrooms. They either modified the teaching resources, tasks or instruction given in the tool to make it more suitable for the learning needs of the students.

Out of the four teachers, Edmon, from the sparsely populated rural island, adapted the most. He modified almost all the tools proposed in the curriculum, with the intention of making it more suitable for his students. Becky and Ashia adapted less than Edmon did but adapted more than Faiha. Faiha felt pressure from the parents and school management to offload the tool and to complete the exercises in the books, so when she adapted, she mainly did so with the introductory task stated in the curriculum. Becky and Ashia from the urban school adapted the tool to provide more challenging tasks to their students.

Teachers who have spent more years in teaching adapted more when compared to the teachers who have spent less years in teaching. All the teachers agreed that the way they use the curriculum tools changed as they gained more experience in teaching. The four teachers who had been teaching for more than seven years stated that with more years of service they had become more aware of the language needs of the students in the different teaching context. So they adapted from the tool depending on the students. Ashia explained: *"As I spend more years in teaching, I adapt and use my own styles and I use the textbook less than before."*

The teachers' pedagogical content knowledge and subject content knowledge also shaped their adaptation behaviour. When teachers became more aware of the various teaching techniques and learning methods, they seemed to adapt the given tool to better suit the students' learning preferences and language needs. For example, Faiha explained why she had to change her plan: *"I understood that it would be difficult to discuss based on their general knowledge. Even though we plan very interactive activities when we write the lesson plan, we cannot always carry out those activities in a real classroom. Very often, I have to change my plan after entering the classroom."* Teachers in the rural schools, particularly Edmon and Daisy, had weaker content knowledge than the teachers in urban areas. As a result, they depended heavily on the brief explanation of the content in the tool, without providing further explanation to the students. Moreover, when the two teachers adapted and improvised they seemed to select the tools, concepts or tasks, which were more familiar to them and, which could be easily and comfortably implemented in the classroom.

Other important factors that shaped teachers' adaptation behaviour included the suitability of the content and procedures given in the curriculum. Very often teachers seemed to adapt from the tool, when the tasks and concepts given were too complex or too easy for students. Edmon, who taught in a rural community where very little English was spoken, modified most of the questions given in the tool because they were too difficult for his students. Edmon stated: *"Some of the questions are very complicated. According to these students' standard, they can't do those questions. They find it difficult to do the questions. So I change them. But the questions are good for the students in well-developed islands."* The students' language experiences at home and at school was different from those of students in the urban area, and the language proficiency seemed to be far weaker than the students in the urban school. Daisy expressed that: *"the students do not watch TV or cartoon at home. They don't talk in English. So, they are weak in English."* On the other hand, Becky and Ashia from the urban school had to adapt the tool to provide more challenging opportunities for the students, because having exposure to the language at home, their language competency was much better than the students in rural schools.

Improvising

With the exception of Kadhy, all the other five teachers improvised some of the tools as they implemented their lessons. Using the learning outcomes given in the curriculum as the "seed" idea, the teachers used materials created on their own or adapted from the internet, to deliver their

lessons. In this regard, Edmon improvised the most, followed by Becky and Daisy. These teachers improvised three to four main activities in the three lessons observed, incorporating very little of what is prescribed in the tool. Ashia improvised occasionally, while Faiha improvised one activity.

One of the key factors shaping teachers' improvising behaviour was the exam-oriented education policy. All six teachers seemed to give particular importance to exam-oriented practices as they implemented their lessons. This behaviour is in large parts shaped by school rankings. Schools are ranked according to the result of an international exam administered at the end of Year 10 and Year 12. Rural schools tend to be more poorly ranked than urban schools. As a result, teachers in the rural schools tend to put more emphasis on exam results. Daisy, who taught on a rural island dependent on tourism, was a typical example. She improvised from the tool to give students more exam-oriented exercises. She explained: *"Our result was very low for the past few years. So I feel that it is important to do some exam-related lessons."*

Another key factor in shaping the teachers' improvising behaviour was their belief about language teaching. Becky and Edmon's beliefs about language teaching, for example, were quite different from those of Ashia, Daisy and Faiha. Becky and Edmon were trained and educated in an era where grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods were given greater emphasis in teaching English. Hence, their teaching involved much more explicit teaching of vocabulary and grammar rules. These two teachers improvised the lesson to include grammar and vocabulary activities in their lessons because they believed that these aspects were crucial in learning a language. As the new curriculum promoted implicit grammar teaching, this improvisation could possibly affect curriculum implementation negatively.

When the two teachers were asked about their reasons for including aspects of grammar and vocabulary in their lessons, they explained that without grammar and vocabulary the students will not be able to learn the language.

> *As a teacher I have to develop students' fundamental knowledge in English. As primary level students, they must be trained with basic grammar and vocabulary to improve their listening, speaking, reading and writing. With that aim in mind, I gave more importance to the grammar and vocabulary. I understood that it is the base to every language learner.*

A third key factor that shaped all the teachers' improvising behaviour was the extent of the students' short-term and long-term job opportunities. For example, although it was earlier assumed that students in this tourism-based region would need an English qualification to secure a job in the tourist islands, Daisy explained that students are not actually required to have a pass grade in English to get a job. In fact, languages such as Chinese, German, and French are more commonly spoken at this tourist destination. Students, according to Daisy, were less motivated to learn English for this reason, which, in turn, was one of the main drivers for Daisy to move away from the given tools to find other approaches to keep her students engaged.

> *…most of the students don't like to learn English. Not only English but other subjects too. Because once they have completed grade 10, they will get a job. They do not need to get passing marks. If they sat in the exam, they will get a job… maybe from the resort, or from the airport or somewhere else. Because of this, they are not paying interest in studying. They (just) have to attend school until they finish grade 10.*

However, Edmon faced a different situation. In the rural island where Edmon taught, the principal reported that there were no job opportunities available on the island and the nearby islands. According to Edmon and other teachers in the school, there were no resorts around the island and neither was it a fishing area. The only career opportunities for the students were the few jobs available in the public sector, such as the health centre, schools and the island council: *"Many people have gone to (the) other islands. The good students are gone… to get (a) better education, and*

better health facilities. We have very few students and they are weak in English," Edmon explained. According to Edmon, the students who remained on the island were mostly weak academically and seemed to lack motivation to learn. This created a huge challenge for Edmon when implementing the curriculum. According to Edmon, he had to make his own materials in response to this situation.

Other contextual features such as the professional guidance available to teachers, as well as the extent of parental involvement, were said to shape the way teachers used the curriculum. For example, in the urban school, the teachers were monitored more closely. The teachers at the urban school received instructional coaching from qualified leading teachers to support their curriculum implementation. In the rural schools, there was significantly less support and guidance, especially by one who has appropriate pedagogical content expertise as leading teachers were not specialised in teaching English.

In the urban school, parents were more educated and had higher expectations regarding their children's educational opportunities. Becky and Ashia stated that parents often expressed their concerns regarding the students' learning in the class Viber (an instant messaging app) group and at parent meetings. Becky reported: *"For example, yesterday I gave a rough idea about a leaflet project which will be assessed. I got messages from parents in the Viber group about it and (as a result) I had to conduct a group activity before giving the assessed project."* Parents in the rural islands tended to be less involved, and perhaps also more limited by a lack of resources: *"The curriculum is very much ICT-based. So, if students do not get this opportunity at home, it is very difficult to implement and achieve the key competencies,"* Faiha said.

Omission

The analysis of the data identified that all the teachers at some point omitted the tool either while planning for lessons or during implementation of lessons. They skipped the tool or replaced it with more suitable material or tasks depending upon the students' interest or level of competency. For example, it was identified that all the teachers omitted the activity on poems that was given in the textbook for different reasons. This is because teachers, particularly those in the urban area felt that it was not useful for the students' learning while those in the rural area found that poems were too difficult for their students to understand.

Discussion and Implications

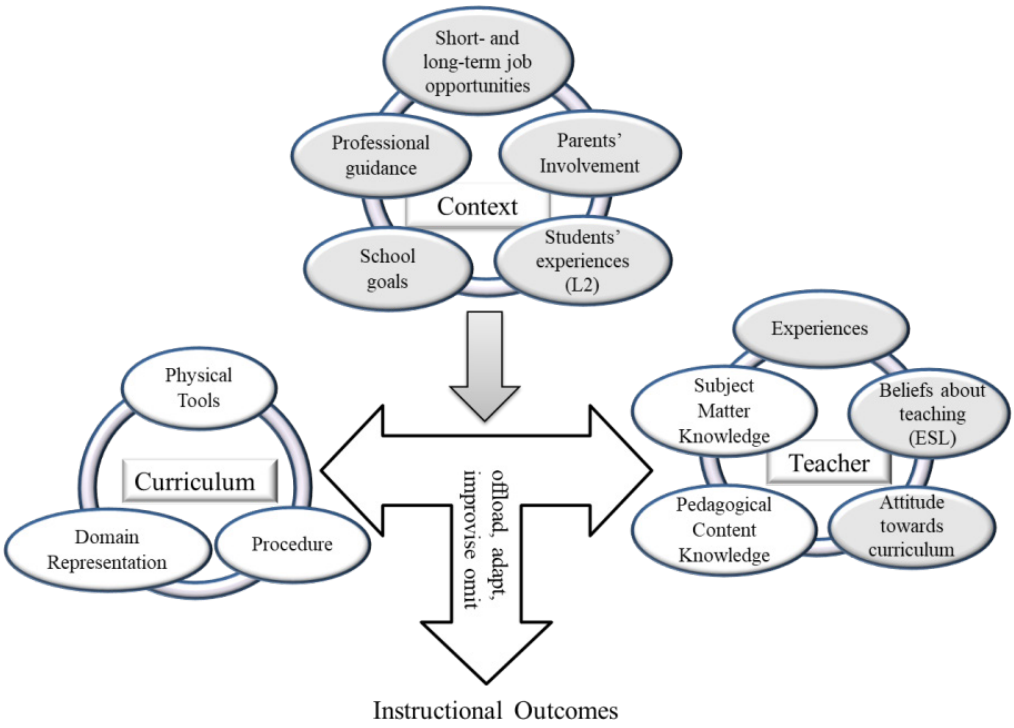
Similar to many other studies (see, for example, Ball & Cohen, 1996; Brown, 2009; Remillard, 2005), this research has found that a multi-layered and complex relationship exists between the teacher and the curriculum tools. The study has also lent support to the idea that the relationship between the teacher and the curriculum is dynamic and is bidirectional. The teacher-tool relationship varies at different stages of the instruction, particularly in a task-based teaching subject like English; and it can vary from one activity to another and from one lesson to another. In this study, however, a multilateral relationship becomes more explicit: the teacher, the context and the tool act upon each other to shape the classroom instruction. In other words, the particular features of each of the three elements may constrain or afford the curriculum implementation process in real classroom settings. Similar to the tool and the teacher, the characteristics of the context may present limitations and possibilities which could influence how teachers interact and use the curriculum.

It is important to note that even though Brown (2009) and Remillard (2005) have highlighted that contextual features within and beyond the education system can have an important influence on how teachers use the curriculum, they did not identify specific features of the context that could shape teacher-tool relationship. Other researchers have identified context-related features such as time constraints (Bodzin et al., 2003), teaching resources (Nargund-Joshi et al., 2011), and peer coaching (Roehrig et al., 2007), but these are features already embedded within the education system.

This study, in contrast, has identified and described how a unique socioeconomic, geographical and cultural context can significantly shape the teacher-tool relationship. In other words, the context (i.e. parents' involvement, students' learning experiences; school goals, job opportunities; professional guidance) also plays a significant role in mediating the interaction between the teacher and artefact. The interaction between the teacher and the tools is also shaped by the context in which this relationship is situated.

A modified DCEF framework is, therefore, proposed (See Figure 3). In this framework, the context plays a significant role in influencing the already dynamic teacher-tool relationship. In addition, the goals and beliefs from the original framework are expanded into more specific teacher characteristics: the teacher's experience, the teacher's belief about (language) teaching, and the teacher's attitude towards curriculum. These characteristics seemed to play a significant role in shaping teacher relationships with the tools, ultimately changing their behaviour in the classroom. Similar to a number of other studies (see, for example, Farrell, 1999; Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999) that have highlighted the impact of teachers' educational histories on the formation of their beliefs, this study has also identified that teachers' beliefs about language teaching are similar to the instructional approaches that were prominent during their initial experiences of teaching. It was identified that a teacher's curriculum use reflected the teacher's basic belief about language teaching. For example, teachers who believed vocabulary and grammar teaching were an important part of teaching English appeared to be much more likely to adapt tools to include the activities of grammar and vocabulary. However, those teachers who had not experienced explicit teaching of grammar and vocabulary in their schools and teacher training did not teach them explicitly. This is because their belief about these aspects of language was different.

Figure 3: The Proposed Extension of DCE Framework



The national vision for the new curriculum of Maldives is expressed as "Every child is prepared for life" (National Institute of Education (NIE), 2013). Hence, teachers are encouraged to help develop the individual skills of each child to prepare them for the future. However, there must be greater recognition that distinct contextual features as shaped by a unique set of social, economic and geographic circumstances can give rise to distinct socio-economic systems, which in turn may have a powerful impact on the teacher-tool relationship. Therefore, it is important to recognize that curriculum as well as teacher education should be designed in a way that accounts for these situation-based dynamics. For instance, curriculum and assessment structures need to be designed in a way that empowers teachers in the more rural settings to adapt and improvise the curriculum to better accommodate the needs of students and parents. Even though it is easy to implement and standardize one curriculum that fits all, the reality is that no curriculum can fit all students' needs in a community distributed across a large number of islands. On the other hand, teacher education should prepare teachers who are more capable to improvise and adapt the curriculum to suit the learning needs of students living in different socio-economic contexts (Wang & Hsieh. 2017; Yazdi, 2013).

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Empowerment in Islamic Schools in Yogyakarta and Sydney

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Abstract: *The function of empowerment is to equip people with the knowledge, skills, and perspectives that can sustain and improve both personal and societal well-being. Empowerment can occur by means of education, as well as by supportive programs in social work, community development, and philanthropy. Especially when intended for the poor, marginalized, or minority students, such programs should be well-focused on methods for building long-term capabilities and for strengthening societal participation. Our investigation documented empowerment methods and effects in three Islamic-based, partially state-funded, co-educational schools, one located in Yogyarkarta, Indonesia, and two located in Sydney, Australia. The study gathered individual and group accounts from teachers, academic staff, and parents at these schools. Their accounts were examined with reference to the educational precepts valued by the schools and their communities. This qualitative case-study used interviews, focus group discussions, and review of selected documents to examine the significance of education as implemented through curricula that includes moral education. The findings illustrate how such programs serve as empowerment for students toward fulfilling spiritual, economic, and social needs. Islamic moral education was seen to be embedded in many courses, including languages, arts, culture, social studies, sports, and science. This research found that there is an urgency for Islamic schools to grow their resources in order to remain viable, to provide powerless children with access to education, and to empower these students through curricular and extracurricular activities.*

Keywords*: Student empowerment, moral education, Islamic schools, Yogyakarta, Sydney*

Introduction

Studies in Indonesia and Australia have examined empowerment gained through education provided to children in poor families, minority groups, and marginalized communities (Hatton, Munns, & Dent, 1996; Kindervatter, 1979; Nilan, 2009; Prasilowati, 2000; Zulfikar, 2009). These children have needed opportunities for better-quality education, even in wealthy countries and certainly in less developed and underdeveloped nations. Studies have focused also on education for children from immigrant or indigent families. And several studies have observed church-run schools and community education programs in poor urban neighborhoods of developed countries, including programs in the USA (Cipolle, 2010; Ferguson, 2008; Nieto, 2008).

Our research in Yogyakarta examined a school initiated by the religious community to provide free education for children of indigent families. This community was already engaged in periodic philanthropic giving for the poor. Now, for over a decade, it has initiated and sustained free elementary schools in provinces on the Island of Java, which include Yogyakarta, Central Java, West Java, and Jakarta. It is beneficial that the Indonesian Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs are funding an elementary school system throughout these provinces. Nonetheless, this public education is not completely free of costs for the students' families. Parents must pay for their

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children's school uniforms, textbooks, and extracurricular activities. To remedy this gap, the *Sekolah Dasar* (SD) Juara school of Yogyakarta is funding these ancillary aspects so that there is no cost to students of indigent families. The schooling thereby assists educational empowerment for children whose families could not afford the fees. In addition, the school and surrounding community believe that the inclusion of Islamic moral education in school programs is valuable in preparation for a more secure future. Indeed, a variety of schools in many countries have historically been founded in order to include such components in curricula (Bennets & Bone, 2019; Cheung, 2008; Chowdhury, 2016; Lam, 1991; Lukens-Bull, 2000; Osman, 2019).

Our research also included two affordable Islamic schools in Sydney, Australia. In these settings, we gained a comparative study of the empowerment in Yogyakarta for indigent children and the empowerment in Sydney for children in a minority cultural group, namely Muslims living in a Christian-majority society. The two Australian schools have only Muslim enrollment and the curricula for both of these schools include Islamic teachings, which necessitates differences from the public school content. Parents and faculty see this moral education as essential for empowering students. By contrast with SD Juara in Yogyakarta, the Islamic schools in Sydney function in an environment with ubiquitous societal contrasts, which affect the differential distribution of benefits and the patterns of relationships within society.

Societal inequities can be individually or structurally based (Foster, 1981), and in Australia they are connected not only to locale, social environment, ethnicity, and religious background, but also to migration patterns and minority nationality groups. In terms of religious inequality, for example, research has found that Australian Catholic children lack full access to educational opportunities due to shortages of accommodations, staff, and facilities (Trethewey, 1990). According to Maslen (1992), Catholic education historically was locked into long-standing hindrances such as traditional routines, problematic school size, and inflexible organization. This led to schools becoming dull workhouses for students and uninteresting stepping-stones to jobs or higher education. In light of such descriptions of minority schooling in Australia, our research examined two Islamic schools in Sydney, relating to how they provide student empowerment amid the effects of being situated in a Christian majority society.

In conducting our study, we looked for furtherance of the empowerment approach toward helping group members to pursue fulfillment of goals and to overcome economic and cultural barriers (Lee, 1996). Educators deal with students who are impeded by scant familial resources, low societal status, notable economic hardship, or pervasive injustice. Payne (2005) maintained that empowerment assists students to attain control of their decisions and actions by minimizing the effects of social and individual factors that impede self-determination. The goal is to expand capacity and self-confidence by relocating power from the environment to the students. Applying the empowerment approach exclusively, however, may be less effective than using it in conjunction with a broader view. Educators can examine the roots of oppression in a society by analyzing history in relation to social policy and inequality. In this approach, students learn how to reduce problems and resolve issues by restructuring false beliefs that had made them feel hopeless (Lee, 1996).

Education is influenced by the disciplines of psychology, sociology, economics, and religious studies. In synthesis, these sources contribute to aspects of empowerment in classrooms. Also, in working with populations who are oppressed, many educators use moral education to encourage students to think analytically and objectively about human issues. As in other religions, Islam includes many theological schools of thought, such as *Asy'ariyah*, *Jabbariyah*, and *Qadariyah* (Goldziher, 1981). The latter says that since humans are incapable of challenging divine power, any persons born into poverty can only see it as a fate they must accept. But in the more recent context of moral education, educators do not adopt a fatalistic perspective, but instead strive to have students learn to empower themselves and to progress toward personal liberation and away from negative cultural and societal factors and from fatalistic perspectives (Lee, 1996).

Empowerment in the Context of Islamic Moral Education

Historically and currently, mankind's religions have established schools and universities. Those institutions embed moral values in the academic settings, while simultaneously influencing, and adapting to, cultural and political developments. Reciprocal effects in society generally, and in education specifically, need to be understood in the context of the underlying beliefs. Morality, as a component of course content in such schools, and particularly for this study in contemporary Islamic schools, contributes to societal functioning. The Islamic principle *âdab*, meaning good behavior and the principles of hospitality, etiquette, politeness, civility, and culture, is a valued component in such curricula (Al-Syaukâni, 1417; Halstead, 2007). The Arabic verb *addaba*, meaning to guide and shape behavior and character, has a central function in Islamic education. These linguistic markers emphasize Islamic moral education as a means by which students attain physical, psychological, social, scientific, and technological abilities. Moral education arouses the minds and hearts of students as they learn independence, responsibility for actions, and the life skills for fulfilling their spiritual, social, economic, and cultural needs. Such lessons are part of comprehensively planned Islamic curricula for empowerment (Hussain, 2008).

Two notable values in Islamic education are developing students' understanding of social ethics and promoting students' respect for adherents of other religions in order to allow harmony among varied communities (Cardinal, 2006). Education, as based in Islam, is a process to equip students with knowledge and skills (Hills, 1985) so that students are empowered to confidently take part in discussions and debates, to conduct research, and to remain open to correction and revision (Panjawi, 2012). Islamic education is expected to encourage motivation for research, so that student awareness of physical and social phenomena, as well as of divinity, will expand and persist. Thereby they gain respect for themselves as potential producers of knowledge, based on scientific methods and on the appreciation of Giver of knowledge (Allah), and they strengthen their openness to correction and revision (Panjawi, 2012).

Heydon (1997) observes that citizens expect schools and colleges to teach moral values in order to reduce bullying and cyclic conflict since moral education guides students to set better examples for others. Indonesian educational policy implements forms of moral education in the national curriculum as one way to reduce violence. Heydon (1997) asserts that people who act according to moral rules will not do violence, that students who are morally educated will not apply an attitude of conflict, and that educators can serve as anti-violence models for students. Moral education functions long-term to arouse awareness of students from varied backgrounds to improve their quality of life and to diminish any cycles of violence or poverty in their families. Islamic education therefore requires moral principles to be modeled by educators, administrative staff, and other school personnel. It is crucial for students at young ages to learn that community members should differentiate between good and bad, and to learn what behavior can be accepted and what should be rejected. Exemplary education thereby creates beneficial change in local communities and in society overall (Alavi, 2008)

Twin questions, therefore, were pursued in our research. How is Islamic moral education significant in contemporary life? And how do contemporary Islamic schools empower students to participate as independent, effective, and responsible learners?

Method

This research used personal inquiry to explore philosophy supporting curricula, nature of subjects taught, methods of teachers, connections among topics, options for extracurricular activities, and daily treatment of students. Participants were asked a series of questions relevant to the study topics and were given the opportunity to elaborate on their answers. This qualitative approach included observation of participants in the school settings and personal accounts of their own conversations, social lives, and finances.

Interviews, observations, and study of documents were conducted at each of three sites: Australian Islamic College of Sydney, Al-Noori Muslim School, New South Wales (NSW), Australia, and Sekolah Dasar (SD) Juara, Yogyakarta. These three are Islamic, but also public, schools. They are open to anyone seeking to enroll. The three schools were chosen on the basis of being Islamic schools providing at least 70 percent of the coursework to fulfill government requirements because they receive up to 30 percent of their total budget for teaching expenditure from the state. The schools' mottos are also in line with objectives of this research, namely to achieve the highest finest attitude (*akhlâq al-karîmah*) according to Islamic teachings in the Qur'an and *hadîth*.

Participants were school headmasters, administrative officials, and parents, selected from the respective communities served by each institution. Each site was initially represented by five persons, so we ended up with fifteen interviewees or respondents. We sought balanced gender representation. Interviews, and in certain cases questionnaires, were used to gather responses regarding attitudes, knowledge, and methods at these independent Islamic schools. Participants were interviewed with the convenience sampling technique to also identify others who could qualify for inclusion. Interviews were done primarily in focus group discussions (FGD) in Yogyakarta and Sydney, but some interviews were conducted through email.

Data Collection and Analysis

The researchers used open-ended questions to elicit participants' knowledge, perceptions, experience, and feelings about the schools. There was a flexible questionnaire that guided interviewers to obtain clarification as needed and to formulate extended questions for more detailed descriptions from participants during the conversations, interviews, and focus group discussions, all of which were conducted in person on school grounds.

Data analysis examined relevant documents, fact findings, and policy-case analysis, and used online databases, references, and sources prescribed in printed and non-printed materials. Creswell (2013) suggests specific methods for such qualitative analysis, including the illustrative method and the analytic comparison alternative. The illustrative method, which uses empirical evidence to illuminate theory, was employed by this researcher by means of observing settings, interviewing subjects, and studying documents related to educational empowerment in Yogyakarta and Sydney. Analytic comparison sought similarities and contrasts. Domain analysis was applied to cultural settings. Neuman (1997) defined domains as themes resulting from interpreting "a cultural scene or social setting", with the ideal type applied as "mental abstractions of social relations or processes" (p. 429). Neuman has summarized that the researcher in context should draw conclusions after identifying both the ideal and the reality. Accordingly, educational empowerment ideas were compared to realities encountered in the field.

Results

Summary of Participant 1: Sekolah Dasar (SD) Juara

Sekolah Dasar (SD) Juara is the first charitable independent elementary school established in Yogyakarta. It started in 2007 with 39 students and now has almost 300. The school's vision is to mold a self-sufficient generation of Indonesian children, as they are lifted out of poverty by its specific mission of providing free and good quality education for the poor. SD Juara educates children, ages 6 to 12, from indigent families. Selection criteria prioritize children with parents who are very poor, lack a permanent job, and wish to obey the teachings of Islam. Students are provided with free tuition, school uniforms, field trips, and participation in recreational and extra-curricular activities. SD Juara exempts enrollees from all fees all the way through graduation.

SD Juara is neither a *madrasah* (mosque school) nor an Islamic *pesantren* (boarding school). It is a co-educational school that educates its students to the level needed to qualify for acceptance

into junior high school. Its courses provide Islamic religious teachings and moral education, but also the full Indonesian national curriculum of Arabic language, mathematics, science, arts, and sports (Yusuf, 2016). Extra-curricular activities include scouting, swimming, archery, *Gamelan* (a Javanese musical instrument), and music. SD Juara holds morning habituation in its mosque with reading 99 *Asmâul Husnâ* (good names of Allah) and a *dhuha* (morning) prayer. This school has notable academic achievements, including the success of one of its students in reaching the second round of the competitive Science Olympiad of Kuark. SD Juara also seeks to educate students of multiple intelligences, to develop all potential abilities, and to equip students with life skills and with the ability to succeed at further levels of education (Interview). SD Juara is an innovative standout among schools and is facilitating the poor, indigent, marginalized, and unfortunate children to have equal opportunities in education.

Summary of Participant 2: Australian Islamic College of Sydney (AICS)

The Australian Islamic College of Sydney (AICS) is a co-educational school, with levels from Kindergarten to Year 12, providing education underpinned by religious values. It operates within the policies of the New South Wales Board of Studies and seeks enrollees supportive of its philosophy and ethos. Similar to SD Juara, AICS is not a traditional *madrasah* but rather is a modern school, and it participates in Australia's system of partially state-funded education. The school therefore must adopt at least 70% of the national curriculum, which it then uses in conjuction with Islamic moral education. As a public school, it is open to all, including children of Aboriginal or Torrest Strait Islander origin and children from other minority groups (Australian Islamic College of Sydney, 2017).

AICS aims to offer a holistic education within an Islamic viewpoint. It was founded to serve the Muslim community in Sydney's western suburbs. According to its Principal Dr. Imam Ali, the AICS was initiated by a man who had already built an Islamic school in Perth with a belief that the *dakwa* (preaching) of Islamic teaching is effective if preached through education. After later migrating to New South Wales, this founder called on the Muslim community there to build AICS (Australian Islamic College of Sydney, 2017). In 1980, Muslim leaders in the suburbs saw a need for a site where their Muslim community could promote and teach Islam. Weekly gatherings were held in homes initially and in the St. Clair community center when attendance increased. The late M.K. Habibullah, a learned community elder, taught the attendees *tafsîr* (interpretation) of the Qur'an, *hadîth* (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad), and *târîkh* (Islamic history) to provide them with the understanding of Islamic studies needed for everyday life (Australian Islamic College of Sydney, 2017).

Historically, in 1983 about 100 people founded the Islamic Association of the Western Suburbs of Sydney. The members, with roots from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Fiji, formed a committee to write a constitution for their Association. Two key objectives were to establish a mosque and to open an Islamic school. Their application to the government was at first declined, but in 1986 the city council granted approval, and in March 1986 the association officially registered with the NSW Department of Fair Trading as a charitable organization (Australian Islamic College of Sydney, 2017).

Planning and fundraising led to the purchase of five contiguous lots of land in Mt. Druitt. Included were a cottage and a truck shed. Later the cottage became the Imam's residence, and the truck shed was renovated to become the present mosque. In 1997, modular structures were added and in 2009, a final adjacent block of land was purchased to expand the space for school buildings and for sports facilities such as a rugby court and an indoor gymnasium (FGD; Observation; Australian Islamic College of Sydney, 2017). Temporary structures were gradually replaced with state-of-the-art classrooms, laboratories, and related facilities. Enrollment at AICS has grown to over 1,100 students, and there are more than 100 teaching and non-teaching staff. The school encourages a global outlook, and its stated mission is to nurture skills, talents, and character, enabling students to confidently face a complex future. The school's annual test results in nearly all subjects have steadily risen into the top 40 percent of all NSW schools. These National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy

(NAPLAN) tests cover reading, persuasive writing, spelling, grammar, punctuation, and numeracy. At the same time, AICS has remained a staunch adherent to core Islamic values and teachings, with a focus on universally accepted morals and behavior (FGD; Australian Islamic College of Sydney, 2017).

Summary of Participant 3: Al-Noori Muslim School (AMS)

Al-Noori Muslim School (AMS) is a co-educational school for grades Kindergarten to Year 12 and now has a student population of about 1800 (Al-Noori Muslim School, 2017). AMS was founded in 1985 to value excellence in academic achievement, social justice, pastoral care, emotional growth and spiritual development. It is a public school, not a traditional *madrasah*. Students learn the NSW Education Standards Authority syllabus. Further, they are given instruction to help them be sure of their strengths and to work as independent, confident, and articulate members of the community (Al-Noori Muslim School, 2020). AMS strives to develop the personal and academic potential of each individual, and it emphasizes personal integrity and social responsibility (Al-Noori Muslim School, 2017). The school also fosters partnerships among staff, parents, and the wider community.

AMS achievements include its ranking among the Top 100 schools in New South Wales based on the High School Certificate (HSC) test results in 2016. The school secured this Top 100 standing in its first year of qualifying to participate in the NSW HSC, which is an achievement unique in the history of the ranking system. Also, the AMS' Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE) department provides regular opportunities for student competition in sports. In their recent and outstandingly successful year, both the girls' and the boys' teams from AMS were champions in the Bachar Houli Cup. And all students have the opportunity to enjoy a variety of school excursions. (FGD; Al-Noori Muslim School, 2017).

Theme 1: Provision of Education to the Economically Powerless – Sekolah Dasar (SD) Juara

In a focus group discussion with fifteen parents and three teachers at SD Juara, the topic was how the school empowers students. We asked about partnership among parents, teachers, and students to address difficulties; about encouragement by parents and teachers for children to have high motivation for homework; and about strategies by parents to persuade children to be diligent in preparation for school. We learned that SD Juara is a charitable school accepting Muslim children whose parents and caretakers are poor. Rumah Zakat, a charitable organization, advertises programs through its education division, which funds education for disadvantaged children in undeserved neighborhoods. The programs help these unfortunate children who meet eligibility criteria, based on surveys and home meetings with parents. The school waives tuition and fees, and once a family passes the screening, they can send two children at a time to SD Juara.

The majority of the fifteen parents who attended the meeting stated that they usually partner with their children to help with homework, and if they cannot solve mathemetical problems considered difficult, then they ask a neighbor for assistance. One of the parents interviewees (all of them females), stated that her child often does homework while helping to sell food from their verandah. Earlier each day, the child opens the shop door and arranges chairs for customers before heading for school. Most participants stated that their husbands also help with homeworks whenever feasible.

Parents help teachers at school by sitting beside children who need assistance. The teachers ask parents to check their children's performance at home as well. Parents help to prepare school bags before bedtime, and they check *Qur'anic* memorization (*tahfîdz*). For some children these two habits are difficult to maintain. Parents at home serve as teachers' partners for study habits, and teachers are parents' partners for building students' values. Participants further told us that teachers act as role models for good character and behavior, such as *akhlâq al-karîmah* (good morality), at school. Students are guided to be eager to share with each other, behave well at home, finish homework, and become independent.

Included in our research was recent information on the economic conditions of parents of the SD Juara children. For confidentiality, actual names are not used. We identify one student by pseudonym as Banu, a 9-year-old who is now in fourth grade at SD Juara. His father's job as a school security officer pays a low monthly salary. Banu's mother is a homemaker. The couple graduated from secondary school and did not continue their education. The mother said that living as urban migrants in Yogyakarta is hard because prices steadily rise. With only the father's income, the family cannot afford public elementary school, so they accepted being surveyed by SD Juara about their economics and religiosity. The surveyor asked about income, expenses, and how often the family practices prayers. Based on answers and evidence, their child was accepted to enroll in SD Juara. Banu's mother told us that his class begins at 7.00 in the morning, starting with a *dhuha* (morning prayer) held in the school's mosque and guided by the teacher. The students then go to their classrooms to start lessons. On some days they practice *Qur'anic* memorization (*tahfidz*), such as short simple verses in the *Amma* Chapter. Classes end at 13.00 in the afternoon (Observation & Interview).

Banu's mother stated that SD Juara conveys lessons suited to the children's capacities and gradually guides students to understand according to each child's physical, affective, and motor growth levels. SD Juara lends course packets on all subjects to students, and when students find a topic difficult, the teachers hold extra classes to help them. This always occurs in fourth to sixth grades prior to the national examination, but it can happen in other grades too. Banu asserted that he is happy that his schooling at SD Juara enables him to practice moral and religious values that he receives in class, to do his five-time daily prayers, to have good will as directed in Islam, such as respect for adults and parents, and to share these benefits with friends.

Other stories came from the father of siblings, pseudonyms Hilal and Halim (8 and 10 years old). The boys entered grade 1 after the survey by SD Juara of the economic, spiritual, and social conditions of their family. The father, a high school graduate with a non-permanent job as a construction worker, stated that besides receiving schooling, his children are involved in sports, such as soccer and swimming, and in extra-curricular activities, such as scouting. He mentioned that teachers are friendly and adapt to each child's capacity. Hilal and Halim perform a *dhuha* prayer in the morning and make a *jamâ'ah* prayer for *dzuhur* (mid-day prayer)before noon. On some Fridays, the students do exercises and *Qur'anic* memorization (*tahfidz*) from *al-Fâtihah* to *al-Ghâsyiyah* Chapters. Students and families attend holy days of Islam, with *pengajian* (moral congregation), and when teachers, parents, and staff have a school committee meeting, they often invite an *ustâdz* (Islamic teacher) to give a *pengajian*.

These detailed case studies of two of the five families expanded our data from parental observation and interviews, as evidence of how charity, benevolence, and philanthropy in Islam are being utilized to give educational access to indigent students and to try to empower them for further success in their future lives (Observation & Interview).

Theme 2: Empowerment Beginning from Community – Australian Islamic College of Sydney (AICS)

Australian Islamic College School (AICS) has as its principal Dr. Imam Ali and as its vice principal Ms. Sherin Mohamed, who is responsible for curricula. We interviewed them along with classroom teacher Ms. Tessie Ida James in order to document the school's history, current curricula, and extra-curricular activities. As described earlier, the school began in 1996 by the initiative of an eight-member multicultural School Project Committee representing Pakistan, Fiji, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Turkey, and Egypt, with most members being Muslim. By November the Committee had purchased and installed the structures needed for K-3 classes to start in February 1997, and Grade 4 began in the subsequent term. We learned that the Committee developed syllabi, procured furniture, and recruited students and teachers. Fund-raising events, plus donations from Australia and overseas, enabled the first school building. (FGD; Australian Islamic ollege of Sydney, 2017). The New South Wales State now donates up to 40 percent of the teaching budget.

For teacher recruitment, Australian Islamic College of Sydney (AICS) prioritizes competence and credentials. Although this is a Muslim school, some teachers and administrative staff are non-Muslim and teach non-Islamic studies (*fiqh* and *tafsîr*). Mr. Ali holds that those who teach these subjects should have a liberal arts diploma and understand *Qur'anic* and *hadîth* teaching. AICS has embraced multicultural values, and thereby AICS survives in a non-majority Muslim community. Dr. Imam Ali maintained that the school tries to meet the challenge of preserving traditional cultures for people raised in Australia and abroad. Ms. James noted that she and her family, for example, maintain their Indian cultural heritage while residing in Australia.

In regard to empowering students, we learned that AICS selects materials suitable to the students' mental development, using the cognitive approach to education. The school provides the content levels and subject matter required by the state, while adding content-based on local needs, such as Islamic studies, *tarîkh* (Islamic history), *tafsîr* (interpretation of the Qur'an) and *hadîth* (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad), and Arabic. Dr. Ali stated that the school could not implement 100 percent of the content required by the state because time is also needed for materials related to cultural backgrounds of the students, families, and community (FGD).

We asked Dr. Ali how the school keeps traditions of students whose parents' backgrounds differ, since they are in a multicultural society where Catholic and Christian values are dominant and the government does not require public schools to teach religion. Dr. Ali stated that the school teaches science, mathematics, languages, physics, and similar courses, plus Islamic studies. The school allocates time for students to practice *ibadah* (worship), prayers, *Qur'anic* memorization, and to celebrate the Muslim holy calendar, including *Idul Fitr* and *Idul Adha*. The school also focuses on physical education and has a sports center where students can practice activities related to their interests. Rugby or soccer is encouraged for male students, and students can compete in sporting events. Also available are gymnastics, scouting, and the arts, such as singing and *nashid* (Arabic religious songs) (FGD).

Theme 3: Empowerment through Subsidy for Expanded Curriculum – Al-Noori Muslim School (AMS)

Al-Noori Muslim School (AMS) had been a public school established in 1985 by Muslims of a nearby community. The school has as its headmaster Mr. Ali Kak. Mr. Ayman Darwich is Deputy Principal of the High School, and Ms. El-Zahab is Deputy Principal of the Junior High School. Similar to AICS, AMS offers preschool, kindergarten, elementary, junior high, and high school levels. Students at AMS have scored well in state examinations and have excelled in intermural sports. After over three decades in operation, Al-Noori Muslim School now boasts alumni employed as teachers, doctors, lawyers, and bankers (FGD).

Our on-site research began as we were guided by the principal and the deputies to observe infrastructure and academic buildings during a half-day tour. We visited classes, laboratories, the music room, playgrounds, administration rooms, teacher rooms, and the gymnastics area. We were introduced in an elementary class, where two teachers were teaching Arabic. Mr. Ali Kak told us that the teachers had established their own Arabic syllabus and course packs because some imported Arabic books from the Middle-East are not suitable to be used for Muslim students in Australia, due to different contexts. For instance, many vocabulary items in imported books are not familiar in the local culture. Instead, the school held a workshop to compose a contextual Arabic reader to respond to students' needs. For this course, the school made its own instructional packets for pre-school to high school levels.

In our conversations and observations at AMS, we heard and saw that the headmaster, teachers, staff, and all others work diligently. They are committed to develop this school by having extra hours of full-day study for students. Students in the state of New South Wales typically attend school from 7:00 in the morning to 15:00 in the afternoon. This school, however, obligates students to spend a longer time in school, so that they can learn subjects that are often difficult, such as mathematics

and science. Mr. Kah asserted that when competing, one succeeds by spending more time on the same work, as a habit to excel. By having extra school hours, the school can set hard work as the norm for their students, even when other people do not expect it. This resulted in many of their students attaining the highest ranks during the national examinations in 2017. Empowering students is achieved by molding learning habits and making such habits part of the school culture. Twenty years ago this school started with one class. Teachers and staff since then have worked hard to make it become one of the best schools in New South Wales, ranked in the upper 15 percent among all independent schools in the state (FGD).

AMS also teaches psychology by integrating Islamic studies into courses. Islamic studies, *tarîkh*, *tafsîr* and *hadîth*, are provided to students in the form of extra classes for perspectives about Islam. When hiring teachers, Mr. Kak pays attention to each candidate's diploma and academic transcript. He interviews and screens teacher candidates himself during their recruitment. The school seeks applicants who are alumni from specialist education backgrounds, not solely from general education or liberal arts. This particular practice has helped AMS maintain its academic standing (FGD).

Discussion

SD Juara in Yogyakarta and AICS and AMS in Sydney are succeeding in empowering students, providing adequate facilities as needed by their students. AICS and AMS are two of the very few Islamic schools in Sydney, New South Wales, and they have developed successfully in under three decades. They each started from having a single class of no more than 31 students. Their Islamic communities had been seeking to have schools that would become competitive with existing schools, such as the Jewish, Catholic, and public schools in Greater Sydney.

Children at SD Juara are empowered by receiving free education (*pendidikan gratis*) when they qualify for it based on their parents living below the poverty line according to Indonesia's Board of Statistics or *Biro Pusat Statistik*. According to Davies (1994), because "education is an enterprise, not a human right" (p. 8), such a situation has worried many parents about their children having fewer opportunities to be educated in competitive public schools due to the barrier of tuition fees. The parents felt they were being blessed because, at SD Juara, their children learn 'secular subjects' at a strong level, while also studying Islamic subjects for empowerment in ethical motivation and life skills. Most parents confirmed that Islamic subjects, including Islamic moral education, are significant for their contemporary life because it guides students' behavior to not only become good and responsible citizens, but also to embrace divinity in life and to become devoted Muslim. In addition to such beliefs, some of the parents were equally concerned about their children's competence in mathematics and natural sciences, although this was not a majority voice of the parents. In addition to free tuition, these children were given myriad of activities which reflect the significance for developing both their spiritual and physical aspects. Empowerment felt by these students included learning moral education and Islamic teachings, which are not provided at other state elementary schools, but which are part of their family values. In addition, the parents are satisfied with SD Juara as a resource for them, as being the poor who live in a society where education has been commercialized. These parents are nonetheless able see their children benefit from schooling inclusive of moral values without the need for them to afford tuition fees.

Education, whatever religious group, state, or community possesses, should focus on developing two aspects of the child: spirituality and physics. The parents contended that the variety of activities which leads to building morality fits their life objective. Regarding this aspect, children in these Islamic schools are under guidance (*mursyid*) to perform regular prayers both in class and in the school mosque or outdoor. In addition to the prayers, they also participate in learning Islamic tradition and history and the Qur'an. The most significant result the students receive is that the moral teaching that has been added to science subjects made it possible for the students to mold their character and vision to become knowledgeable.

Muslim schools were seen to have benefited from local initiatives and input from their communities. As seen in our observations and focus group discussions, these schools are also allowed to have a non-Muslim principal. This is a progressive step as it sometimes takes an outsider to readily perceive flaws and spur improvements in an organisation. This phenomenon is different from what these researchers see in Indonesia, where principals have the same faith as the majority of a school's students. Like SD Juara, Islamic schools in Sydney are inclusive to race, religion, culture, and social class. AICS and AMS are both open to enroll students from diverse backgrounds, while also empowering Muslim students with Islamic studies perspectives such as *tafsîr*, *hadîth*, and variety of activities to further develop students' potential in all aspects. The students at these schools also stay longer in class (compared to other schools) in order to better learn subjects which teachers consider as difficult, a contributing factor in students excelling in state examinations.

The Islamic schools in Greater Sydney that we visited are developing several laboratories suited to various purposes such as physics, biology, mathematics, music, and sports laboratories. Because of this availability, students have greater chances to forge their ability and talent in sports, arts, and academics. Many students also recently won competitions locally. Some of them attained very high scores in the national examinations in New South Wales state. Methods for empowerment, as used by these Islamic schools, include extra-curricular activities, including scouting, sports, and optional extra hours of study for challenging courses. Students must attend required classes, but local schools can also add activities that exceed the minimum requirements. In visiting AICS and AMS, we saw that the combination of longer hours of study with physical and spiritual activities, plus the use of prayer facilities such as the school mosque and chaplaincy guidance, has boosted students' character, capability for studying, and opportunities for experiencing socialization.

The Islamic schools in Sydney that we visited have notable roles in empowering Muslim young people in a Christian-majority country. The schools serve as role models for teaching Muslim children to live in modernity and keep Islamic values at the same time. This empowerment serves as a method that helps marginalized or indigent people to become independent without neglecting their family heritage.

In Yogyakarta, SD Juara is affiliated with the Rumah Zakat Foundation, which collects *zakat* (religiously based charitable donations) from the public and distributes it to the poor and the indigent (Lessy, 2013). Students' fees at this school are waived and indeed, some refer to it as *Sekolah Gratis*. Located in an inner-city neighborhood of Yogyakarta, the motorists, drivers, and travelers easily notice the rented building. It occupies one entire block with a main building of two levels, and has some classrooms integrated into its community mosque. In Indonesia this was the first *Sekolah Gratis*, namely a school where students pay nothing. All students come from low-income families, and in order to be enrolled, they must pass a screening test which assesses whether their parents are poor. A qualifying family can send two children to the school at a time.

The teachers improve performance through improvisation in so-called thematic teaching styles. The school maintains physical and spiritual curricula in combination, as a balance between secular and spiritual teachings. In our focus group discussion, the anonymous participants agreed that the school helps them amid financial and economic difficulty by providing free education for indigent children. We saw how grateful the participants felt about this assistance. Even so, in an interview with one parent, we found her saying that she wants this school to add a priority for teaching science and mathematics. She wants her children to finish their schooling with high grades in those subjects so that they will be able to continue their education in public state-owned inexpensive secondary schools, which also offer good quality education. In order to empower children, the teaching can start from simple intentions, deeds, commitment, and work. We saw schools that began with only one class in a room divided between teaching and administration. And SD Juara has been able to help similarly disadvantaged children by waiving their tuition fees.

Conclusion

Empowerment programs through education can be accomplished in many ways, and our research has investigated three schools offering programs and activities to emancipate minority and low-family-income students from lesser self-esteem and lesser independence, in order to integrate them into mainstream society and culture with a greater chance of economic success. The power of community building and a spirit of togetherness has shaped minority groups in Greater Sydney, New South Wales, to run their own schools for educating young Muslims amid observance of their own family culture, while expanding their horizons at the same time. These schools provide a powerful resource for unifying people from various ethnic backgrounds. These schools are open for students of any religion, ethnicity, culture, or political affiliation while at the same time providing the opportunity of values harmony for Muslim families. Despite having religious names connected with these schools, such as "Islamic" or "Muslim", their curricula have the independence to exist within a system of State or community support. They offer *Qur'ân*, *târîkh*, *fiqh*, *hadîth*, or *tawhîd* and other Islamic teachings to their students, so long as they also meet the minimum course requirements mandated by the State. We found that the students of these schools have benefited from learning science and mathematics, in preparation for higher education or future business acumen, while also gaining reinforcement of spirituality, for harmony with their family beliefs, in a time in which many other public schools do not offer both.

By contrast to the parents in our study, society's non-needy families can more easily afford the cost of elite schools, if they so choose. But the schools in our study are helping needy families and their children to overcome this hurdle by providing quality education without cost. It may also be noted that economic differences between neighborhoods sometimes leads to lack of self-esteem even among public school students. And the travel time and cost, for attending schools outside a family's neighborhood, make it difficult for poor children to attend distant institutions. As our research documented, these poor children often must spend some non-school time to assist in family businesses or care of siblings. Without the opportunity to attend schools such as the three cases studies in this paper, poor students would be less likely to have time for school related activities.

Traditionally, governments have acted as the decision makers for access to an educational system, but our study noted a trend for public schools to become more independent and self-governing. Meanwhile, many other schools stay lucrative because they accept children from the middle and upper classes without added assistance for those who are indigent. As competitiveness among such schools becomes more acute, many children citizens are left without sufficient access to good quality education. SD Juara is an example of an independent school that prepares students well, rivalling the results of other schools, while waiving tuition and fees. Their belief is that in order to create a good future for society, individuals or groups of people should invest today to empower low-income students with both academic and moral success. Our investigation noted that competitiveness in education is valuable but has often been beyond the reach of students who lack resources. Our study showed increasing attention to blending a fee-free and democratic environment with the technical and moral education desired by poor familes. In such settings, empowerment becomes multi-faceted.

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Decentralised Centralism: Insights from a Malaysian Cluster School of Excellence

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Abstract: *Currently, in many developing countries, there have been intensified efforts by policymakers to push for decentralisation of education as part of a neo-liberal reform agenda to improve school management efficiency and cater to localised needs. In the Malaysian context, the government has attempted further decentralisation of autonomy in selected public schools, marking a shift from the post-independence centralised education structure. This has led to the development of Cluster Schools of Excellence, practising some form of school-based management and accorded autonomy in the selection of niche areas, programme planning and programme implementation. Drawing primarily on the interview narratives from school administrators as key policy actors, this study examines how autonomy is manifested at the micro-level and how the school administrators exercise their agency when they are accorded autonomy. Using a decentralised centralism framework, the tensions and complexities in education policy implementation are highlighted in this study. Findings reveal that agency and autonomy are held by both macro and micro-level policy actors in varying degrees, and that school administrators have fundamental agency in school-level policy implementation. The study also explores the dynamics of the decentralisation process and raises the issue of re-centralisation of authority through decentralisation of education.*

Keywords: *Malaysia, decentralisation, autonomy, agency, educational policy*

Introduction

Over the past two decades, policymakers have intensified the push for decentralisation of education as a part of neo-liberal reform initiatives in many developing countries, for instance, in Chile (Parry, 1997), El Salvador (Cuéllar-Marchelli, 2003), Ghana (Chapman et al., 2002), Kenya (M'Nkanata, 2012), Malawi and Zimbabwe (Chikoko, 2009), China (Cheng, 1994), Thailand (Gamage & Sooksomchitra, 2004), Nepal (Khanal, 2010) and Indonesia (Bandur, 2012). The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals advocates improvement in education quality (Niño-Zarazúa, 2016; United Nations, 2015) and in this context, education decentralisation is often adopted as a governance strategy (Ball, 2012; Lefebvre & Thomas, 2017) to improve school management efficiency and cater to localised needs. According to Bjork (2006), decentralisation can reduce administrative bottlenecks in decision-making, increase the efficiency of government and its responsiveness to local needs, enhance the accountability of public institutions, improve service delivery, and allow greater political representation and participation of diverse groups in decision making. In recent years, governments in several developing countries, including Malaysia (World Bank, 2013; Tan, 2012) have given serious consideration to decentralisation of education. This paper aims to highlight the issue of decentralisation of authority for decision making within the education system in Malaysia. In particular, it is a case study of a 'Cluster School of Excellence' initiative in Malaysia as one possible model of decentralisation.

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Decentralisation of Education in Malaysia: Cluster Schools of Excellence

Studies conducted by the World Bank (2013) reported that the high level of centralisation in the Malaysian education system had, to a certain extent, stifled efficient production and distribution of education services over the years. In this regard, the Malaysian government has recently implemented various measures, aimed at shifting more autonomy towards the schools at the grassroots level, and slowly moving away from the centralised education structure.

In Malaysia, the '*Cluster School of Excellence*' (hereafter, CSE) is a form of decentralisation of education, which has been implemented since 2007 (Mohd Noor & Crossley, 2013). CSE was established by the Malaysian Ministry of Education (hereafter, MOE) to decentralise power to schools in order to develop their 'full potential within their cluster of excellence' under Chapter Nine of the Education Development Master Plan 2006-2010 (MOE, 2006). These schools are clustered based on their excellence in certain niche areas. Each CSE has been given two choices for its niche areas. One of those niche areas must be academic, while the other is sports or extra-curricular activities. Examples of the niche areas may include English language and robotics or Mathematics and debates. Generally, students enrolled in CSE will gain more exposure and experience, especially in the schools' niche areas. However, the school curriculum and examinations are still based on centralised structures, like that of other non-cluster schools.

Here, CSE in Malaysia differs from the common understanding of cluster schools, which are selected based on geographical location, such as *school clusters* in Singapore (Tan & Ng, 2007), the cluster system (Thailand), Ruapehu Cluster (New Zealand), Pockets of Educational Excellence (United States) and Lancaster Schools Excellence Cluster in the United Kingdom (Noor Rezan, 2008). Instead of forming clusters around neighbouring schools, the Malaysian schools form *clusters of excellence* in niche areas (Mohd Noor & Crossley, 2013). The selection process of such schools involves multiple stakeholders at the school, district, state and federal levels.

By 2015, the Ministry of Education Malaysia has recognised 506 schools as Cluster Schools of Excellence, making up five per cent of the total number of public primary and secondary schools in Malaysia (Azim, 2015). This meant that the MOE had exceeded its target of 500 cluster schools by 2015 (Azim, 2015). Since the programme was initiated in 2007, there had been nine phases of school selection. The ninth and final phase was implemented in 2015, hence the year 2015 was used as a benchmark in this study. After 2015, there were no additional CSE being announced.

The introduction of the CSE project in Malaysia was essentially a central decision, implemented at the micro-level. The initiative was aimed at granting selected schools and individuals more autonomy and responsibility (Nor, Hamzah & Razak, 2019), which was important for the implementation of central goals. Malaysian Cluster Schools of Excellence are accorded autonomy in certain areas such as, among others, programme planning and financial management (Mohd Noor & Crossley, 2013); which allow them to plan and implement micro-level initiatives while fulfilling macro-level education policy aspirations. This is in line with Shift Six of the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MOE 2013, p.259) to grant school authority greater autonomy over what happens in the classroom or the school.' To put things in perspective, the Malaysian CSE have flexibility in planning school-level programmes, however, these schools are still answerable to the central government and required to carry out programmes at the district and state levels.

The Study

The idea of having CSE as a form of decentralising education from the macro-level to the micro-level often results in varied dynamics in the implementation process, as exemplified in the decentralised centralism concept proposed by Karlsen (2000). This is perhaps because macro-policymakers are perceived to be unwilling to decentralise full autonomy; instead they tend to retain agency in certain areas directly or vicariously. This study attempts to explore how decentralised centralism fits in a Malaysian CSE framework and examines the dynamics and tensions involved in the decentralisation process. The study specifically considers whether a decentralisation process results in more

decentralisation, *centralisation* or a blend of *centralisation* and *decentralisation* practices on the ground.

At the micro-level of the decentralisation process, it is vital to explore the school administrators as key agents as they are the ones who can drive major initiatives to achieve national aspirations. However, the literature is more focused on teacher agency (Hoppers, 1998) and learner agency in classroom practices (Ricento, 2006), it is still unclear as to what extent school administrators can exercise their autonomy in influencing policy decisions in the implementation process of a Cluster School of Excellence. This raises a pertinent question of whether autonomy and agency are held primarily by micro-level planners in a Cluster School of Excellence or invariably by the macro-policymakers instead. Taken together, the dynamics of the decentralisation process; the notions of autonomy and agency of school administrators as well as the macro-level government bodies, are discussed in relation to this study.

Literature Review

The literature on decentralisation of education is generally categorised into three strands. The first comprises the literature on full decentralisation; the second on decentralisation as a form of 'masked' *recentralisation* (Mifsud, 2016); and third, a decentralised-centralism strategy as a compromised position. The scholarly debate has often centred on the centralisation-decentralisation dichotomy, whether there needs to be more decentralisation, a tilt towards centralisation, or a balance of both spectrums.

According to Karlsen (2000), as a government strategy, decentralisation has been evident in Western societies and in developing countries (Rondinelli, 1983). Decentralisation and restructuring reforms give schools more power in decision making and have proven to impart a positive impact in improving school performance and effectiveness (Caldwell, 2005; Dykstra & Kucita, 2008; Gamage, 2003). However, education transformation through decentralisation does not guarantee success and might not be sustainable (Bjork, 2006). Edwards and Mbatia (2013) argue that decentralisation reform is usually promoted without much consideration of its effectiveness, thus it is vital to understand how and why they work (or do not work) when putting theory into practice and why they are not successful in some circumstances.

According to Bjork (2006, p. 223), education decentralisation policies, although popular in Asia, have 'yielded an array of fascinating puzzles, lessons of experience, and unanswered questions.' One of the drawbacks of decentralisation has been its implications on widening disparity between urban-rural areas as shown in case studies in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia (Bjork, 2006), Korea (Jeong, Lee & Cho, 2017) and China (Cheng, 1994), depending on the context and scale of its operation. Clearly, there is no one-size-fits-all solution across the vastly dissimilar developing countries. Phillips and Ochs (2003) argue the necessity for sustainable education reform and commitment to persist. These generate persistent curiosity and questions as to why decentralisation of education has not been as effective as some scholars have actively argued since the 1990s (Caldwell, 2005). The crux of the problem lies in the constant contestation of autonomy and agency among policymakers and policy implementers at the micro-level, hence the need for further understanding of the dynamics involved in the decentralisation process (Karlsen 2000).

Centralisation versus Decentralisation of Education

The 'centralisation–decentralisation axis,' coined by Isaac Kandel (1954), has dominated debates on paradigms of education reforms. On one hand, there is a need for monitoring and synchronisation of policies and practices by macro-policymakers; on the other hand, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic, Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2015) widely acknowledge and advocate for decentralisation initiatives in developing nations. To a certain degree, decentralisation of education is considered

a governance strategy that the state may employ to uphold its legitimacy, and to *re-centralise* its control over the schools (Karlsen, 2000). The process of decentralisation sometimes creates new forms of independent agencies or local authorities who act as proxies for the central authority; in other words, a form of 'masked' *re-centralisation* (Mifsud, 2016). In this context, decentralisation is often understood as a means to manage conflict and to give 'compensatory legitimisation' (Weiler, 1990). The federal government has to compensate 'the erosion of legitimacy', and decentralisation rhetoric is one strategy to strengthen its legitimacy and thereby maintain indirect power and control (Weiler, 1990).

However, Zajda and Gamage (2009) highlight the tension of balancing *centralisation*, which focuses on control and uniformity against *decentralisation* practices, usually associated with freedom, differentiation and responsiveness. For quality control purposes, centralised practices (UNESCO, 2005, p. 10-11) such as the league tables in Britain, US assessment under the No Child Left Behind legislation and French centralised curriculum could be justified. Contrastingly, strong opposition by the central government and government agencies, reluctant to relinquish their authority, are clearly exemplified in Pakistan and Singapore (Bjork, 2006). Bjork (2006, p. 227) finds that "few Asian states have traditionally expected local educators or community members to actively participate in the management of public institutions, thus local actors may be unprepared to respond to the reforms through decentralisation". Amidst the clashes between centralisation and decentralisation, Lockheed (1997) rules out the existence of a fully centralised or decentralised education system since all education structures make decisions at many institutional levels. Levin (1997, p. 260) succinctly points out that decentralisation represents a wide range of practices, `some of which appear very little different than the supposedly more centralised approaches they have supplanted'. This strengthens the case that *decentralisation* as an education reform in one situation, can also be perceived as *centralisation* in another.

Decentralised Centralism

Karlsen (2000) proposes decentralised centralism as a politically adequate answer to present problems and government crises. The strategy compensates for the lack of legitimacy of the central authorities. However, there are various tensions and challenges in the implementation of the decentralised centralism strategy due to the contrasting, contradictory and ambiguous factors in the decentralisation process (Karlsen, 2000).

Karlsen's decentralised centralism illustrates the four dynamics in the decentralisation process. The first process is usually the dynamics of initiation, which refers to the practice where decentralisation reforms are initiated from the top by the authorities at the central level, but implementation and accountability are regarded as micro-level responsibilities. However, these reforms have often led to new central legislation and regulations, and can be a strategy for consolidating central locus of power (Tan & Ng, 2007). Dynamics of content, which involves the disparities in curriculum and implementation practices in the decentralisation process, is not being emphasised in this study. The third process in the decentralisation process is the dynamics of levels. Decentralisation of tasks and administrative responsibility to the micro level does not necessarily result in a shift of power from a higher to a lower level (Tan & Ng, 2007). The parallel nature of centralisation and decentralisation at work; and the management of the tensions that come with it, are vital concepts under the fourth decentralisation process: dynamics of simultaneity. The dynamics of simultaneity (Karlsen, 2000) is largely considered as an important element in decentralised centralism as it was a feasible approach to handle the persistent dilemmas within the macro-micro policy network, as shown in Karlsen (1999) and Levin & Young (1994).

Inevitably, there will be constant transitions and reforms of education governance in most countries. "Some of these shifts will be centralising, others decentralising, and yet others will be both centralising and decentralising at the same time" (Bray 1999, p.228). Due to the mixed outcomes of the decentralisation policies, a balanced approach of centralisation and decentralisation appears to

be the preferred model (Mundy & Verger, 2015). The debate on when, what and how to decentralise will remain a contested territory in the education reform literature.

Decentralisation and Agency of School Administrators

The underlying concept of agency is inextricable when discussing the process of education decentralisation. Agency at the local level refers to the capacity of individuals to perform actions (Meyer & Jepperson, 2002). School administrators' agency is increasingly crucial in school-level decision-making (Mintrop 2012; Rigby, Wouflin & Marz, 2016). When autonomy is decentralised at the micro-level, school administrators have pivotal agency in policy implementation (Salter, 2014). In this context, the school administrators, i.e., the School Head and the Senior Assistants, have the agency to exercise autonomy in terms of planning and implementing policies in a CSE. The concepts of decentralisation of education through the formation of CSE, *agency* and *autonomy* at the local level; are interconnected within a complex macro-micro policy planning structure (Goggin et al., 1990; Ricento, 2006).

Methodology

In this study, the case study approach is adopted. A case study of this nature strives for a thorough understanding by drawing upon the agency and autonomy of key actors and the dynamics involved in the decentralisation process. Single cases provide glimpses into complex interplays between policies, pedagogic practices and institutional constraints (Ramanathan & Morgan, 2007). This case study is aimed at fleshing out the nuances of key stakeholders within multiple institutional layers, such as the agencies in Ministry of Education and the Cluster School of Excellence, over a period of six months. The study presents findings from one particular CSE, elucidating a microcosm of the intricacies on how autonomy plays out and to what extent the school administrators exercise their agency. Only by studying micro-level policy implementation and its nexus with the macro-level aspirations, can we fully understand the true picture of the dynamics and tensions within the decentralisation process.

Research Site

The site chosen for this study is CS (a pseudonym), a national-type government primary school, situated in an urban, cosmopolitan area in Malaysia. CS has 60 teachers and about 1000 pupils. The school has a multi-racial make-up in terms of its teacher and student population. This national primary school was accorded its CSE status with English as its primary niche area and Robotics as a supporting niche area in Malaysia. CS is among the few Cluster Schools of Excellence with English as its primary niche area, thus this study focuses on its English niche area.

The participants selected in CS comprise the three school administrators which include the School Head (Chong, a pseudonym) and two Senior Assistants in Academic Affairs and Student affairs respectively (Lum and Ho, pseudonyms). The participants are chosen due to their considerable experience in the management of a Cluster School of Excellence. The school administrators are involved not only in the planning of school-level policies, but also form an integral part in driving the CSE policy implementation since 2010.

Sources of Data

Interviews with the School Head and the Senior Assistants form a major part of data collection. Interview transcriptions are largely used to provide a rich interpretation and *thick* descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of the reality on the ground. Official documents such as Request for Proposals, CSE Policy, the Treasury department guidelines (MOE, 2006) and the English Language Panel Report were used as references in this study. 'Request for Proposal' (RFP) is an official document required

for CSE to get approvals for niche area's programmes and funding. The analyses provided a better understanding of how policies were manifested at the ministerial and school-levels as part of the multi-layered institutional onion (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996).

Trustworthiness of the Research and Ethical Considerations

Trustworthiness of the research is an essential element to be considered in qualitative research studies. To ensure confidentiality of informants and to enhance trustworthiness of the findings, pseudonyms were used in this study. The name and exact location of the school would not be revealed in any part of my research to ensure privacy and confidentiality of the school authorities. To ensure credibility of the research, this study adopts a case study methodology, which is a well-established research methodology. Triangulation of data collection methods, in this case, interviews with school administrators and official documents, is employed to increase trustworthiness of the research findings.

Findings

To provide a comprehensive account of the complexities in a decentralisation process, it is crucial to explore the five main implementational aspects stipulated in the Malaysian CSE Policy (MOE, 2006), i.e.: the selection of niche areas, preparation of the Request for Proposal, financial management, advancing the niche areas, and exercising autonomy. The findings are arranged based on these five implementational aspects as each of these aspects is instrumental in ensuring the successful implementation of a CSE. Narratives of the five aspects and the dynamics involved in the decentralisation process are highlighted, especially in terms of the 'why', 'when', 'how' and 'who' exercise their agency as well as the implementational complexities at the ministerial and school levels.

Selection of Niche Areas

The first implementational aspect of the CSE Policy is the selection of niche areas. The selection of niche areas is a key aspect of autonomy which defines a CSE. The Ministry of Education Malaysia allows the school authorities in a CSE to propose its own niche areas, usually based on the expertise and potential of the school. The niche areas will then be finalised in writing by the Residential Schools and Excellent Schools Division (hereafter RSESD), a division under the Ministry of Education, tasked to facilitate the implementation process of the CSE at the ministerial level.

The selection of niche areas is an interesting case in point as school administrators typically have the agency in deciding their niche areas. As the School Head for more than ten years in CS, Chong stresses that it is pivotal to have *"a group of teachers who share a common vision and mission to ensure the success and sustainability of school-level programmes*". Thus, Lum, the Senior Assistant in charge of Student Affairs, states that there is a *"mutual consensus among the school administrators and staff that English language would be their ideal niche area based on their track record in winning many national and international accolades*" in recent times. Lum adds that the school authorities choose English language as their niche area as there are *"many competitions in the world in English*" that they can focus on. According to Lum, teachers and students in CS also *"have more opportunities to participate in various English-based programmes at regional, national and international levels*". Lum, for instance, was a leading figure in coaching students for choral speaking competitions. Since the school authorities have the resources and expertise in training choral speaking, storytelling, Scrabble and other English language programmes, CS would have a comparative advantage over other local primary schools by strategically choosing English language as their niche area. The study offers insights on how the school administrators utilise their agency in choosing a suitable niche area for CS. In a decentralised framework, the school administrators in

CS have the autonomy to choose the niche areas they can excel in, so that they can perform their best and be a role model for other CSE.

Request for Proposal

The Request for Proposal (RFP) is usually the second stage of the implementation process. Before implementing any programme under the niche areas, the school authorities need to submit a formal Request for Proposal to RSESD. Lum has been a key master planner of the Request for Proposals (RFP) for the past four years ever since CS was accorded its Cluster School of Excellence status. From one point of view, MOE places the trust on CS to perform what they have envisioned to achieve in the RFP. The Senior Assistant, Lum, adds that *"usually the ministry would not question much*" on "*where we [as a school] are, what we can do, what we can't do and what we have to do"* when they present the RFPs. Ho, who has been the Senior Assistant 1 in charge of academic affairs in CS for the past five years, explains that *"They usually approve the programmes as long as it is not political."* However, the submission of the proposals is not a mere formality. Further responses by Lum demonstrate that procedures of preparing and submitting the RFP are not as clear-cut due to interference at the macro-level. Apart from being non-political, other issues for instance the budget, the hiring of coaches and the suppliers chosen can also be queried by RSESD in Putrajaya. Lum is quoted as saying:

> *Only when the programmes and budget are approved by the Ministry can the school proceed with the activities. Usually, the school is asked to alter its budget and answer some queries on the viability of the projects planned…All the proposals every year are different and with different requirements.*

The school administrators are aware that without the Ministry's approval of the programmes and the budget, it is not possible to proceed with the implementation of the programmes. Lum further points out that, RSESD sometimes approve RFP "with conditions". Based on the findings, RSESD stipulates that the coach hired "*should have a certificate and be registered with the government".* The school administrators in CS need to exercise agency in the context of bureaucratic constraints, by selecting from their list of certified coaches for instance, in choral speaking and drama. The school administrators does work within the implementational spaces to achieve their objectives. The school administrators shared that these macro-micro implementational tensions (between the government agencies and the school authorities) eventually prolonged the procurement and subsequently the approval process.

The findings further revealed that though The Residential Schools and Excellent Schools Division (RSESD) under MOE provided guidelines and a framework for RFPs (MOE, 2006), RSESD's conditions frequently delayed and hampered the progress of the programmes planned. The school administrators in CS regarded the RFP procedures as a form of red tape, which was an extra burden to them. When faced with these issues, Lum posits that the school administrators adopt a pragmatic approach of not to "*resubmit new RFP*", but to "*alter the proposal to fulfill the requirements for approval by the higher authorities*". This study fleshes out "what" needs to be done in the preparation of RFP as well as "when", "how" and "why" RFP planning and approval are problematic. The nuances in the RFP planning and approval procedures highlight the prevalent tension that arises between the central authorities and local school administrators. The frequent contestation between centralisation and decentralisation has manifested itself in this context. As a government entity, RSESD plays the role of micro-managing CS to ensure accountability of the school administrators. The government is perceived to *re-centralise* the autonomy to a central division to oversee the programme planning and budget for CS. Here, the decentralised centralism strategy was demonstrated. The central

agency (RSESD) retains the autonomy to approve RFPs even though micro-level policy actors at CS can exercise their agency in planning the RFP within a decentralised structure.

Financial Management

The school administrators in CS are accorded autonomy in managing the allocated funds for the niche area. However, the Treasury Circulars and Guidelines (MOE, 2006) needs to be adhered to by CS when planning budget allocations in their respective niche area(s). For the previous section on RFP, the central agency was concerned with the coaches hired by CS, however in this section on financial management, the ministerial entity pays particular attention on the suppliers for the programmes.

In terms of usage of funds, Lum was dissatisfied that the MOE was more concerned with "*who [which suppliers] they get it from*" with regards to food, books and costumes for choral speaking and English-in-Camp. Lum explained that the preferences and recommendations from the ministry are not always ideal as some suppliers were not *"registered with the government*". Lum argued that there was a mismatch when they compared prices with the suggested suppliers from the government who tended to offer higher prices than the initial proposed supplier, who happened to be unregistered. To resolve the macro-micro implementational tension, the school administrators resorted to "*selecting suppliers from a limited pool of government-registered suppliers".* This again disrupted their progress as the school authorities were required to defer the implementation of the programme and resubmit their Request for Proposal for approval. This analysis shows that the central agency has the final discretion in niche area funding approvals and that so-called macro-micro discrepancies between CS and the ministerial entity tend to convolute financial management in CS. Thus in financial management, the Ministry of Education, via the Treasury Department, employs a decentralised centralism strategy as a governance mechanism for check and balance. Inevitably, however, occasional bottlenecks involving "mismatches" between federal authorities and school administrators are part of the unintended consequences (Hood, 2006) in education policy implementation.

Advancing the Niche Area

"Advancing the niche area" is generally viewed as expanding and extending the programmes by including a greater number of students; and introducing innovative practices to develop the niche areas. One of the flagship programmes stipulated under the CS niche area is "English-in-Camp". Using a case study approach, "when", "how" and "why" "English-in-Camp" programme is relevant to advancing the niche area are explored. The English-in-Camp programme is targeted for Level Two primary students, who are in Year Four, Year Five and Year Six. The English-in-Camp document states, "This camp is open to all Level Two primary students". At the micro-level, Lum explained that apart from the Level Two students, the school administrators tried to "*include most Year Two and Year Three students [who are still at Level 1]*." This is where CS authorities have the flexibility to involve more students provided "*there is no additional budget implication*." In this case, the school teachers and staff have the agency to tailor some of the activities to cater to the needs of Year Two and Year Three learners. This, in the view of the school authorities, was practical and impactful in advancing the niche area since a much bigger number of students can participate in a wide range of activities during English-in-Camp. The scenario reveals the agency of school-level decision makers in reinterpreting a specific section of the English-in-camp document, with the purpose of advancing the niche area. This is one of the available implementational spaces explored by micro-level actors.

Exercising Autonomy

School administrators are often regarded as anchors of school-level initiatives. This section demonstrates how school administrators exercise their agency in engaging with the parents and

the Parent-Teacher Association members to help support school-level programmes. Chong, the School Head and the other school administrators, have been playing a "*proactive role in courting the parents*" to contribute to the school. According to Chong, they identify the "*parents who attend Parents-Teachers Association meetings"* and *"those who are often present in school for various school functions and events*". The following excerpt from the interview with Chong exemplify how and why parents are courted to assist in the school's programmes.

> *I hope to pull in parents to help. Any parent will do. Because our hands are tied. The teachers need to do their core business. We use personal approach to get the parents to help. All of us ask the same questions. They (the parents) help on a voluntary basis, especially those with talents and experience. Some parents willingly co-train students for public speaking and choral speaking competitions. There is even a duty roster for parents to be the traffic guards during peak hours in school! A few volunteer to help with early morning reading with the students, while some others assist the remedial students improve their literacy skills.*

Evidence from the interviews show that the school administrators, including Lum and Ho, "*use personal approach to get the parents to help*". Interestingly, the school administrators would "*teach the other teachers to ask the same questions*" to the parents identified, especially those with specific "*talents and experience*". The school authorities actively exercise their agency in courting the parents to assist in the school programmes. Chong and Lum feel that parental support "*helps build a stronger camaraderie between the staff and the community and create a positive learning environment*" in CS. This is a policy implementational space explored by the school administrators as there is no provision in the CSE Policy framework constraining them from recruiting parents to help in school programmes. The school administrators at the micro-level can exercise their autonomy innovatively to suit the needs of the school and community.

The analyses of the five implementational aspects revealed that the school administrators have agency to work *within* their implementational spaces in the "Selection of Niche Areas", "Advancing the Niche Areas" and "Exercising Autonomy" while the government still retains some control in "Request for Proposal" and "Financial Management" via RSESD and the Treasury Department.

Discussion

The findings illustrate the complex interplays between MOE and a Cluster School of Excellence. "The relationships within and between public agencies are highly complex and difficult to manage" (John 2012, p.21). Agency and autonomy exist at both macro (RSESD and Treasury Department) and micro-level (School administrators in CS). When appropriating the macro at a micro-level, agency is supposedly transferred to school administrators. However, as the data has shown, many of their plans require approvals by the macro-policymakers before implementation (MOE, 2006). The scenarios are linked to the complexities of translating policy into practice (Mohd Noor and Crossley, 2013) in multi-layered bureaucracies. Notwithstanding such complexities in educational policy implementation, the agency of school administrators should not be viewed as largely insignificant as the findings illuminate that school administrators can exercise their agency within their implementational spaces in three of the five main implementational aspects of a Malaysian Cluster School framework. The agency and autonomy of policy actors at the macro-micro levels are also linked with the dynamics of decentralisation process (Karlsen, 2000) in a decentralised-centralism framework as discussed below.

Dynamics of the Decentralisation Process

While the analysis indicates that decentralisation of education system is strongly advocated in the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MOE, 2013), on the flipside, the terms and conditions in the CSE policy (Aziah, 2010) validates the MOE's perceived unwillingness to accord greater autonomy directly into the hands of the school administrators. Aziah (2010) cautions that whilst the CSE are encouraged

to be more creative in introducing innovations to accelerate their organisational excellence and establish themselves as active learning organisations, these organisations are still guided by a set of standards. Inevitably, the aspirations of the macro-policy actors tend to offset the intentions of the micro-level agents.

Using the decentralised centralism strategy (Karlsen, 2000), the study has teased out the dynamics of the intricate decentralisation process within the Cluster School of Excellence structure. On one hand, the School Head and the Senior Assistants can exercise their autonomy to decide on the niche areas in CS. On the other hand, when it comes to the Request for Proposal and funding approvals, the school administrators are constantly in a quandary. They respond by framing RFPs according to specifications and guidelines which fit the criteria and ethos in CS. The RSESD and the Treasury Department at MOE, meanwhile play the role of approving or disapproving RFPs; or at times delaying the approval subject to fulfilment of prior conditions. One form of dynamics of the decentralisation process which is useful in explaining such phenomenon is the dynamics of levels. Each institutional level would exercise the agency they have, which results in frictions and delays in the implementation process. Consequently, there are bound to be tensions and conflicts related to budgetary decisions as exemplified in the findings.

Periodic monitoring is conducted by RSESD to ensure proper execution of niche area programmes and full compliance of the CSE policy guidelines. Herein lies the dilemma of *responsiveness versus accountability* among school administrators. MOE recognises the need to function as a check and balance tool to CS in terms of school-based management, i.e. financial planning, programme planning and procedural requirements. The school administrators normally attempt to fully oblige with the MOE's conditions, with the interest of school-level stakeholders in mind, as part of their administrative accountability. However, the macro-level intervention often causes bottlenecks and eventually interrupt the process. Dynamics of simultaneity (Karlsen, 2000) is elucidated in the analysis of the decentralisation process. There is a simultaneous practice of centralisation, as the central level sets clear goals and standards for outcomes; and decentralisation, where the means and the responsibility for implementation are local duties (Tan & Ng, 2007). Such decentralisation dynamics illuminate the frequent contestations of agency and autonomy among the policy actors within the macro-micro framework.

One may argue that the school administrators are bound by the macro-policy framework; nevertheless they can work within the implementational spaces available as part of micro-level policy planning (Giddens, 1979; Sabatier, 1986). The school administrators can, to a certain extent, exercise their autonomy by reinterpreting policy documents. Dynamics of simultaneous practice of decentralisation with flexibility and autonomy for the schools, and centralisation with central goals and standards for the outcomes (Tan & Ng, 2007); are often inevitable in a complex web of decentralised centralism spectrum. For instance, the English Camp programme, as stipulated in the policy document, was targeted for Level Two students. However, the School administrators, utilising their agency, involved Year Two and Year Three students as well. Lipsky (1980) argues that top-down policies tend to overlook, or underestimate, the tactics used by street-level bureaucrats to work within the policy implementation spaces according to their own self-interests. As street-level bureaucrats, the study has shown that school administrators, who are key policy actors, do exercise some agency (Doolan & Blackmore, 2017) in influencing policy practices and processes at the school level. For instance, they exercised their autonomy in micro-level policy implementation by engaging with the Parent-Teacher Association members and parents to help in advancing the niche area.

Decentralisation, Re-centralisation or Decentralised Centralism?

Under the dynamics of initiation in the decentralisation process, decentralisation reforms are usually initiated from the top by the authorities at the central level (Karlsen, 2000) as can be seen in the

CSE framework. The Malaysian Ministry of Education initiated the decentralised initiative; whilst implementation and accountability are considered micro-level responsibilities (Karlsen, 2000). Although CSE is part of the national education decentralisation initiative, the *unplanned* outcome of such policy planning (see Baldauf, 1994; Hood, 2006) is that autonomy and agency might be inadvertently *re-centralised* at the hands of the school administrators, as shown in the findings.

Depending on the context, what is considered 'decentralisation' at one level, can easily be seen as 'centralisation' at another (Karlsen, 2000). *Re-centralisation* at CS occurs when school administrators have substantial autonomy and agency to plan and conduct school programmes. School administrators, in this case, refer to the School Head and the Senior Assistants. The findings show that the school administrators decide on the niche area, have some form of agency in advancing their niche areas and exercise their autonomy in implementing school-based policies. Such observations are also in line with Karlsen's dynamics of levels and dynamics of simultaneity. In the decentralisation process, both centralisation and decentralisation at various levels of governance occur in varying degrees, which results in autonomy and agency being re-centralised at the local level, as highlighted in the findings.

The act of the *decentralisation* process via the establishment of CSE has caused the emergence of a tacit power base being *re-centralised* at the macro-level. RSESD and the Treasury Department have, intentionally or unintentionally, become entities with the potential of *micro-managing* (Smith, 2016) CSE; as these government agencies have the power to approve or reject Request for Proposals on the pretext of ensuring accountability of the school administrators. These agencies are also responsible for monitoring schools through on-site audits and scrutinising niche area reports. Paradoxically, decentralisation is countered by systematic regulatory re-centralisation (Edwards & Mbatia, 2013; Lee, 2006; Tan & Ng, 2007). One should ponder whether decentralising in this context, "masquerades" as a "masked recentralisation" (Mifsud, 2016). This leads us to question whether Malaysian Cluster Schools of Excellence are a form of *decentralisation*, *re-centralisation* or more accurately, a "decentralised-centralism" strategy (Karlsen, 2000). The form of decentralised-centralism strategy is more appropriate in this case, as the situation mirrors both a systematic regulatory recentralisation (Tan & Ng, 2007) as well as perceived 'masked re-centralisation' (Mifsud, 2016) as part of the 'decentralising' process.

The Way Forward

To heed the clarion call for greater decentralisation of education, more autonomy should be given by macro-level agencies; in turn, there needs to be a proper check-and-balance (monitoring) mechanism that functions accordingly. Neither should be overlooked in the pursuit of greater decentralisation. Moving forward, the decentralised-centralism strategy is likely to be a compromised solution, or a so-called 'win-win' situation that satisfies the regulatory bodies at the macro-level besides allowing agentive spaces to be explored in the implementation of CSE.

Conclusion

The main argument driving this research is that school administrators can exercise their agency in education policy implementation at the micro-level albeit with some intervention from the federal government departments. The paper has problematised decentralisation of education at both the macro and micro-levels. The findings reveal that despite further autonomy accorded to the local school authorities, macro-level agencies do not completely relinquish control and continue to monitor the Cluster School of Excellence for accountability purposes. Fundamentally, the paper highlights the complexities and the implementational tensions involved in (i) the dynamics of the decentralisation process, where both the macro, and more importantly micro-level key actors exercise their agency and autonomy in varying degrees in different contexts of policy implementation; and ii) *re-centralisation*

of authority through *decentralisation*, in other words, the acts of decentralisation result in hybrid forms of centralisation, as exemplified in the findings. Taken together, the decentralised centralism implementational dynamics in the Malaysian Cluster School of Excellence framework necessitates a nuanced reading of the nexus between the macro and micro education policy spheres.

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The Role of NGOs in Supporting Education in Africa[1]

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Abstract: *Non-Government Organisations (NG0s) which support education in Africa may use different titles such as Council or Trust, are almost always Non-profit organizations. They differ in size, ranging from small local organisations through to large internal multinationals. When founded they will often reflect the ideas, objectives and views of their founders. Funds for new NGOs especially smaller organisations were, and still are, likely to come from supporters, small charities and foundations. Their activities are likely to focus either on specific areas for example village schools or supporting specific causes such as school children with disabilities. Funding for many NGOs has changed significantly from their early years. Many now receive large proportions of their funding from governments. However many NGOs perceive their work to be guided by the principals of neutrality and impartiality. Governments however may view the NGO education programmes they fund as being part of a "counter insurgency strategy" or as one of their "combat teams". Governments and international funders such as the European Union often now prefer to support consortia where a number of NGOs and multilateral organisations join together to work on a single project. There are significant benefits but also some significant problems.*

Keywords: *International Development; Fragile States; External Influence; Communities; Consortium*

NGOs: Purpose and Vision

Many different non-governmental organizations (NGOs) support education in Africa; some NGOs such as Save the Children and OXFAM are large multinationals which cover the continent, employ hundreds of people and have annual budgets of tens of millions of British Pound Sterling (£) (Save the Children UK, 2013; OXFAM, 2013). Others consist of a small number of volunteers helping to raising a few hundred pounds for a school in a particular village. NGOs also work under different titles such as association, charity, council, foundation, society or trust; generally however they share the common feature of being non-profit organizations. For most of the larger organizations education is only one part of their work along with other areas such as health, water and sanitation and child protection. Smaller NGOs are more likely to specialize in one area such as education, but even then they can be set up for different purposes and to meet different needs within education. Some, for example, may focus on pre-school or nursery education, some may provide small grants for university students and others may support the development of local languages).

The aims and focus of the work of NGOs are generally a reflection of the backgrounds and interests of those who have set up the organisation. Founders of an NGO are likely to set not only its aims and objectives but also its character and vision. However, as NGOs develop and grow, the question arises as to what extent will they be able to continue to follow their founders' aims and vision and to what extent will they have to adapt to changing needs, political situations and donor priorities. An example can be seen from the work of the Africa Educational Trust (AET), a medium sized NGO which has sixty years of experience working across Africa. Over that time, it has been

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able to manage and deliver a wide range of education programmes. Some were developed and delivered by the Trust, others were funded by governments either directly or as part of a consortium programme and developed by a government.

AET was set up by a group of people with different backgrounds, professions and political allegiances but with a shared interest and commitment to a particular cause – in this case helping people in Africa to prepare for and manage their countries' independence from colonialism. AET was established in 1958, almost two years before, but very much in tune with Harold Macmillan's famous 'Wind of Change' speech in which he spoke about the need to accept the awakening of national consciousness 'in peoples who had for centuries lived in dependence upon some other power' (Macmillan, 1960, p. 1).

Among those who helped to start AET were a publisher, a journalist, a number of academics and a priest. The priest, the Rev. Michael Scott was the prime mover in establishing the trust; some would say the instigator. Nelson Mandela described him as 'A great fighter for African rights'. Desmond Tutu wrote that 'He helped many of us black South Africans not to become antiwhite, for here was a white man who cared about us' (Yates & Chester, 2006: Foreword). The US State Department called him 'A troublemaker' (Yates & Chester, 2006) and MI5 the British Intelligence Agency reported that he had 'close communist party links' but also reported that the communists 'considered him to be "most peculiar" and under the influence of Quakers' (National Archives, 2014). Scott had already spent many years working in South Africa, initially in a leper colony and later in the black townships of Sophia and Tobruk. While in South Africa he became a prominent activist against the government's racial policies both in South Africa and in South-West Africa/Namibia. In 1949 he presented a petition on behalf of the people of South-West Africa to the UN against rule by South Africa. He continued to represent them at the United Nations for over thirty years. In 1952 when the South African government declared him a prohibited immigrant and banned him from entering the country, Scott returned to England and set up The Africa Bureau, an organization devoted to helping people in Africa gain independence for their country. The AET was formed six years later as an offshoot of the bureau. It was established specifically to help achieve the aims of the bureau by supporting education, mainly through scholarships in the UK. Michael Scott's view was that 'Education was the key to the development of a people' (Maxey, 1991; AET, 1998).

The backgrounds of AET's other founders were very different from Scott's. The first chair of the board of trustees, for example, had been educated at Eton and Oxford and had served as an officer in the British Army during the First World War. When AET was founded he was the director of the London School of Economics and vice chancellor of the University of London. As vice chancellor he had been responsible for establishing colleges and universities across Africa in countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. Another trustee had also been educated at Eton and Oxford and had been an intelligence analyst at the Bletchley Park code-breaking centre during the Second World War. Two of the founders had been born in Africa: one was the first Rhodes professor of race relations at the University of Oxford, the second the diplomatic editor of the Observer Newspaper.

The aims, approach and ethos of the organization that emerged were very much moulded and set by the founders and could be described as respectable, professional, left of centre politically and committed to working with people in Africa, especially those seeking independence and fairer government. It is not surprising therefore that one of first beneficiaries of the new NGO was Kenneth Kaunda who was supported to study economics while imprisoned in 1959 (Kaunda, 1963). Shortly afterwards in 1960 the first secretary of the AET, Joan Wicken left on a short leave of absence to help Julius Nyerere establish a college for adults in Tanzania. She remained as his personnel assistant for over thirty years. Joan was replaced by Pat Llewelyn-Davis a Labour Party activist who became a baroness in 1967 while still being the director of AET and later the first woman government chief whip in British history (Maxey, 1991; AET, 1998).

AET Liberation Movements and Scholarships

The IUEF scandal had two major implications for NGOs. It reinforced and emphasized the need for confidentiality and security of information, especially on the location, courses and travel arrangements of students. However, it also brought about the closure of IUEF with the result that the Nordic governments rechanneled their funding though other like-minded organizations such as AET and WUS. The AET director during this period was Tim Matthews a Zimbabwean with close links to the Zanu party. The AET audited annual accounts from 1978 to 1981 reported that the funding AET received from the Nordic governments doubled over the four-year period. In its early years less than a quarter of the trust's scholarships (23 per cent) went to students from Southern Africa; by the late 1970s and 1980s this had risen to almost three quarters (73 per cent) (Unterhalter & Maxey, 1996). This study also found that between 1958 and 1993 AET provided scholarships for over 1,600 students from Southern Africa, of these 49 per cent were from South Africa, 30 per cent from Zimbabwe, 19 per cent from Namibia and 2 per cent from other Southern Africa countries.

It is worth noting that the change in direction and emphasis was not a policy decision made by the NGO but one brought about by changes in donor funding policies, specifically the decision by the Nordic governments to fund Southern Africa liberation movements and their later reaction to the IUEF scandal. It was during the 1970s and 1980s that AET made its greatest contribution towards support for education in Southern Africa. For most of that time it was one of the very few organizations providing scholarships for members of the liberation movements. The tracer study found that two-thirds of the beneficiaries had strong connections with the ANC or other movements including the Pan African Congress and Black Consciousness Movement. Three quarters of the beneficiaries had returned or were planning to return to Southern Africa. The study noted that the 'AET South African Programme clearly succeeded in helping to produce a highly educated and competent group of people, the majority of whom are making a very significant contribution to the political, economic and cultural development of South Africa in its current transition from apartheid' (Unterhalter & Maxey, 1996, p. 9).

Among those traced were government ministers, members of parliament, senior government administrators, lawyers, medical doctors, dentists, engineers, university professors and teachers. There were similar results from a tracer study of AET's former scholarship holders from Namibia where 90 per cent of those traced had returned to Namibia and were in employment (Preston & Kandando, 1992). AET Southern African scholarship holders have gone on to become cabinet ministers and university vice chancellors in South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe. They also include the current chair of the Africa Union and the union's commissioner for social affairs.

Adapting to Change in Southern Africa

From 1990 onwards Nordic donors' policies towards Southern Africa began to change. Zimbabwe had gained its independence in 1980. What had been a major scholarship programme in the 1960s and 1970s ended in the mid-1980s as donors channelled their funds through the new Zimbabwean government rather than international NGOs. The war in Namibia ended in 1988 and again donor policies changed to providing direct funding to the new government. When Nelson Mandela was released from prison in February 1990 it was clear that donor policies towards South Africa itself were also going to change.

The trust had been successful in managing scholarships for Southern African students to study in the UK for over thirty years and like other organizations such as WUS and the Canon Collins Educational Trust for Southern Africa it was now faced with the question of whether or not there was still a role for NGOs such as AET when independent governments were in place across Africa and donors could fund them directly. The trust's first response was to continue with scholarships in the UK but move the focus from Southern Africa to the Horn Region where there was still ongoing

conflict. This approach worked for a time. AET had received limited funding for students from the Horn from 1983 and the Nordic donors were prepared to continue and increase it. However, with the ending of the Ethiopian Civil War in 1991 and new governments in both Ethiopia and Eritrea, donors' policies once again shifted towards direct government funding.

Not all of the AET's trustees had agreed with the change in geographic focus to the Horn Region and a number resigned. New trustees not linked to Southern Africa were appointed. In a major development for the trust three of these new appointments were women. Shortly afterwards there was also a change in the style of directorship. From 1958 to 1992, AET's directors had generally come from political backgrounds. Since 1993 the directors appointed have had backgrounds in education and development.

AET scholarship programmes had humanitarian as well as developmental aims (Brophy, Bird & Omona, 1997). With the change in donors' policies one approach it adopted was to seek funding from the UK Home Office and local authorities for education and training programmes to help refugees settle in the UK. A second approach was to continue with scholarship programmes but for study in African universities. A problem with this second approach was that by the 1990s donors were not only stopping funding for overseas scholarships, but they were cutting back generally on support for higher education.

Education and Rates of Return

Since the mid-1970s there had been a growing interest among the international community in the rates of return from investments in education. Surveys for the World Bank had reported that there was a much greater rate of return from investment in primary education than from secondary or tertiary. Figures suggested that in Africa investment in higher education gave a social rate of return of 12 per cent or less, secondary a return of 17–18 per cent while in primary education it gave a return of 25–29 per cent (Psacharopoules, 1981, 1994; Psacharopoules & Patrinos, 2002). Although the figures were highly controversial and were criticized among other things for flawed methodology (Knight, Sabot & Hovey, 1992) and economic assumptions (Bloom, Canning & Chan, 2005), the concept was accepted by the World Bank and by most UN agencies and governments. It was fundamental to the development of both the Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development goals (MDGs) and the subsequent focus on primary education. It also led to major falls in funding for higher education. The World Bank's own funding for higher education as percentage of its education sector funding fell from 17 per cent in 1985 to 1989 to 7 per cent in 1995 to 1999 (Bloom, Canning & Chan, 2005).

Organizations which had provided scholarships in Europe were faced with a double dilemma. They and their staff may have had many years of experience working in higher education but had very limited or perhaps no experience of working at the primary level and their experience and professional knowledge were of the UK and European education sectors; they had limited or again no experience of working in Africa. Where possible organizations fell back on their reserves while they attempted to reorient and restructure themselves. In some cases this meant selling offices and moving into smaller rented accommodation. Other organizations were unsure of what strategy to adapt, work in the UK with refugees and asylum seekers or work overseas at the primary level. Some like AET and WUS adapted a duel approach, continuing working with refugees in the UK while building a capacity to work overseas. This duel approach although successful created tension within organizations and often led to employment tribunals as longer serving UK scholarship staff saw themselves as being squeezed out.

Although income fell year on year the majority of AET's funding in this period was for work in the UK. It included funding from local authorities and foundations for research, advisory work and study grants for refugees and asylum seekers. This was important for the trust as the first projects in Africa were slow in coming with some potential donors rejecting proposals because of AET's lack of experience of working either in Africa or in primary education. The first project in Africa came in

1996 after the Somaliland minister of education met with one of the new trustees, Professor Ioan Lewis. It led to a joint project with the University of Manchester for a capacity-building programme for education staff in Somaliland and was funded by the UK Overseas Development Administration (now DFID). It was soon followed by grants from the European Union and Comic Relief for work with primary schools in Southern Sudan and in 1997 a grant from the Norwegian government for scholarships and training programmes for Southern Sudanese students in Africa. Norwegian government support for this programme continued for twelve years and through it a large cohort of Southern Sudanese gained qualifications in areas key for reconstruction and development. They included almost 200 students who studied by distance learning for qualifications in public administration and management while continuing to live and work in South Sudan (FHIG, 2004).

Meeting Needs but Whose Needs?

The trust's experience of working with liberation movements meant that it was better able and more comfortable than most organizations working in conflict areas. One question faced by the trustees and staff, now the trust was working in Africa, was whose needs should it try to meet in conflict-affected areas – needs as expressed by children and parents or those expressed by local authorities and governments or needs as identified by donors and multilateral agencies. A study of the role of NGOs in four African states has reported that 'governments generally believe that it is their legitimate right and responsibility to control everything that happens in their country. Although government personnel often talk about partnerships with NGOs, they believe that the relationship should be government regulating NGOs' (AED, 2002, p. 6).

While governments and international organizations might argue that they were all aiming to meet the same needs, they often had different views on what these were. In the 1990s there was an ongoing debate in the international community around the concept of what were called fragile states or conflict affected countries. While the primary aim of aid for these states was developmental there was a growing awareness in the West that long-term conflict in countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan and Somalia could affect their own security and had the potential to promote terrorism. Providing aid, including support for education, was viewed as one way of protecting a country's own interests. The former British prime minister Gordon Brown has referred to education projects as part of the 'hearts and mind' activities within a counter insurgency strategy while Colin Powell the former US secretary of defence referred to NGO staff as being 'an important part of our combat team' in conflict areas (Colenso, 2012, p. 64). For NGOs working in the field it was difficult to reconcile these government and donor's views with the historical concept of humanitarian aid being based on principles of neutrality and impartiality.

Local authorities and governments in fragile states also often had different views from donors and UN agencies on what were the needs of children and young people in their communities. Even the word 'needs' raised issues for them. Local authorities and governments were familiar with the idea of developing programmes to meet children's educational needs. They were unfamiliar with the concept of developing them to meet children's rights. Yet often donors, UN agencies and NGOs focused on programmes which used a 'Rights Based' approach (UNICEF, 2004; Council of the European Union, 2014). A multidisciplinary, cross-sectorial child rights-based approach was seen by many international organizations as being essential for coordination with governments. Unfortunately it could lead to government staff being unwilling to attend coordination and planning meetings and rather than being actively involved in these, ministries were sometimes simply made 'aware of the partners' meeting agenda items and of the main outcomes of meetings' (Aguilar, 2012, p. 99).

A second difficulty for the local governments and authorities was that fragile states almost by definition had weak institutional capacities. Developing local capacity and infrastructure to manage and deliver education programmes was a priority for local administrations, but they felt these were often not a priority for donors and NGOs, which they saw as concentrating on beneficiary numbers rather than developing sustainable systems (McNerney, 2005). However, while local government

capacity remained weak, donors, even if they wished to develop this, preferred to work through UN agencies and NGOs which they felt could make better progress than governments in improving education (Benn, 2007 in Colenso, 2012, p. 64). There was also a view that reconstruction of education systems in conflict situations provided an opportunity for major changes that the local governments and authorities may not necessarily agree with

> For education and reform and transformation, the post-conflict reconstruction environment is the best of times and the worst of times, both an opportunity and a constraint. It is the best of times because the post-conflict reconstruction environment offers significant opportunities for policy reform and system change. (Buckland, 2005, p. 25).

These views were not limited to education and were held in other areas such as health, sanitation and transport and could lead to what local people perceived as parallel governments running their country with NGOs being seen as being tools of the donor governments (AED, 2002). In places such as Somalia and South Sudan this perception was reinforced by donors and NGOs use of a zonal approach, through which different NGOs were funded to deliver education or health programmes in specific geographic areas or zones, usually from within their own NGO-enclosed compounds – an approach which for local people was reminiscent of the former colonial systems of administration.

AET's experience, however, was that in contrast to central authorities and local governments, parents and communities in fragile states often agreed with donors bypassing central administrations. Inequalities in the provision of education had often been an underlying cause of conflict and were perceived by parents as being due to corruption at the central level. However, parents and local communities were less likely to agree with donors and NGOs over the type of education their children should receive. Like those in central administrations parents and local communities had little or no understanding of the concept of children's rights. They wanted their children, especially their sons, to be educated so that they could earn money. Education was a means of a family escaping from poverty (Bekalo, Brophy & Welford, 2000).

For donors and NGOs there was also an inherent tension in the delivery of education projects between the need to disburse funds efficiently and effectively and the need to reach the poor and disadvantaged. At one extreme there were large-scale 'capital intensive' projects, building schools, supplying materials and equipment and printing textbooks. From a donor's viewpoint these met an obvious need and evidence can be produced that they were successful, buildings were built and text books and materials produced and delivered. Expenditure could be justified and results shown. It was also relatively easy to spend a large proportion of the aid budget quite effectively. The problem was that such projects had difficulty reaching the poor particularly in rural areas (Karpinska, 2012). The local governments were more likely to want NGOs to work with marginal populations and communities on the periphery and in areas which were more difficult and expensive to reach (AED, 2002). Smaller non-formal education programmes they felt could reach the poor and disadvantaged. They also had the advantage that they paid teachers and provided incentives across a much wider social and geographic range and so funds could be seen to be spread more equitably across society. However, it was more difficult for NGOs to provide evidence to donors of success and impact for these non-formal and rural programmes or to identify and isolate the effects of a particular activity or intervention (AET, 2011b; Karpinska, 2012).

Working with the Community

Between 1996 and 2005 AET concentrated on developing new and innovative ways of providing basic and non-formal education programmes for disadvantaged children and young people particularly those living in rural areas. Within this work there was a strong focus on promoting gender equity and a commitment to working with and through local communities and organizations and also with

regional and national authorities. As a demonstration of its commitment to this approach the trust opened local offices across Southern Sudan, Somalia and Uganda, all of which were managed by local staff. There was also a regional office in Kenya staffed predominantly by Kenyans. Distance learning was one of the innovative approaches AET used to help provide education to young people who were unable to access education through formal schooling. The largest such programme was the joint AET and BBC World Service, Somali Distance Education for Literacy (SOMDEL) project, through which over 100,000 young Somalis who had missed out on formal education were able to complete basic education courses and receive education certificates from their ministries. Many SOMDEL classes took place in rural and nomadic communities and were taught at times and locations suited to the needs and situations of the community. Of those who benefited 75 per cent were girls and young women (Brophy & Page, 2007). A World Bank report referred to the SOMDEL programme as being 'one of the World's most innovative uses of distance learning to reach uneducated populations in conflict situations' (World Bank, 2006, p. 1).

A second example of an AET innovative project during this period was the School Baseline Assessment (SBA) programme for Southern Sudan which was developed in partnership with United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). This programme trained local teachers and educationalists to assess over 1,400 schools across Southern Sudan and established the first computer database of primary schools in Southern Sudan (AET-UNICEF, 2003). It was widely used by multilateral and bilateral government agencies and donors for planning support for education after the 2004 comprehensive ceasefire.

Although SOMDEL, SBA and other AET projects such as the school mothers and street children programmes in Uganda and nomadic education programmes in Kenya and Somalia were innovative and relatively important for the impact they had, they were still quite small. In 1998 the average annual funding for an AET project was less than £10,000 per year. By 2004 although this had increased to an average of £50,000 per year, the projects were still relatively small. Organizations such as AET were finding that even in fragile states, bilateral and multilateral donors were becoming less willing to support projects developed by NGOs in partnership with local governments and communities. In both education and other areas, in order to improve coordination and reduce duplication and at the same time reduce their own staffing and administration costs, donors were moving towards large countrywide approaches.

> Donors today are being held to account very closely for the funds they disburse. Many key humanitarian donors are finding economies of scale by funding NGO consortia to respond to emergencies or to work on finding solutions to common challenges as a group. This enables a wider reach with potentially more limited resources. By forming a strong and effective country-level consortium, NGOs position themselves well vis-à-vis their donors to receive support for their efforts. (ECB, 2013, p. 7)

These large programmes, however, often had aims, goals and objectives developed by public servants and fund managers and based more on global and international strategies and targets than on local or beneficiaries perceptions of needs.

Donors and Consortia

Once more NGOs were faced with a dilemma should they continue as they were with relatively small programmes developed in close consultation with beneficiaries and local communities but not necessarily in line with donor governments' interests and priorities or should they work within a consortium to reach a greater number of beneficiaries through programmes based on internationally agreed goals and standards (Graham, 2010; Kweyu, 2013). The choice was difficult for in addition to helping greater numbers of people large grants also helped to cover staff salaries and administration, logistics and transport costs. Things which were problematic when there was only funding for small

projects. Large projects also often allowed staff to travel, monitor and deliver project activities across a larger area. However, for smaller and medium NGOs the question arose as to whether or not they still had ownership of their activities and projects. Were they partners or simply contractors? Some larger NGOs also felt the pressure to combine with partners in consortium and larger groupings. Describing the formation of Save the Children's Global Challenge, Webley reported how 2003 was a turning point for the different Save member organizations as they accepted that 'it was clear that the world needed fewer, stronger NGOs' and that for 'corporate survival' they had to 'either combine or compete' (Webley, 2012, p. 74).

There were a few exceptions in the push towards consortia; in 2004 the president of Somaliland made a direct request to the British government for assistance in establishing a national examinations centre. The UK government was unwilling to support the Somaliland Education Ministry directly. However, AET had a good working relationship with the ministry and was asked by the minister to prepare and submit a proposal for support for the centre. The proposal was approved by UK Department for International Development (DFID) and a grant was made for support to the ministry through AET. This examinations programme was an important milestone for both Somaliland and for AET and involved a grant which totalled over £3 million (Page, 2010; AET, 2010b). It also reinforced and strengthened the trust's relationship with the ministry. Two years later when the European Union invited bids from the consortia for a programme to support secondary education in Somalia the ministry supported the bid of the consortium led by AET which was successful.

The idea of a consortium approach was already familiar in the private sector and in higher education but not that well known within the NGO community. The idea of four or more international organizations joining together to bid for and manage a large donor-funded project was a relatively new concept not only for AET but for many NGOs. Graham has suggested that multi-agency consortium applications for donor funding only really started in 2006 (Graham, 2010). From 2008 onwards AET continued to work in South Sudan. Kenya and Uganda either on their own or with a single partner, but in Somalia due to changing donor policies most of its work there began to be carried out in consortium with other organizations. Funding from these consortium projects was significantly higher than the funding for the non-consortium projects. In 2010, for example, the trust's annual accounts showed that AET's income from a single EU-funded consortium programme in Somalia, Strengthening Access and Participation in Secondary Education (SAPIS), was 1.5 times the combined income from its six largest projects in South Sudan. In fact although AET supported thirty-nine projects that year, 42 per cent of its income came from just three consortium projects (AET, 2010a).

Working within consortia may have meant reducing duplication and being able to help significantly more children and young people access education, but consortia also had their own problems and difficulties. For organizations like AET the major problems almost always related to finance and the financial structure within the consortium. In a traditional project structure the NGO received its funding directly from the donor; within a consortium the funds could pass through two or three other organizations before reaching the NGO. This meant that often there were frequent and lengthy delays in the receipt of funds. When this happened NGOs had to use their reserves to ensure that staff were paid and project activities kept going. The problems were magnified when organizations were involved in more than one consortium which meant that there could be a constant strain on its reserves and cash flow with negative effects on staff moral and the organization's standing with the ministry and local communities. Delays were also likely to have a 'carry over' effect with later tranches of funds being held up while lead organizations waited on each partner collecting receipts and invoices from the field, preparing and submitting accounts. The time between spending one tranche of funding and receiving the next was often determined by the capacity and skills of whichever organization within the consortium had the weakest finance department.

A second financial problem stemmed from a common donor requirement that NGOs provide a share of the funding for a programme, commonly known as matched funding. Bilateral and multilateral donors were under pressure from governments to ensure that they obtained value for money from their programmes and there was a growing pressure and expectation by donors

that NGOs should reduce their costs (Graham, 2010). One way to achieve this was by requiring organizations to bring additional funding to a programme. Instead of covering all planned expenditure the donor would offer only a proportion and require partner organizations to provide the balance. In a competitive situation the more matched funding a consortium could offer the more likely it was to receive the contract. As the budgets of consortium programmes grew so did the amounts required for matched funding with smaller partners often experiencing pressure from both the donor and the lead organization to increase contributions and reduce administration costs. This could lead to a concern among the partners that the lead organizations were trying to 'cream off' all of the money (Cabinet Office, 2008). Matched funding of £25,000 for a single project was feasible for most smaller NGOs. Raising 10 or 20 per cent of £10 million was much more problematic even if there were a number of partners. Foundations and charities were and are also generally reluctant to see their funds being used and absorbed into large government or multilateral programmes rather than being directed at smaller discrete projects they can feel some ownership of.

Finance and financial management were not the only problems that NGOs encountered as they learned to work in consortia. Difficulties familiar from single project management were often exacerbated by the increased length of the management chain in a consortium where there were ample opportunities for misunderstanding and different interpretations between and within the multiple levels of management. There were also greater restrictions on developing and trying innovative approaches and on adapting to changing local needs. For example, when there were fresh outbreaks of fighting in countries such as Somalia and South Sudan, AET and other smaller organizations by working through local staff were able to continue their projects in areas not affected by the outbreak. Consortium programmes were much more likely to be shut down, generally on instructions from the donor or funding government.

NGOs also quickly realized that large consortia programmes just like projects had limited lifespans (Kweyu, 2013). In small- and medium-sized organizations local staff rarely worked on a single project and when one project ended it was possible to continue employing them until new ones could be started. Employing people on a longer term basis meant that they were more likely to understand and be committed to the work and mission of the organization. It also meant that the organization had experienced staff in place and was ready to start new programmes quickly. Consortia programmes required full-time staff and their own separate running costs. When they ended after two or three years it was rarely possible for smaller organizations to cover or absorb these continuation costs. On large consortia programmes staff understood they were likely to be made redundant at the end of the cycle and often started looking for new jobs well before the end of the programme (People in Aid, 2010). NGOs found themselves looking for temporary, lessexperienced staff for the last months of programmes. With a high turnover of staff NGOs were less likely to invest in capacity building and staff training.

Large organizations are likely to be better able to absorb staff and office costs in interim periods and in providing matched funding. They are also likely to have larger finance departments. Consortium programmes have continued to grow in size with donors inviting bids for programme grants of many millions of dollars. Recent examples were the UK Department for International Development (DFID) 2012 Girls Education South Sudan (GESS) programme with a budget of £50 million over six years (DFID, 2012) and the USAID South Sudan Safer Schools Support Project with a budget of US$105 million over five years (USAID, 2012). As they have grown consortium programmes have increasingly favoured the structures and resources of larger organizations and those who are better able to cope with the risks and the liability (Cabinet Office, 2008; Kweyu, 2013).

Conclusion

When it was established in 1958 the AET closely reflected the views and interests of its founders by supporting higher education scholarships for people from Africa and helping to develop the capacity and skills needed by people in newly independent countries. Throughout its history the trust has

continued to support students from Africa, but there have been major changes both in how and in where it has worked. For more than half of its existence it focused on scholarships in the UK mainly for students from Southern Africa. In the 1990s as the political situation and donor priorities changed, AET adapted and most of its work became focused on providing further and higher education grants to African refugees living in the UK. By 2000, however, it had once more adapted to meet changing priorities and concentrated on supporting primary and non-formal education programmes in Africa.

From this review of its history and activities it is clear that AET has made an important and significant contribution to education in Africa. It is also clear that throughout its existence it has been able to adapt to changing situations and priorities. Currently like many other NGOs it is faced with having to adapt from working on individual projects it has developed in partnership with local communities and authorities to working as a partner in large consortium programmes where most of the assessment and planning have already been carried out by the donor and fund managers. For AET and many similar organizations the question has arisen once again of how to maintain a balance between achieving its own vision and aims and adapting to the changing priorities of governments and agencies.

As the 2002 Academy for Educational Development (AED) study of the 'Role of NGOs in Basic Education in Africa' has noted donors finance NGO education activities because they share similar priorities, goals and policies: 'When they diverge, donors are easily able to leverage a realignment' (AED, 2002, p. 31). However, as that report has cautioned 'donors can be fickle and may abandon an NGO if their interests shift' (AED, 2002, p. 35).

Note

[1] This article is an updated and edited version from Education and NGOs (2016), London: Bloomsbury Academic

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Book Review

Education in Japan: A Comprehensive Analysis of Education Reforms and Practices. By Yuto Kitamura, Toshiyuki Omono, Masaaki Katsuno (Eds.) (2019), 241 pp. ISBN: 978-981-13-2630-1, Singapore: Springer.

Japan began to modernize its education system during the late 19th century by drawing upon models provided by the West but without having to experience the phenomenon of colonization. During the post-WWII period, its education system was restructured, under strong influence from the United States. Then, during the 1990s, there was further wide-ranging reform of the system. These three waves of change have enabled Japan's education system to play a vital role in Japanese society, first through its contribution to the modernization of Japanese culture during the late 19th century, then by contributing to the high-speed pace of economic growth from the late 1950s, and recently by enabling Japan to become a rich and globally advanced nation.

Japan's education system has, however, faced many challenges. In this book, Kitamura and colleagues, drawing upon original research as well as material from secondary sources, present a comprehensive portrait of these challenges, especially those experienced over recent years. Their book explores the distinctive characteristics of Japan's education system, together with critical challenges and likely developments.

Overall, it is an extraordinarily valuable resource, both for the attention it gives to particular aspects of the Japanese education system and for its comprehensive overview of the processes of change within the system.

The book is presented in two parts. Part I is about the organizational elements within the education system in Japan, and Part II about a range of issues affecting the system. Part I provides a stage-based analysis of the system: primary, secondary, higher and lifelong education, addressing basic institutional structures, significant policies, and recent reforms. Part II delves into issues concerning teachers, disciplinary structures, community engagement, equity, labor market articulation, multiculturalism, university reform, international relationships, and sustainability.

In Part I, Chapter 1 describes briefly the main changes that occurred in Japan's education systems after WWII. It explains the organization of the book. It also draws particular attention to the importance of researching early childhood education in Japan, though curiously this topic receives no further consideration in the book. Chapter 2 investigates changes in the post-WWII primary and secondary systems and identifies factors affecting the establishment of an Ad Hoc Council in Education, together with its impact on the subsequent development of the Japan's education system. Chapter 3 is concerned with higher education in Japan. It summarizes several features of this sector: the largest share of private higher education, the importance of the national university's role in undertaking academic research and in producing graduate students, and the market-oriented nature of the higher education system before the 1990s. It identifies four stages in the development of the sector: higher education in the pre-war era; higher education during the pre-war period; the growth of higher education after WWII; and the expansion and disorder associated with massification and reforms during the 1990s. Chapter 4 addresses the restructuring of social and lifelong learning, exploring characteristics of post-war social education, its reforms, and how it transitioned to become a lifelong learning system since the 1970s. These characteristics include commercialization, municipal reforms and the establishment of citizens' community centers. This chapter demonstrates the importance of having a robust civil capability. Chapter 5, outlining changes that have occurred in the Japanese educational administrative systems at both national and local levels since the 2000s, breaks the flow of the previous chapters because of its broader scope. It presents an account of changes in governmental policies at both the national and local levels,

together with an analysis of challenges arising from these changes. Perhaps this chapter would have been better placed in Part II of the book.

Part II has nine chapters. Chapter 6 analyzes various issues facing teachers in Japan, focusing mainly on their working conditions and quality. It argues that the working conditions of teachers need to be improved, that they should have more time to reflect their work and understand students from a socioeconomic perspective, and that there is a need to eliminate rigid national policies regarding the teaching profession. Chapter 7 presents the results of a national survey of elementary, junior and senior high schools. Based on the case of an elementary school, it discusses how the school's in-house lesson study system works. This chapter raises issues facing lesson study in Japan that might well have been addressed in more detail in the book. Chapter 8 reports on the main long-term changes in the education system by drawing upon teacher narratives and archival records since the early 20th century. It asserts the importance of analyzing these narratives and records as a basis for understanding what needs to be improved. Chapter 9's focus is the relationship between schools and local communities since the late 19th century, when Japan modernized its education system. The chapter argues that Japan succeeded in teaching children to have an image of Japan as an ethnically homogeneous entity, characterized by equal access to educational opportunities and the provision of a high level of social mobility propelled by school credentials. However, this success occurred at the expense of teaching children communal values and cultures unique to geographical regions within Japan, and it failed to address issues related to immigration and internationalization. Chapter 10 raises questions about educational disparities in Japanese society. It draws on empirical data to discuss how these disparities have influenced the youth labour market, especially after the March 2011 earthquakes in the Fukushima prefecture. The chapter makes several specific recommendations on how officialdom might seek to resolve these issues. Chapter 11 discusses multicultural issues in Japanese society. It distinguishes between 'oldcomers', 'newcomers' and 'those in between, or not, part of either'. It then examines in detail how localities with a concentration of foreigners have defined the meaning of 'multicultural' in a Japanese context. Chapter 12 touches on recent higher education reforms in Japan by focusing on the incorporation of national universities since 2004. Two significant challenges identified regarding national university corporations are the continuing extent of reductions since 2004 in annual operating grants and problems experienced concerning the mid-term plan and targets for these corporations. Chapter 13 outlines the historical development of the teaching and learning of English in Japan since the early 19th century. It critically reexamines the hypothesis that English instruction in Japan has been a failure. It stresses the role inclusion of English in the curriculum might play in promoting the internationalization of Japanese education. Chapter 14 suggests a framework for the implementation of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) programs in Japan. It identifies a need to provide multiple software support for existing safety education, proposing that this plan should start with traffic and then broaden in scope to take account of daily life and disasters.

Compared with previous publications concerning Japan's education system, there are three distinctive features of this book. Firstly, all but one of the contributors come from the Graduate School of Education at the University of Tokyo. The high social and academic status of both entities means that the book will be regarded as an authoritative source of information about the state of education in Japan. Secondly, the book is much more analytical than descriptive. Part I, which covers details of the system, accounts for only 58 pages, while Part II, which presents detailed analyses, accounts for 150 pages. Thirdly, the book is contemporary in its focus, providing a reliable source of detail about recent research on the topic of education in Japan.

In general, this book is a valuable resource if what you are looking for is an up-to-date, authoritative and comprehensive overview of the state of education in Japan.

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