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Educational governance in Rwanda. Coordinating action for equity through cooperation between education providers

Zusammenfassung

Chancengleichheit ist in der Bildung einer der wichtigsten Faktoren für nachhaltige Entwicklungsziele. Trotz der quantitativen Verbesserungen beim Zugang zu Bildung in Entwicklungsländern ist die Minimierung von Ungleichheiten bzgl. des Zugangs zur Bildung – bei der Beteiligung und bei den Lernmöglichkeiten – ein wichtiger Schlüssel zur Bildungsentwicklung. Dieser Artikel befasst sich mit der Struktur der Bildungspolitik und ihren Auswirkungen auf die Chancengleichheit durch die Zusammenarbeit zwischen verschiedenen Bildungsträgern in Ruanda. Anhand einer Analyse des Bildungsgesetzes wird die Governance im Bildungswesen als ein gemischter Rahmen aus Zentralisierung und regelungsorientierter Partizipation konzeptualisiert. Offensichtlich vertritt die Existenz von Governance-Gremien unterschiedliche Bedürfnisse und fördert somit die Bildungsgerechtigkeit. Der Artikel regt weitere wissenschaftliche Analysen und politische Überlegungen zu Bildungsgovernance und Gerechtigkeit in Ruanda an.

Schlüsselworte: *Bildungsmanagement, Gerechtigkeit, Bildungsanbieter*

Abstract

Equity in education is one of key drivers of sustainable development goals. Despite the quantitative improvements of access to education in developing countries, disparities in terms of access, participation and learning opportunities are issues to be reflected in education development. The article at hand reflects the structure of educational governance and its implications to equity via cooperation between education providers in Rwanda. Through the analysis of law governing education, the educational governance is enacted as a mixed framework of centralisation and compliance-driven participation. Apparently, the existence of governance bodies is likely to represent different needs and hence promote equitable education. However, this seems to be limited by conformity to central orientations. The paper suggests further scientific and political reflections on educational governance and equity in Rwanda.

Keywords: *Educational Governance, Equity, Educational Provider*

Introduction

The major focus of this paper concerns the reflections on the structure of educational governance and its implications to educational equity in Rwanda. Educational governance implies cooperation between stakeholders and providers. In this paper, the focus is on the cooperation between governmental and non-governmental educational providers. The relation of governance and equity in the education sector has been widely explored and the two concepts are found to have close linkage (Alan, Marks, Novelli, Valiente & Scandurra, 2016). Educational governance influences decisions related to matters of equity, especially the distribution of human resources, of financial means and of infrastructure. Moreover, the structure and functioning of educational governance in each country reflects, explicitly or implicitly, how educational needs for vulnerable groups of people are catered for. In the context of Rwanda, governance of education is reflected in three typologies of school systems: state, subsidised and private owned schools (Government of Rwanda [GoR], 2021, p. 34). In addition, governance is discussed in terms of different levels of power distribution – centralisation versus decentralisation. These links are reflected in the paper concerning equity in education.

In the context of theRwandan education system, educational equity is mainly reflected quantitatively in terms of access, participation, and learning achievements. Educational statistics as annually provided by the Ministry of education show disparities in terms of access to pre-primary education and gender disparities where girls are underrepresented in secondary, vocational and higher education (MINEDUC, 2018/2020). In terms of learning achievement, there are inequalities between urban and rural primary schools (urban better than rural) and between school ownership, respectively higher in private, average by government-aided and lower by public rural schools (REB, 2016). Regarding financing education, there is inequity in terms of direct financing by parents between schools located in rural and urban areas. Pupils with more learning needs in rural areas are worse funded as compared to urban schools (Institute of Policy Analysis and Research-Rwanda [IPAR], 2012, p. 3). Existing data show the inequity, which is linked to the typology of schools. The law governing education in Rwanda (Republic of Rwanda, 2021)

will be critically analysed through the method of content analysis. The law was chosen as basic law enacting the orientation of education in Rwanda. The focus of the article is on the structure of educational governance especially the cooperation between education providers and its implications to educational equity in Rwanda. The article starts by shortly reviewing the existing literature on educational governance and equity, proceeds with the structure of educational governance with focus on existing and reconstructed typology of school system and its implications to educational equity in Rwanda and ends with a summary and outlook.

Educational Governance and Equity: Conceptual framework

Educational governance is one of the key determining factors of educational quality (UNESCO, 2004/2014). Governance in education is related to reflections on how decisions are made regarding distribution of resources to provide quality education for all. Moreover, educational governance is related to how policies are enacted, implemented, monitored, and evaluated. More than that, it clarifies the cooperation of state and non-state organisations as far as the distribution and management of educational services are concerned (OECD, 2016; Brewer & Smith, 2008).

School governance matters (OECD, 2016, p. 110; Connolly & James, 2011, p. 508; Maureen & Gelander, 2008, p. 3) and it proved to be an "enabler" that underpins other key educational elements such as effective resource utilization or stakeholders' engagement (Brewer & Smith, 2008, p. 21) and offers tools for program design and its implementation (Maureen & Gelander, 2009, p. 51). Schools operate in the society and reflect its diversities and complexities (Battalio, 2005, p. 24). The current global situation marked by uncertainty and fluidity, makes governance and school governance extremely complex (Burns & Koster, 2016, p. 58). Since the turn of millennium, governments around the world made explicit pledge to ensure universal quality education to their citizens. That commitment gave rise to a wave of changes affecting various dimensions of education systems. The traditional centralized school governance structure is claimed to be inadequate in the current complex society (Burns & Koster, 2016, p. 60). Strategies have been adopted to find a fitting governance system. Those include decentralization with a big deal of power resting on local authorities and school-based management where schools are guaranteed autonomy (Burns & Koster, 2016, p. 18; OECD, 2016, p. 110; Lincove, 2006, p. 350). Additionally, the current trend of globalization coupled with the ideas of transfer, of knowledge, and the possibility of comparability, of educational information has tremendously affected the processes of policy making and governance in education. The situation has led to a widespread expansion of internationalized models of decision making, leading to international educational governance (Wiseman et al., 2015, p. 4–7).

By its very nature, educational governance is a multi-layered activity which involves a variety of interest groups and, all aspects considered, it is not possible to find a "one size fits all"-model of educational governance. However, there are elements which proved to be necessary for the sake of governance success. Those include ideas of accountability, capacity building and stra-

tegic thinking (Burns & Koster, 2015, p. 23). Looking at all responsibilities shouldered by the school systems in the world development agenda and taking into consideration the centrality of equity in the whole development project, we posit that school governance needs to be reconsidered (Howard et al., 2019, p. 9).

Equity in education is related to the inclusivity and fairness of education provision (EACEA, 2010, p. 22). Educational equity has the premise that no condition inherent to students should stand as an obstacle to their route towards the achievement of their educational potentials. As Levi puts it, "a commitment to equity suggests that differences in outcomes should not be attributable to differences in areas such as wealth, income, power and possession" (Levi, 2003, p. 5). Within the education system, equity means to bridge the gap between low- and high-performing students (EACEA/Eurydice, 2020, p. 29; Levin, 2003, p. 5). It means to take into consideration the heterogeneity of students by valuing each individual student (EACEA/Eurydice, 2020, p. 53f.) and coming up with a fair system to allocate both school material and human resources (Sayed et al., 2020, p. 9) on the side of system. There is a call to take appropriate action, in this regard, at different levels of the educational system. Should governments ensure equitable education, prospects of achieving social justice in society could be high. Notwithstanding, there is a long way to go in the whole journey leading to equity in education, albeit the will and efforts undertaken in that respect. The current COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated the need to consider equity in school governance. Existing inequalities have proved to be a stumbling block to efforts of preferential online learning imperatively adopted after schools' closure. Basically, the access to digital platforms and technological devices was a determinant of continuation of learning albeit the ongoing crisis (Sayed, et al., 2020, p. 10). The understanding and enactment of equity in educational organization is framed by prevailing mode of governance and societal discourse about social justice (Blackmore, 2011, p. 447). The governance contributes to equity assurance through the process of participation and distribution, which entails the idea of democracy in the decision-making process and the principle of equalisation of expenditures (Sayed et al., 2020, p. 4).

Decentralization proves to be a fitting governance model for that purpose as it is premised on the ideas of stakeholders' participation. However, decentralization and participation are not enough to guarantee educational equity. A suggested ideal governance arrangement to support equity is a centralized funding (Fusarelli, 2004, p. 86) combined with a decentralized and community-based planning which reflect the existing equity concerns (Lincove, 2006, p. 353). To do that, the participation must be based on the premise of democracy, broader community representativeness and done in an inclusive environment (Lincove, 2006, p. 353f.).

Structure of Rwandan Educational Governance

Rwandan educational system is organized in four levels including pre-primary, primary, secondary, and tertiary with a TVET stream at both secondary and tertiary levels. The Law No 010/2021 of February 16th, 2021 governs the educational system. The law establishes that education services are delivered

in three types of education institutions: public, government-subsidized, and private. However only public and government-subsidised educational institutions get subsidies from the Government, which take different shapes (Republic of Rwanda, 2021). The teaching is organized around a standardized curriculum, punctuated by standardized examinations. This particular organization is thought to be conducive to equity as evidences show that the existence of a national curriculum with associated national testing is, in some regards, a requirement to equity assurance in schooling (Steffi, 2001 cited by Fusarelli, 2004, p. 85).

Educational governance in Rwanda is a complex activity encompassing a number of actors including organizational entities from central government to parents' assemblies via local governmental institutions, faith-based associations (FBO) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The Rwandan administrative structure is differentiated in two main levels, through the decentralization process, namely the central and local government. The organization of the education system follows this differentiation. At the top level, the government is entitled with responsibility to organize the educational system through policies and granting accreditations. The local government monitors the functioning of the educational system through specific regulations and resolutions (The World Bank 2011, p. 35). Besides, school owners resort to policies, procedures and reporting regulations to govern their schools. At the bottom level of the spectrum, school authorities refer to school board policies and internal rules and regulations to ensure the functioning of the system. By decentralization, a number of decisions including planning, budgeting, school construction and teachers' daily management have been delegated to local governmental entities, while schools took on responsibilities of textbooks choices and acquisition, as well as making individual action plans. District and school officials resort to participative governance in the process of operationalizing top-down policies and making independent decisions. This is done through negotiations between educational providers and stakeholders in the framework of the district educational council, the sector educational council and – to a certain extent – by the school general assembly. The idea of participation is believed to be in line with equity in education. However, the discourse in educational science shows that it works only out when the school board composition goes beyond parents and teachers and considers the representatives of the broader community in order to integrate into the educational landscape (Lincove 2006, p. 354).

Educational equity is among key commitments of Rwandan Government especially after the wreckages associated with 1994 Genocide perpetrated against Tutsi. However, from the legal perspective, the existing organization of education leaves much to be desired when it comes to equity assurance. The aforementioned law and associated policy documents address the issue of equity from its simplistic understanding by just focussing on equal chance with regards to access to education (Republic of Rwanda, p. 8). Yet, it looks silent when it comes to strategies put forth to enhance a genuine equitable learning which takes consideration of students' diversity. Basically, while there is a political will which materializes through several equity-oriented policies – recognition of diversity in educational processes, improved girls' education, inclusive school governance, applying meritocracy in the process of awarding higher learning scholarship, introduction of no-fee basic education, dissemination of schools' infrastructures – there is still a gap in terms of understanding of equity as a policy imperative.

Type / Criteria	Public/ government owned	Government-subsidised	Private
Built by	State	State, individuals, faith-based organisations (FBO) and non-governmental organisations (NGO)	NGOs and private enterprises
Owner of land	State	Individuals, FBOs and NGOs	NGOs and private enterprises
Management	State	State, individual, FBOs and NGOs	NGOs/enterprises under state-enacted prescriptions
Teacher salaries	State	Mainly state with contributions from individuals, FBOs and NGOs	NGOs/enterprises
Teacher deployment	State		Institution owner
Curriculum	State-centralised; designed at university & approved by the state		State and/or international
Management of transitions	State-centralised		Institution owner

Table 1: Existing typology of educational institutions in Rwanda
(Source: Designed by the authors based on GoR, 2021)

Typology of schools and implications for equity in Rwanda

In the context of this article, we first present the existing typology of schools to reflect them in relation of governance and equity.

Existing typology of schools in Rwanda

As mentioned above, the types of schools in Rwanda are mainly defined per title of ownership and responsibility. These are (1) so called "public institutions", (2) "government-subsidised education institutions", and (3) "private" institutions (GoR, 2021). The naming is misleading as the majority of government institutions do ensure public access. As per the Official gazette no 010/2021, Special of 18/02/2021, government schools and government-subsidies schools originate from different sources as illustrated in the table 1.

As shown in table 1, it appears that educational institutions are defined based on ownership and management responsibility. For the transition from one level of education to the other, there are obligatory national examinations administered by the Ministry of Education. After primary education and lower secondary education, results of the national examinations determine whether (a) a student move to the next level or not as well as (b) the type of school, which can be either a boarding or no-boarding (day-)schools (GoR, 2019; JICA, 2012). The Ministry of Education authorizes the boarding status at secondary education level and by exception for pre-primary and primary education for schools for learners with special needs (GoR, 2021). For upper secondary education, students can choose from three types of schools namely general secondary schools, teacher-training college (TTC), and technical and vocational education and training schools (TVET) (JICA, 2012). At tertiary education, the government of Rwanda allows also the establishment of special education schools that provide education to learners who have special education needs like disabilities, talents or unusual intellectual ability (GoR, 2021). Up to secondary education, schools whether public, govern-ment-subsidised or private are called to follow the curriculum developed by a national agency. However, private schools which fulfil the requirements can be allowed to offer an international curriculum (GoR, 2021). According to this flexibility, we find in Rwanda private schools offering only either national or international curriculum[1], and private schools offering at the same time the national curriculum and international curriculum.[2]

Reconstructed typology of educational institutions in Rwanda

In reflecting access to education and the allocation of finances, the typology of schools in Rwanda may be reclassified, according to the tuition fee (financing), and the access to education (see table 2). It emerges from table 2 that there are other aspects that need to be considered for a deep understanding of the implications of educational management in relation to educational equity, how they are structured, and managed. At the level of financing, educational institutions are classified as state financed or non-state financed. Aspects of access and financing especially in terms of tuition fees show a need to be reflected for better understanding of educational equity (see table 2). We see from that analysis that limited access is not always a question to education equity, i.e. regarding non-state special needs schools. They, on the one hand, provide access to learners with special education needs but at the same time are limited by their geographical distribution and number of available places.

It appears from the table above that there are non-state financed institutions of education which provide open access to education (example of non-state financed schools) and others which have limited access (example of non-state financed international schools). This brings the need of reflecting on the meaning of public and private educational institutions, not only in terms of ownership (see GoR 201), but also it terms of how they provide access to education. In this regard of access, even non-state educational institutions may be "public" as they provide open access to education and government funded institutions may be highly selective.

| FINANCING | ACCESS | | |
	Limited	Conditional	Open
No fee	Non-state financed special needs schools (limited by the number of schools, geographical location, and number of places)	None	State financed nursery and basic education
Low fee		State financed boarding secondary schools	Non-State financed schools and higher education institutions
High fee	Non-state financed national and international schools	State financed higher education and non-state financed international higher education	None

Table 2: Reconstructed typology of educational institutions in Rwanda
(Source: Designed by the authors according to the official gazette, GoR, 2021)

Educational governance and equity in Rwanda: Summary and outlook

The critical review of the issue of educational governance and equity shows different perspectives in the context of Rwanda, which enlighten further reflections in educational science and policy. First, the concept of equity only is implicitly reflected in the law governing education. Secondly, the framework of educational governance in Rwanda is mixed. It is centralized in the sense that decisions are made by the state to be implemented by delegated local governmental institutions in collaboration with other educational stakeholders. The latter include parents, FBOs and NGOs. At the local level, it is a participative-compliance-driven governance. This is justified by the existence of governing bodies at local including school level where different stakeholders: parents, FBOs, NGOs and community are represented. Apparently, the existence of governance bodies is likely to represent different needs and hence promote equitable education. However, this seems to be limited by the conformity to central orientations. Third, the typology of schools especially shows a double perspective. On the one side, the state finances educational services in public and government-aided schools, which is an aspect of equity in terms of granting access to education. Nevertheless, it raises the issue of equity in terms of equalization of resource allocation for unequal educational needs. Additionally, the state financing system is likely to contribute to unequal distribution of resources by financing educational institutions solely based on status to the expenses of students' needs. The direct and indirect financing from parents, due to income inequality, may limit the fair access to learning resources. The higher the fees to be paid, the more limited access. In this perspectives, further political and scientific reflections are needed:

- Towards the reconceptualization of the equity and its inclusion in the legal and political educational framework.
- Towards empirical research on practical formal and informal cooperation between educational stakeholders at local levels and strategies to address different educational needs.
- Towards the establishment of a framework of cooperation between state and other educational providers and stakeholders at central level.

Notes

1 Examples of schools offering only international curriculum: https://greenhillsacademy.org/, https://kepler.org/

2 Examples of schools offering both (national and international curriculum): http://rivierahighschool.org/#, https://www.kingdavidacademy.co/

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