



School-based management developments and partnership: Evidence from Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

School-based management (SBM) with devolution of authority and responsibility to school level decision-makers has become the most prominent feature of public school management systems in most countries around the world. This article provides the global trends and current developments in SBM in Indonesia with an emphasis on how SBM has created partnership and participatory decision-making processes in school level. The data reported here are on the basis of an empirical survey involving 504 school council members from Ngada Flores followed by 42 interviews with all relevant stakeholders.

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1. Introduction

School-based management (SBM) with the formation of mandatory school councils has become the most prominent feature of public school management systems in most countries around the world. More particularly, in Indonesia, the Central Government established a Commission of National Education (*Komisi Nasional Pendidikan/KNP*) in February 2001 on the basis of [Law 22/1999](#) by which education was decentralized. The KNP worked until December 2001 with responsibilities, among others, to: (1) formulate policy recommendations to have a better quality education and (2) provide inputs to government about educational decentralization. It was expected that the work of this Commission would become a basis from which to comprehensively reform Indonesian education.

One of the recommendations of the KNP was to develop educational councils at district level and school councils at school level. The Commission recommended the formation of Education Council (*Dewan Pendidikan*) at district level and school councils (*Dewan Sekolah/Komite Sekolah*) at school level to improve the quality of national education. The Government then embarked on the formation of school councils in Western Sumatera, Eastern Java, and Bali. On the basis of these trials, the councils were considered strategic in promoting democratic principles in schools, creating higher levels of parental participation in school governance, and improving the quality of national education. For these reasons, in 2002 and 2004, the Government provided a set of

guidelines to establish mandatory corporate governing body type school councils in accordance with the [Law 22/1999](#) on Regional Autonomy, [Law 25/2000](#) on National Development Program 2000–2004, the Commission Report, and [Education Act 20/2003](#) on National Education System. Five years later in 2009, the Directorate General of Basic and Secondary Education provided further guidance and assistance to empower school councils by providing several modules on the clarity of authority and responsibility of the councils.

Indeed, historically for a period of over 50 years, the Indonesian public school system was fully centralized with particular reference to the bureaucratic model of school management. Even though [Education Act No. 4/1950](#) strengthened the participation of parents and community members through the formation of the Associations of Parents and Teachers, known as *Persatuan Orang Tua Murid dan Guru* (POMG), its main responsibility was limited only to non-instructional matters such as school buildings and school finances, while authority in terms of teaching/learning was vested in school staff ([Education Act 4/1950](#), Chapter 78, Article 4). Two decades later, between 1970s and 1990s, POMG was substituted by the *Badan Pembantu Penyelenggara Pendidikan* (BP3). Similar to POMG, the authority and responsibility of the BP3 was limited to supporting school finances. Authority with regard to deployment and development of staff, curriculum, textbooks, and school facilities were the responsibility of central government, while responsibility in building maintenance and renovations was devolved to district governments ([Government Regulation 28/1990](#), Article 9). On the basis of the regulation, the principal was given responsibility in terms of teaching/learning operation in school, school administration, staff training, and school facilities maintenance.

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However, with the turn of 21st century, a new concept of decentralization and devolution of significant power and authority to all Indonesian school councils has been emerging as a new school organization culture. Aimed at improving the quality of schooling, devolution of authority and responsibility in terms of grant expenditures has been vested at the school level. This paper focuses on how the contribution of education decentralization policy through school-based management (SBM) towards the creation of partnership on the part of school stakeholders, has led to the participatory decision-making for school level decision-makers.

2. Global reforms and theoretical concepts of SBM

School-based management (SBM) is a worldwide education reform strategy that appears under various terms – *site-based management*, *site-based decision making*, *school-based decision making*, and *shared decision making*. However, even though these terms represent the widespread education reform agenda, they vary slightly in meaning, particularly on the extent that authority and responsibility are devolved to school councils or whether the councils are mandatory or advisory.

Models of SBM have become largely accepted as a major reform initiative both in developed nations including Australia, New Zealand, the UK, the USA and developing countries such as Indonesia, Hong Kong, and Thailand. The Australian education system from its inception in 1789 showed tendencies for centralization and bureaucratic forms of school management. However, since the mid 1970s, some of the Australian systems took the initiative in moving towards a new concept of decentralization of education to regional levels with devolution of significant power and authority to school level with community participation in school governance (Gamage, 1992, 1994a, 1996a, 2003; Sharpe, 1996; Connors and McMorrow, 1990). More particularly, Gamage (1996a: 36) reveals that with the enactment of the Education School Councils Act of 1975 and the establishment of school councils as mandatory corporate governing bodies in 1976, Victoria followed the move towards SBM.

In the context of the UK, scholars have reported that school governing bodies in England and Wales have been given greater powers to manage their own affairs within clearly defined national frameworks (Bush and Gamage, 2001; Raab, 2000). They clarify that the power has been typically devolved to school level governing bodies, comprising of the representatives of relevant stakeholders, while operational management is devolved to the principal. They claim that the transfer of powers to governing bodies can be viewed as a willingness to empower parents and business interests.

In the context of the USA, with particular reference to the success of the Chicago SBM model, some researchers assert that the decision-making authority devolved to the Local School Councils (LSCs) was significant, particularly in view of the fact that each council has the authority to hire and fire the principal on the basis of a four-year performance contract (Gamage and Zajda, 2005; Hanson, 1991). Other researchers report that the reforms have contributed to the improvements of teaching and learning, financial and administrative management, professional recruitment standards, and academic performance and school management (Edge, 2000; Hess, 1999; Wong, 1998; Hanson, 1991).

Based on research conducted in Victoria, the ACT and NSW, and other countries, Gamage (1996b: 65) defines SBM as a pragmatic approach to a formal alteration of the bureaucratic model of school administration with a more democratic structure. It identifies the individual school as the primary unit of improvement relying on the redistribution of decision-making authority through which improvements in a school are stimulated and sustained. In this

context, the focus on facilitating improvements in the individual school as the key to successful educational reform strategies has a good deal of public appeal and other research support (Cheng, 1996; David, 1989; Gamage and Zajda, 2005; Gamage, 1998, 2003; Herman and Herman, 1993; Odden and Wohlstetter, 1995; Whitty et al., 1998).

Marburger (1991: 25–26) considers SBM as an approach in which decisions that are traditionally made by a superintendent are now being made by the school council comprising the principal, teachers, parents, citizens, and the students. Likewise, Anderson (2006: 223) defines SBM as “the shifting of decision-making authority from the district office to individual schools.” Many scholars also affirm that the movement towards SBM is often assumed as the approach to serve students better by improving the school practices in meeting the diverse expectations of the stakeholders in a changing environment towards increasing student performance and achievements (Bandur and Gamage, 2009; Cheng and Mok, 2007; Anderson, 2006; Caldwell, 2005; Gamage and Zajda, 2005; Gamage and Sooksomchitra, 2004; Muijs et al., 2004; Sheldon and Voorhis, 2004; Blank, 2004; Gamage, 1994b, 1998).

Gamage (1996a: 21–22) has proposed a revised theory of SBM based on 20 years of experience in the Australian SBM systems. In the revised theory, he has devised seven assumptions, on which to base a more realistic application of SBM. The first assumption is that a school council shall consist of all relevant stakeholders such as the principal or the head teacher and the representatives of staff (both teaching and non-teaching), parents, local community, and in the case of secondary schools, the students. The representatives of the staff, parents, and students are expected to be elected by the relevant constituencies, whereas the community representatives are to be nominated by the other elected members and the school leader.

The second assumption is that the devolution or transfer of both authority and responsibility needs to be affected by a legislative enactment. This approach will transform the former advisory body to a democratic governing body. The third assumption is the heavy reliance on the voluntary participation of the parents, community, and student representatives in the process of policy formulation in governing the school. It is believed that the school stakeholders are motivated and dedicated to developing quality schools because of the genuine transfer of authority and responsibility.

The fourth assumption is that the lay councillors, with appropriate induction and training, will acquire sufficient knowledge to function as equal partners. The knowledge and experience of the lay-members who come from fields other than education are relevant and useful to the educational enterprise in order that the needs of contemporary schools are met. The fifth assumption is that because of de-zoning, the schools need to function in an interesting and effective mode that can improve the image of the school in a similar way to the business reputation of a private/public enterprise. Such an image will help attract high levels of school enrolments.

The sixth assumption is that SBM would be cost effective because the ownership of the policies and higher levels of commitment leads to minimization of costs and better utilization of limited resources. More resources would also be available as a result of minimizing the size of the educational bureaucracy, as well as drawing on previously untapped resources from the school community.

The last assumption is that stricter control needs to be enforced by the centre to ensure accountability for the finances placed at the disposal of the school in conformity with the Ministerial/Departmental Guidelines relating to the operation of school councils. The principal is made accountable to the

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