



Education Policy vs. Practice: An assessment of Decentralisation by Devolution Practices in Secondary Education Sub-sector in Tanzania

Gasper Nturu Shoo

University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Email: gasper.shoo@nactvet.go.tz

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0598-8500>

Received: 20/02/2026

Revised: 18/05/2026

Accepted: 30/06/2026

Published: 30/06/2026

Abstract

This study evaluated devolution reforms in the management practices of secondary education at the secondary school level. Employing a qualitative approach, the study involved 35 participants, comprising 10 school heads, 2 ward education officers, 3 District Secondary Education Officers, and 20 teachers. Data were collected using an interview guide and an open-ended questionnaire. The findings indicate that Decentralisation by Devolution (D by D) policy reforms have endowed schools with some authority over academic matters, resource mobilisation, staff monitoring and supervision, and addressing student misbehaviour. The study concludes that the effectiveness of decentralisation in enhancing education service delivery is contingent upon the appropriate delegation of designated functions to school actors. Evidence from this case suggests that the experience of Tanzanian secondary schools with education devolution aligns with that of many developing countries that have experimented with education decentralisation but have not achieved the desired outcomes due to inconsistent implementation processes. Consequently, this study recommends that the government undertake deliberate measures to empower school heads and boards by providing them with the necessary resources, training, and authority to function effectively. This includes facilitating their role in overseeing educational management systems.

Keywords: Decentralisation, devolution, local government authority, policy reforms

How to cite: Shoo, G. S. (2026). Education policy vs. practice: An assessment of decentralisation by devolution practices in secondary education sub-sector in Tanzania. *Journal of Adult Education in Tanzania*, 28(1), 149–166. <https://doi.org/10.61408/jaet2026v28i01.08>

Introduction

Quality education is essential for Tanzania's development as it equips citizens with the necessary skills for economic growth, innovation, and poverty alleviation. The nation is enhancing its education system to meet global standards, with a particular focus on delivering quality education. A significant component of this reform is the decentralisation of education, which empowers school management and improves decision-making processes (Bulgrin & Semedeton, 2024). Decentralisation in education commenced in the 1960s in developed countries such as the USA, the UK, and Canada, initially concentrating on administrative roles within the education sector. The economic challenges of the 1980s led many nations to adopt these reforms. The 1990s highlighted decision-making, stakeholder participation, and accountability due to globalisation (Edwards, 2017; Romanowski, 2020; Yusuf & Abubakar, 2026). In Africa, decentralisation began in the 1980s, with countries like Uganda and Kenya seeking efficiency amid economic pressures (Bulgrin & Semedeton, 2024; Yusuf & Abubakar, 2026). Tanzania's decentralisation started in 1961, associated with the socialist principles of the Arusha Declaration. However, in 1972, it transitioned to a more centralised approach with the Decentralisation Policy. Restructuring in 1982 addressed inefficiencies resulting from the global oil crisis, and in 1994, Tanzania adopted Structural Adjustment Programmes to transition towards a free economy (Baganda, 2016; Mwemezi, 2017; Likwelile & Assey, 2018; Matete, 2022). The 1990s reforms in Tanzania, influenced by private enterprises and open markets, significantly impacted educational policies and decentralisation (Rwiza, 2016). The 1995 Education and Training Policy enhanced the role of local authorities in improving education quality (URT, 1995), while amendments to the National Education Act strengthened School Governing Bodies (URT, 1995). Decentralisation efforts in 1998 increased local community involvement in school governance (Rwiza, 2016). The Local Government Reform Programmes (2000–2014) established autonomous local authorities, thereby improving education through institution-based management (Masue & Askvik, 2017; Mkoma & Rwekaza, 2022).

Educational decentralisation varies globally and is shaped by historical, legal, and geopolitical contexts (Mgema, 2022). In countries such as the United States and

Australia, while teacher recruitment and financial management are decentralised, curricula and examinations remain under central control (Gorgodze, 2016; Gobby & Niesche, 2019). Conversely, England and the United Arab Emirates have shifted decision-making powers to schools and local governments, respectively (Liang, 2016). Spain's decentralisation efforts are minimal, with regional structures still mirroring centralist frameworks (Khisa, 2020). In former Soviet states, the move towards decentralisation is intertwined with the transition to market economies (Karlsson et al., 2022). Asian nations typically centralise teacher management but decentralise administrative functions, a pattern similar to Australia's (Lee, 2016). In African countries such as South Africa, Sierra Leone, and Rwanda, decentralisation strategies have been employed to manage ethnic diversity and support post-conflict recovery (Kigume & Maluka, 2018; Kapilima, 2022; Khilji et al., 2022).

Since 2008, the Tanzanian government has been tasked with the formulation and evaluation of policies, while the implementation is delegated to the Prime Minister's Office–Regional Administration and Local Government (PMO-RALG) (URT, 2010; World Bank, 2021). The execution of these policies is managed by regional, district, and ward offices, with school governing boards overseeing the school management. Effective governance relies on the active participation of teachers, management teams, parents, and students, all supported by strong accountability mechanisms (Norman, 2018; Maramoko, 2022). Although the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MoEST) is responsible for overseeing education quality and PMO-RALG for service delivery, school governing boards and education officers do not report directly to MoEST's management. Consequently, the MoEST is responsible for the overall accountability of education quality rests with MoEST (Nkoa & Rwekaza, 2021; Maramoko, 2022; Kapilima, 2022; Matete, 2022). The complex governance structure of Tanzania, coupled with decentralisation reforms, has led to challenges such as role conflicts among the MoEST, PO-RALG, and Local Government Authorities (LGAs). These conflicts have diminished collaboration and resulted in planning that is predominantly directive-focused (World Bank, 2021; Kapilima, 2022; Matete, 2022). Administrative decentralisation has caused dissatisfaction, as government schools face stringent directives from the Central Government, limiting the decision-making power of management teams. Furthermore, unreliable budgets and insufficient resource allocation hinder policy implementation (Rwiza, 2016; Maeda, 2021; Masue & Askvik, 2017; World Bank, 2021). This situation contrasts with governance theory, which advocates for increased autonomy. Although the global literature addresses these reforms, there is a lack of understanding of the specific challenges of school governance in Tanzania. This article examines how

decentralisation has affected the roles and autonomy of school management teams in daily school operations, particularly in the Dar es Salaam region, contributing to discussions on education policy in developing countries. Specifically, this study aims to answer the following question: What are the roles and autonomy of school management teams concerning daily operations in secondary schools following devolution policy reforms?

Fullan's (2001) theoretical insights into educational change and development form the foundation of this study. Fullan (2000) argues that decentralisation necessitates a balanced distribution of power between central and local authorities. The theory advocates for the integration of both "top-down" and "bottom-up" approaches, which are deemed essential for effective outcomes. Fullan critiques the notion of complete centralisation, suggesting that it leads to excessive control and disorder. The theory further contends that the idea of top-down control is misleading, as managing complex organisations in such a manner is impractical. It encapsulates the philosophy by asserting the need for a reciprocal relationship characterised by pressure, support, and ongoing negotiation (p. 38).

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative methodology due to the inherent nature of the social issue being examined. Within this methodological framework, this study employed a multiple case study design. In this context, multiple case studies were used as respondents. The rationale for employing multiple cases is not to increase the sample size, as a quantitatively inclined researcher might assume. Instead, as Yin (2009) emphasises, the significance lies in other critical factors such as the context. Firstly, using multiple cases is analogous to replicating an experiment or study, implying that findings from one case should be compared and contrasted with those from other cases. Secondly, the selection of cases for multiple case studies is categorised into literal and theoretical replications. Literal replications involve selecting similar cases with expected similar outcomes, whereas theoretical replications involve choosing cases based on the expectation of producing differing results. The researcher opted for multiple cases with the expectation of achieving a literal replication. Loseke (2021) argues that in multiple case studies, one objective is to develop a general explanatory model applicable to each case in the study despite variations in detail. Consequently, in this study, each respondent category was treated as an individual case study.

The research was conducted in the Dar es Salaam region, encompassing five districts: Ilala, Temeke, Kinondoni, Ubungu, and Kigamboni. These districts were chosen due to their early involvement in the Local Government Reform

Programmes (LGRPs) in Tanzania Mainland. The study's sample consisted of 35 respondents from 10 secondary schools: two from each of the District Councils. Among the respondents, there were 10 school heads, 2 ward education officers, 3 District Education Officers, and 20 teachers. Purposive sampling was employed to select both schools and participants, focusing on those that piloted devolution policy reforms and individuals possessing the requisite information. Data collection was conducted through in-depth semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires. Thematic analysis was utilised to analyse the data, identifying and reporting patterns (themes) within the datasets. This method facilitated theorising across multiple cases by revealing common themes in the participants' experiences. Themes were developed to encapsulate the study findings.

Results and Discussion

The results of this study are structured based on the subthemes identified from the research question presented in the Introduction. The subsequent discussion examines the domains in which the school management team exercises authority over the daily operations of the school.

Academic-Related Decision-Making Authority

Interviews with school heads, teachers, ward education officers, and district education officers reveal that the School Management Team (SMT) holds the authority to prepare school timetables, develop and implement academic strategic plans, monitor instructional time, conduct classroom observations, and audit teachers' lesson plans to ensure effective curriculum implementation. A ward education officer highlighted the increased authority granted to Heads of Schools by the 2004 Education Circular, which allows them to make decisions regarding teaching and learning activities and to supervise and audit lesson plans. During interviews, a ward education officer remarked on the administrative decisions that SMTs can make concerning academic-related decisions at the school level: "If you read the Education Circular of 2004, you will see clearly that devolution and related reforms have given Heads of Schools more power in managing teaching and learning activities at the school level...they have the power to decide who will teach which subject and which class...they also supervise and audit teachers' lesson plans and schemes of work." (Ward Education Officer, 23rd October 2025). It was also noted that supervision of instructional activities is a primary responsibility of the SMTs, as specified in their appointment letters, which state, "to ensure the curriculum is implemented effectively at the school level". This aligns with Education Circular Number 14 of 2009, which empowers school heads to supervise

and monitor teaching and learning activities. This ensures that the school timetable is effectively implemented, students' time on task is maximised, and lessons are consistently monitored. This study's findings align with Leer (2016) in Indonesia, who found that principals have been given authority under decentralisation to initiate decisions on all academic activities. Similarly, Carr-Hill et al. (2023) observed that in Northern Ireland and England, schools are governed by school governing boards responsible for overseeing all academic activities at the school level. Another study by Nnunduma (2023) indicated that local governments in Tanzania have the authority to implement strategies aimed at delivering quality education to secondary school students, thereby enhancing their academic performance. Consequently, these local governments can issue directives to lower levels and offer guidance to higher levels regarding optimal educational management. These findings are supported by the theoretical framework. The analysis of Education Circular No. 1 of 2022 indicates that the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MoEST) has the authority to establish the annual academic calendar for secondary schools. Consequently, schools are required to synchronise their teaching schedules with the national calendar devised by the MoEST. This centralisation underscores the significant influence of the central government on school management teams decisions regarding the annual school calendar. However, despite the MoEST issuing circulars, the degree of autonomy afforded to individual schools remains ambiguous. This concern was echoed by the head of the school during an interview when asked about their authority in determining the annual school calendar. The head of the school stated:

The teaching and learning calendar, which delineates the major events of the academic year, is typically distributed to us. It is imperative that both teachers and students adhere to the guidelines specified in the issued circular to avoid any potential inconvenience (Head of Secondary School I, 23rd October 2025).

Comments from school leaders and ward education officers suggest that the preparation of annual school calendars is a predominantly centralised process. This reflects the challenges the government faces in implementing policy modifications and reforms, particularly in empowering school management teams to develop their own annual calendars. This observation is consistent with the findings of Nnunduma (2023), Norman (2018), Kapilima (2022), and Maeda (2021), who demonstrate that the Tanzanian government has consistently implemented an annual school calendar. In contrast, Romanowski (2020) warns that decentralisation through devolution does not automatically guarantee school involvement in creating the yearly calendar, which is a fundamental goal of decentralisation and effective governance. Rwiza's (2016) study further emphasises

that, despite devolution reforms, the participation of school management teams in drafting the annual education calendar remains limited.

Staff Development-related Power

In Tanzania, School Management Teams (SMTs), led by Heads of Schools, are tasked with implementing decentralisation reforms in their daily operations. Although the central government maintains control over hiring and promotion processes, SMTs are responsible for managing human resources at the school level. The data collected in this study indicate that the Public Service Act of 2002 and its Regulations of 2003 empower heads of schools and SMTs to manage and deploy human resources within their respective institutions. During an interview, the ward education officer stated the following:

Today, I can confidently say that school heads, along with school management teams, hold significantly more managerial responsibilities over teachers than they did before the D-by-D policy reforms. They must ensure that staff members are deployed fairly, aligning their expertise with the subjects they teach.

This statement underscores that within the D-by-D policy framework, SMTs operating under decentralisation are tasked with ensuring an equitable distribution of workloads among teachers and other school staff. Interviews with heads of schools and district education officers revealed that SMTs are responsible for organising internal capacity-building workshops, conducting induction programmes for newly appointed teachers, and facilitating continuous professional development (CPD) sessions tailored to the specific needs of the school. During an interview with selected heads of schools, one head remarked:

Frankly speaking, as the head of school, I have the authority to decide on any type of indoor training my school wishes to conduct and to suggest names of teachers who are eligible to attend long- and short-term training programmes. But we do not have the authority to suggest what teachers can attend those short or long training sessions ... our leaders at the municipal level decide that...

This implies that heads of schools are empowered to determine indoor training for their schools and propose names of teachers eligible for short- and long-term training to district education officers. The district education officer noted:

With D by D policy reforms, nowadays at least heads of schools have been given the power to decide on the types of indoor training for their teachers and other staff...they also decide on the names of teachers who may attend short and long training to district education officials or district executive director...but they cannot allow them to attend any training conducted outside the school environment without permission from district education officials.

In contrast, the majority of interviewed teachers acknowledged their limited involvement in planning their professional development. They expressed that their needs were inadequately addressed during the professional development process at both the school and district levels. Teachers perceived that their professional development requirements were not effectively considered, with training topics being determined by others. One teacher, during an interview, remarked the following:

I am uncertain about who plans short- and long-term training programmes, as we only receive information about short-term training from the head of the school. Individual teachers must take the initiative to write a letter to the district education officer via the head of school for long-term training. Annually, the head of the school compiles a list of teachers wishing to attend long-term training and submits it to district officials for a final decision.

The data collected revealed that teachers were not actively involved in planning their professional development programs at the school level. Instead, these programs were organised by school heads or district education officers. This underscores the need for teachers to have the authority to plan and make decisions regarding their professional development. The principles of decentralisation advocate for empowering teachers at the school level to design professional development programmes that are tailored to local contexts and align with cultural and professional needs (Yusuf & Abubakar, 2026; UNESCO, 2017). Professional development is considered most effective when teachers themselves set the agenda and determine the focus and format of the programmes offered (Mgema, 2022; Bandur et al., 2022). Furthermore, this finding contradicts the theoretical framework the study, which emphasises the distribution of power between central and local authorities. Similar changes are also evident in the autonomy of SMTs over teachers' discipline at the school level. It was found that the D by D policy reforms empowered heads of schools and their management teams to address teachers' misconduct. However, in practice, the situation differs, as narrated by the ward education officer.

They cannot do that. They can only reprimand, write a warning letter, or report the teacher to district officials for further action. Terminating a teacher from their position is beyond their power. When teachers misbehave, they issue a first and then a second warning. If the teacher's misconduct persists, the matter should be forwarded to higher authorities (Ward Education Officer, 23rd October 2025).

The ward education officer's remarks indicate that, as part of the devolution process, certain powers have been delegated to school heads, enabling them to make decisions regarding teacher disciplinary matters. School heads are authorised to reprimand or issue verbal and/or written warnings to teachers who default.

Should these measures prove ineffective, they have the option to refer the matter to the Teacher Service Commission (TSC) for further disciplinary action. The officer's assertions were based on the limitation that school heads could only warn or reprimand non-compliant teachers at that time. This limitation complicates the responsibilities of school heads, as they lack the authority to impose severe disciplinary measures on non-compliant staff, despite the emphasis on quality instruction. Consequently, the quality of basic education is compromised due to delays in disciplining teachers for misconduct. This observation is consistent with Pliyesi's (2020) study, which found that in Malawi, school heads possess only limited administrative capacity to adjudicate specific teacher discipline issues, contrary to the expectations of decentralisation reform. Similarly, Beckham and Wills' (2020) research demonstrated that school management in South Africa and Namibia lacks the local autonomy to address undisciplined teachers, instead depending on the central government's administrative authority and accountability. Furthermore, Padayachee and Gcelu's (2022) study corroborate that warnings and reprimands were the most frequently employed strategies by school heads to manage teacher misconduct. Matete's (2022) study also found that school heads utilised written warnings and reprimands to address teacher misconduct before formally escalating the issue to higher authorities for further action.

Resource Mobilisation and Budgeting-related Power

The decentralisation of education aims to fundamentally transform the management and distribution of teaching and learning resources. By shifting authority from the central to the local governments, schools can formulate guidelines and strategies that better address local needs. Participants in the study noted that within the D by D framework, School Management Teams (SMTs) possess the authority to mobilise resources as deemed appropriate and have the autonomy to procure services such as educational materials and construction contractors. Additionally, schools have the independent capacity to seek financial support from local communities and non-governmental organisations. This approach fosters collegiality and democratic decision-making in schools. However, a few respondents indicated that the SMTs' ability to plan their budgets was constrained. One head of school recounted the following:

Schools are increasingly subject to new directives that diminish their autonomy in resource procurement and allocation. Presently, schools are unable to independently determine their annual budgets, as these are formulated by municipal authorities. Consequently, schools receive allocations that have been predetermined by these officials. Although schools have the capacity to

mobilise financial resources at the local level, they must first obtain authorisation from district education officers.

These findings were corroborated by the district education officer during the interviews with him. The officer presented two primary perspectives regarding their perceived lack of significant budgeting authority. Firstly, they observed that the budget requires inspection and approval by the central government, which provides over 90% of the funding for most local government authorities. Second, they emphasised the obligation of local government authorities to follow the budgeting procedures mandated annually by the central government. Consequently, this study posits that while local government authorities possess some degree of budgetary control, it is not substantial enough. Under the framework of decentralisation by devolution, the aim of delegating authority to School Management Teams (SMTs) and local government authorities to mobilise and use financial resources (fiscal decentralisation) was to minimise fund wastage and ensure the efficient use of resources. Fiscal decentralisation is a crucial framework that clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of various government levels in managing fiscal activities such as budgeting, revenue generation, and resource distribution (Nnunduma & Hussein, 2023; Norman, 2018). It functions as the essential circulatory system of decentralised local governance, ensuring that financial resources are allocated efficiently to address the needs of citizens. In the context of education, decentralisation empowers schools and Local Government Authorities (LGAs) with the necessary financial autonomy, significantly enhancing the delivery of educational services. By adhering to the subsidiarity principle, public sector financing is allocated to the most capable level of government, ensuring optimal performance. The central government plays an active role by directly transferring funds to schools, guaranteeing that these institutions receive the timely financial support they require (Day & Sammons, 2014). This proactive approach contrasts with the historical misappropriation of funds through district councils, which previously deprived schools of essential resources (Carlitz, 2016; Mgema, 2022). In contrast to the findings of Gobby, Niesche, and Anosisye (2017), which indicated that schools had less authority over procurement than budgetary control, the current study reveals that schools possess greater expenditure authority than budgetary oversight authority. This may be attributed to the direct disbursement of funds from the central government into schools' bank accounts. Input from school heads, teachers, ward education officers, and district education officers suggests that schools have the freedom to acquire teaching and learning materials and other essential equipment, provided they obtain approval from the District Education Office and procure them from authorised dealers. The general view of the study, based on the descriptive findings, is that SMTs and school governing boards have

some decision-making power regarding the mobilisation and budgeting of their resources. According to government regulations, the expenditure process must follow the prescribed procedures for using public funds. Lower levels must secure approval from the presiding offices. For example, schools had to secure approval from the district secondary education office, which is also under the regional education office. The schools involve parents and the general community via the school board in the decision-making process regarding resource mobilisation and budgeting. The study concludes that, under devolution policy reforms, SMTs possess the authority to mobilise resources and manage expenditure.

Students' Administration

According to the national strategy, educational decentralisation in Tanzania has enhanced local government authority by decentralising governmental functions. This has been achieved by delegating administrative and legal authority to school management teams and school boards, enabling them to make educational decisions at the school level. However, this study reveals that top authorities continue to exert supervisory control over student selection and administrative processes. Most interviewed school heads expressed that the current selection procedures do not grant sufficient authority to the school management team and school board for decision-making regarding student selection. They are unable to make significant decisions independently due to various legal requirements that render school administrations and boards dependent on local and central governments. Essentially, the central government retains substantial control over student selection and admissions decisions. A head teacher explained:

As a headteacher, one of my roles is to admit new students to the school. However, I do not have the authority to refuse admission to any student selected by top officials. Consequently, managing such a school presents numerous challenges, as we sometimes register beyond the school's capacity without considering the actual number of available spaces, teachers, and other school requirements.

In response to the same issue, the ward education officer stated:

Regarding students' admission, we only decide the number of students we want depending on the available infrastructure. The power of school heads is limited to transferring students within the district or region from one school to another or receiving students from other schools. However, a higher authority must approve the transfer; without that, it cannot be completed. We use the online system to make the transfer; hence, the head of the school initiates the process. However, as I said, the authority to select and enrol students belongs to the PO-RALG. However, MoEST has set criteria.

This statement demonstrates that while school heads can determine the number of students their institutions will accept, they lack the authority to reject students assigned or transferred to their schools by PoRALG and LGAs, even if it exceeds their capacity. The reviewed documents indicate that the Ministry of Education and PO-RALG not only oversee the selection process but also issue guidelines regarding school admission criteria. For example, the directive in the letter with reference number DC 297/507/01/146 dated 23rd November 2015, specifies: The letter called for the standardization of all joining instruction forms in government public secondary schools. The directive outlines the requirements and procedures that must be followed whenever a parent, guardian, or representative seeks to have their child repeat a grade. This suggests that although joining instructions have been decentralised, schools receive directives on what should and should not be included in the joining instructions. This finding contradicts Fullan's theory regarding educational change and development. The theory posits that a distinct two-way relationship involving pressure, support, and continuous negotiation is necessary (Norman, 2018, p. 38). The Education and Training Policy of 2014 granted the central government, including the Ministry of Education, PoRALG, and LGAs, the authority to make decisions regarding the selection and admission of students into public secondary schools (URT, 2014). This policy asserts that the government of the United Republic of Tanzania is responsible for ensuring educational access for all pupils and students at any level (p. 42). It further mandates that the MoEST possesses the authority to establish enrolment, admission, and selection criteria for individuals seeking education at any level within the country. Pernia (2017) characterizes devolution reform as the delegation of authority and power to the school level, thereby enabling schools to make decisions concerning student affairs. Advocates of decentralisation contend that it can transfer decision-making capabilities to the local level, with specific impacts contingent on government structure and social and interpersonal factors (Kapilima, 2022). Maeda (2021) similarly observed that school administrations and boards have limited influence over the selection of students for public secondary schools in Tanzania. They argue that devolution policy reforms are frequently ambiguous, and a longstanding tradition of centralised control over secondary education persists within the educational system. This perspective is corroborated by numerous studies on decentralisation in Africa (Rwiza, 2016; Masue & Askvik, 2017). Nevertheless, implementation theory suggests that more nuanced approaches to addressing secondary education issues often coexist with a highly centralised decision-making system.

Students' Discipline

Most research participants concurred that, although the authority to make managerial decisions on student discipline has seen minimal improvement, it would be simplistic to assert that devolution has not transferred power to manage student disciplinary issues as intended. For instance, Regulation No. 4 of the Education Regulations of 2002 permits school boards and management to expel female students who become pregnant while enrolled. Interviews with the Ward Education Officers (WEOs) revealed the following statement:

There is an explicit law prohibiting girls from continuing their studies after pregnancy is discovered; thus, the school board possesses the authority to remove them from school and even prosecute those responsible.

Based on the WEO's perspective, it is evident that secondary education stakeholders, excluding teachers and school heads, have limited influence over decisions concerning pregnancy-related actions. The policy confers such rights to school management teams, governing boards, and school heads, who are authorised to make decisions regarding student misconduct. Consequently, even when local government authorities are granted a degree of power, their actions are typically not definitive and require endorsement from central government officials. A district education officer stated:

Schools and school boards have the final authority regarding student discipline standards... they possess the power to establish discipline standards... and once they decide on punitive measures, including dismissal or suspension, no alternative decision can be made.

This assertion demonstrates that the devolution policy empowered school heads and boards to establish guidelines for student discipline. This finding is consistent with Bulgrin and Semedeton (2024) in Ghana, who found that school principals and boards are empowered to make decisions on student discipline. Similarly, Letuma (2023) identified school leaders and disciplinary masters as the primary authorities responsible for maintaining discipline among students in South Africa. In a related study, Liguluka and Onyango (2020) contend that school boards have the authority to expel students involved in misconduct, such as alcohol or drug use. This finding aligns with various educational policies and circulars, including the Education Act of 1978, the Education Training Policy of 2014, revised in 2023, and the Government School Order of 2002, all of which aim to enhance the role of school boards in maintaining student discipline in public secondary schools, among other objectives (URT, 2010).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that the potential of decentralisation to enhance education service delivery depends on the appropriate delegation of specific functions to school actors. Evidence from this case indicates that the experience of Tanzanian public secondary schools with education devolution aligns with that of many developing countries that have experimented with education decentralisation but have not achieved the desired outcomes due to inconsistent implementation processes. Consequently, this study recommends that the government take deliberate measures to empower school heads and school boards by providing them with the necessary resources, training, and authority to function effectively. This includes facilitating their role in overseeing educational management systems. Furthermore, the study suggests that the government establish effective monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess the impact of D by D reforms on secondary education, thereby identifying successes and areas that need improvement. Additionally, the study advises that the government promote collaboration between different levels of government and educational stakeholders to create a cohesive approach to educational reforms. This includes sharing best practices and encouraging innovative solutions to address local challenges.

Declaration of interest statement

Authors have in any circumstances no conflict of interest of any kind in respect of this manuscript.

Funding Statement

This research did not receive any specific grants from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

References

- Adolfsson, C. H., & Alvunger, D. (2020). Power dynamics and policy actions in the changing landscape of local school governance. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, 6(2), 128-142.
- Baganda, E. (2016). *The Trajectory of Universal Primary Education and Educational Decentralisation in Tanzania 1961-2015: A Nyererean Perspective*. University of Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia.

- Bandur, A., Hamsal, M., & Furinto, A. (2022). 21st Century experiences in the development of school-based management policies and practices in Indonesia. *Educational Research for Policy and Practice*, 21(1), 85-107.
- Bashtannyk, V., & Kudriavtseva, M. (2020). Decentralization reforms as modern concept of state development. *Public administration and local government*, 45(2), 17-24.
- Beckham, J. & Wills, K. B. (2020). Responsibilities, duties, decision-making, and legal basis for local school board authority Web Solutions LLC and its Licensors. U.S.A.
- Beidokhti, A. A., Fathi, K., & Moradi, S. (2016). The structural relations of the parameters of school-based management are based on decentralisation, responsibility, participation, organizational culture, and organizational commitment. *Rev. Eur. Stud.*, 8, 159.
- Berhanu, K. Z., & Gobie, D. (2023). Adequacy of capacity building and stakeholder involvement in decentralised education management: Evidence from Ethiopia. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 9(2), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2023.224715>.
- Brown, M., Ehren, M. C. M., Janssens, F. J. G., McNamara, G., O'Hara, J., & Shevlin, P. (2017). Evaluation and decentralised governance: Examples of inspections in polycentric education systems.
- Bulgrin, E., & Semedeton, S. V. (2024). The importance of trust in education decentralisation in West Africa. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 54(6), 914–932. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2022.2149238>.
- Bulgrin, E., & Semedeton, S. V. (2024). The importance of trust in educational decentralisation in West Africa. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 54(6), 914-932.
- Bush, T., and Anania, A. M. (2023). Developing instructional leadership in Tanzania: Impact of British Council Intervention. *Research in Educational Administration, Instructional Leadership* 8 (2), 296-333.
- Caldwell, B. J., & Spinks, J. M. (2021). *The self-managing school*. Routledge.
- Carr-Hill, R., Rolleston, C., Pherali, T., & Schendel, R. (2023). *Decentralisation Disadvantages and Incentives*. International Initiative for Impact Evaluation, London, UK.
- Carr-Hill, R., Rolleston, C., Pherali, T., Schendel, R., Peart, E., and Jones, E. (2015). *Effects of School-Based Decision Making on Educational Outcomes in Low- and*

Middle-Income Contexts: A Systematic Review. International Initiative for Impact Evaluation, London.

- Cheng, Y. C. (2022). School effectiveness and school-based management: A mechanism for development. Routledge.
- Chidawali, H. (2017). Ndugai in plea over teachers. *The Citizen on Sunday*, 24th December 2017.
- Cilliers, J., Dunford, E., Habyarimana, J., & Dunford, E. (2021). What do local government education managers do to boost learning outcomes? RISE Working Paper Series 21/064 (21/064, Issue: October). https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG_RISE-WP_2021/064.
- Clarke, S., and O'Donoghue, T. (2017). Educational leadership and context: A rendering of an inseparable relationship. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 65 (2), 167-182.
- Cornito, C. M. (2021). Striking a Balance between Centralised and Decentralised Decision-Making: A School-Based Management Practice for Optimum Performance. *International Journal on Social and Education Sciences*, 3(4), 656-669.
- Creswell, J.W. & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Dou, D., Devos, G., & Valcke, M. (2017). The relationships between school autonomy gap, principal leadership, teachers' job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 45(6), 959-977.
- Edwards Jr, D. B. (2017). Decentralisation and community-based management from a global perspective: Trends and institutions. In *the Trajectory of Global Education Policy: Community-Based Management in El Salvador and the Global Reform Agenda* (pp. 125-148). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gobby, B., & Niesche, R. (2019). Community empowerment? School autonomy, school boards, and depoliticizing governance. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 46(3), 565-582.
- Gorgodze, S. (2016). Rise and fall of decentralised school governance decision-making practices in Georgia. *International Education Studies*, 9(11) 25-39.
- Gratia, A.M., Melon, J.A.S., and Lara, J.L.H.A. (2017). Influence of international organisms on school management autonomy as an education policy: Current

Business and Economics Driven Discourse and Education: *Perspectives from Around the World*, 15, 129-136.

Hallinger, P. (2016). Bringing context out of the shadows of leadership. *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, 45 (1) 5-24.

Kapilima, V. C. (2022). Participatory approach in public policy formulation: A comparative analysis of Tanzania's 1995 and 2014 education policies. *Kivukoni Journal*, 4(7), 210–229.
https://www.mnma.ac.tz/media_doc/journals/attachment

Karlsson, J., McPherson, G., & Pampallis, J. (2020). A critical examination of the development of school governance policy and its implications for achieving equity. In *The state, education and equity in post-apartheid South Africa* (pp. 139-177). Routledge.

Khilji, G., Jomezai, N. A., Bibi, N., & Baloch, F. A. (2022). Understanding the effects of educational decentralisation through the perspectives of education managers and teachers. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 36(7), 1206-1220.

Khisa, M. (2020). Decentralization of Public Services and the Role of Local Government in Rural Development: Findings from Bangladesh. *Journal of Public Administration and Governance*, 10(1), 249261-249261.

Kigume, R. & Maluka, S. (2018). Decentralisation and Health Services Delivery in Four Districts in Tanzania: How and Why Does the Use of Decision Space Vary Across Districts *International Journal of Health Policy Management* 10 (10), 1-11.

Leer, J. (2016). After the Big Bang: Estimating the effects of decentralisation on educational outcomes in Indonesia through a difference-in-differences analysis. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 49, 80–90.

Letuma, M. C. (2023). Dynamics of managing learners' classroom disruptive behaviour: Experiences of secondary school staff, South Africa (Doctoral dissertation, University of the Free State).

Liang, X. Y., Kidwai, H., & Zhang, M. X. (2016). How Shanghai does it: Insights and lessons from the highest-ranking education system in the world. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Liguluka, A. T., & Onyango, D. O. (2020). Effectiveness of secondary school boards in managing students' discipline among public secondary schools in Ulanga District, Morogoro, Tanzania. *East African Journal of Education and Social Sciences*, 1(3), 184-190.

- Likwelile, S., & Assey, P. (2018). Decentralisation and development in Tanzania. University of Dar es Salaam: Unpublished Dissertation.
- Loseke, D. R. (2021). Methodological thinking: Basic principles of social research design. Washington, DC: Sage
- Maeda C. M. (2021). Empowerment and effectiveness of school boards in managing secondary schools in Kilimanjaro, Tanzania. *East African Journal of Social and Applied Sciences*, 3(1), 188–199. <https://doi.org/10.2023/eaj-sas.v3i1.111>
- Maramoko, D. D. (2022). [Effectiveness of secondary school management in addressing teachers' professional misconducts in Kiteto District, Manyara, Tanzania]. [Master's dissertation, The Open University of Tanzania]. Department of Educational Policy, Planning, and Administration. [http://repository.out.ac.tz/3729/\(open in a new window\)](http://repository.out.ac.tz/3729/(open%20in%20a%20new%20window)).
- Masue, O. S., & Askvik, S. (2017). Are school committees a source of empowerment? Insights from Tanzania. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 40(9), 780–791. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2016.1201839>.
- Matete R. E. (2022). Forms of decentralisation and their implications for educational accountability in Tanzania. *Heliyon* 8, 2022, e09436.
- Merriam, S. B. (2019). Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mgema, B. (2022). Decentralisation of educational activities and its influence on the provision of quality education: Literature review. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Education Research*, 6(1), 1–6. <http://ijmer.in.doi/2022/11.06.01>
- Mkoma, R. N., & Rwekaza, C. T. (2021). Decentralisation in Tanzania: Perceptible efficiency and effectiveness in management of country health care free education and public-private partnership. *HOLISTICA – Journal of Business and Public Administration*, 12(1), 57–68. <https://doi.org/10.2478/hjbpa-2021-0006>.
- Mwemezi, P. (2017). The Impact of Decentralisation on Public Participation in Secondary Education Service Delivery in Tanzania: A Case of Kagera Region: Unpublished dissertation, University of Dodoma, Tanzania.
- Nir, A., Ben-David, A., Bogler, R., Inbar, D., & Zohar, A. (2016). School autonomy and 21st century skills in the Israeli educational system: Discrepancies between the declarative and operational levels. *International journal of educational management*, 30(7), 1231-1246.

- Nnunduma, E. (2023). Decentralisation and delivery of secondary school education: Influence of institutional arrangements in Mtwara region. *Tanzania Journal of Education and Development*, 2(1), 70–109.
- Nnunduma, S.E., Hussein, L. (2023). Community Participation in Decentralised Secondary Education in Mtwara Region, Tanzania. *EAJESS*, 4(2) 184-194
- Norman, A.S.K. (2018). Anatomy of pay in decentralisation by devolution in Tanzania. *International Journal of Educational Administration and Policy Studies*, 10 (7), 65-71.
- Padayachee, A. S., & Gcelu, N. (2022). Collaboration: The key to managing discipline in South African schools. *South African Journal of Education*, 42(4), 1-9.
- Pernia, R. A. (2017). The dynamics of decentralisation of higher education delivery and local politics in the Philippines: The case of Mandaue City College in Cebu Province. *IAFOR Journal of Education*, 5(2), 87-103.
- Piliyesi, E. (2020). The Impact of Indiscipline on Students' Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Balaka District, Malawi. *Journal of Popular Education in Africa*, 4(1), 4-28.
- Romanowski, M. (2020). Education transferring and decentralised reforms: The case of Qatar. Prospects.
- Rwiza, G. (2016). The decentralisation policy for education in Tanzania: The impact on primary head teachers and their instructional and managerial roles.
- Sheremet, O., Chorny, O., Pshenychna, T., Sheremet, Y., & Domotskyi, D. (2024). Analysis of the impact of decentralisation policy on higher education management: Challenges and opportunities. *Academia*, (35-36), 92-111.
- Sumintono, B. (2018). School-based management policy and its practices at the district level in post-new order Indonesia. *Journal of Indonesian Social Sciences and Humanities*, 2, 41-67.
- UNESCO (2017). Decentralisation of Education in Pakistan. Country Report at the UNESCO Seminar on “EFA’ Implementation: Teacher and Resource Management in the Context of Decentralisation. Administrative Staff College of India, Hyderabad, 6-8 January 2017.
- United Republic of Tanzania (URT) (2025). *Tanzania Development Vision 2050*. Dodoma: National Planning Commission.
- United Republic of Tanzania. (1995). Education and Training Policy. Dar es Salaam: Adult Education Press.

- United Republic of Tanzania. (2000). Tanzania Development Vision (2025). Dar es Salaam: Planning Commission.
- United Republic of Tanzania (1998). *Local government reform programme policy paper on local government reform*. PMO-RALG.
- United Republic of Tanzania (2008), *Education sector development programme (2008-2017)* revised edition. Dar es Salaam: Ministry of Education and Vocational Training.
- United Republic of Tanzania (2014). *Education and training Policy*. Ministry of Education Vocational Education and Training: Government Printers: Dar es Salaam.
- World Bank. (2011). *An Impact evaluation of Sri Lanka's policies to improve the performance of schools and primary school students through its school improvement and school report card programs*. South Asia Human Development Unit Report No. 35. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- World Bank. (2021). Tanzania Education Sector Institutional and Governance Assessment. The World Bank. <https://ideas.repec.org/p/wbk/wboper/35973>.
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Yusuf A. M., & Abubakar A. S. (2026). Decentralised education in Somalia: Lessons from East African models. *Cogent Education*, 13(1), 2612325.