

The rule of School-Based Management in developing countries

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ABSTRACT

For more than 100 years the lack of a school management methodology has been the cause of countless complaints. But it has been only in the last 30 years that efforts have been made to find a solution to this problem. School-based management (SBM) has become a very popular movement over the past decade. The SBM work program emerged out of a need to define the concept more clearly, review the evidence, support impact assessments in various countries, and provide some initial feedback to teams preparing education projects. During the first phase of the SBM work program, the team examined in detail the existing literature on SBM. It focuses on the major issues generally faced by implementers while designing and implementing SBM programs and gives examples from a number of World Bank financed projects from around the world that have SBM components. In addition, it also provides more in-depth analysis of a few country case studies where the process of decentralization of authority to the local-level has taken place over the past decades.

Key words: School, Based, Management, School Based Management, SBM

Introduction

Despite the clear commitment of governments and international agencies to the education sector, efficient and equitable access is still proving to be elusive to many, especially for girls, indigenous peoples and other poor and marginalized groups. There are many international initiatives that are focusing on these access issues with great commitment, but, even where the vast majority of children do have access to education facilities; the quality of that education is often very poor. This has become increasingly apparent from the scores from international learning tests in which most students from developing countries fail to excel. Evidence has shown that merely increasing resource allocation – without also introducing institutional reforms – to the education sector will not increase equity or improve the quality of education. (King, 1998)

Governments around the world are introducing a range of strategies aimed at improving the financing and delivery of education services, and have recently added an emphasis on improving quality as well as increasing quantity. The decentralization of educational decision-making is one such strategy. Advocates of this strategy maintain that decentralizing decision-making encourages demand and ensures that schools reflect local priorities and values. By giving a voice and decision-making power to local stakeholders who know more about the local education systems than central policymakers, decentralization can improve educational outcomes and increase client satisfaction. One way to decentralize decision-making power in education is popularly known as School-based Management (SBM). There are other definitions and names for this concept, but they all refer to the decentralization of authority from the central government to the school level. SBM emphasizes the individual school (as represented by any combination of principals, teachers, parents, students, and other members of the school community) as the primary unit for improving education and the redistribution of decision-making authority over school operations as the primary means by which this improvement can be stimulated and sustained. (According to Hanushek, 2007).

Wohlstetter, P. and S.A. Mohrman (1996) believed that SBM-type reforms have been introduced in countries such as Australia, Canada, Israel, and the United States, some going back 30 years. There are many reasons for this popularity. SBM has the potential to be a low cost way of making public spending on education more efficient by increasing the accountability of the agents involved and by empowering the clients to improve learning outcomes. And by putting power in the hands of the end users of the service (education), SBM eventually leads to better school management that is more cognizant of and responsive to the needs of those end users, thus in creating a better and more conducive learning environment for the students.

What is school-based management?:

School-based management (SBM) is the decentralization of levels of authority to the school level. Responsibility and decision-making over school operations is transferred to principals, teachers, parents, sometimes students, and other school community members. The school-level actors, however, have to conform to, or operate, within a set of centrally determined policies. In other words SBM is the decentralization of

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authority from the central government to the school level. School-based management can be viewed conceptually as a formal alteration of governance structures, as a form of decentralization that identifies the individual school as the primary unit of improvement and relies on the redistribution of decision-making authority as the primary means through which improvement might be stimulated and sustained. SBM programs take on many different forms, both in terms of who has the power to make decisions as well as the degree of decision-making devolved to the school level. While some programs transfer authority to principals or teachers only, others encourage or mandate parental and community participation, often in school committees (sometimes known as school councils). In general, SBM programs transfer authority over one or more of the following activities: budget allocation, hiring and firing of teachers and other school staff, curriculum development, textbook and other educational material procurement, infrastructure improvement, setting the school calendar to better meet the specific needs of the local community, and monitoring and evaluation of teacher performance and student learning outcomes. SBM also includes school-development plans, school grants, and sometimes information dissemination of educational results (otherwise known as 'report cards'). (Gertler, 2010)

Starting in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada, SBM programs have been implemented and are currently being developed in a number of countries, including Hong Kong (China). The majority of the SBM projects in the current World Bank portfolio are in Latin American and South Asian countries, including Argentina, Bangladesh, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Mexico, and Sri Lanka. There are also two Bank-supported SBM projects in Europe and Central Asia (in FYR Macedonia and in Serbia and Montenegro), and one each in East Asia and the Pacific (the Philippines), the Middle East and North Africa (Lebanon), and Sub-Saharan Africa (Lesotho). Other projects and programs have been introduced more recently in Madagascar, the Gambia, and Senegal. Gertler et al (2010)

Why is school-based management important?:

Advocates of SBM assert that it should improve educational outcomes for a number of reasons. First, it improves accountability of principals and teachers to students, parents and teachers. Accountability mechanisms that put people at the center of service provision can go a long way in making services work and improving outcomes by facilitating participation in service delivery. Second, it allows local decision-makers to determine the appropriate mix of inputs and education policies adapted to local realities and needs. (Anderson, 2005)

Impact of school-based management:

Evaluations of SBM programs offer mixed evidence of impacts. Nicaragua's Autonomous School Program gives school-site councils – comprised of teachers, students and a voting majority of parents – authority to determine how 100 percent of school resources are allocated and authority to hire and fire principals, a privilege that few other school councils in Latin America enjoy. Two evaluations found that the number of decisions made at the school level contributed to better test scores. Mexico's compensatory education program provides extra resources to disadvantaged rural primary schools and all indigenous schools, thus increasing the supply of education. However, the compensatory package has several components. If one breaks the intervention up in its multiple components, then it is shown that empowering parent associations seems to have a substantial effect in improving educational outcomes, even when controlling for the presence of beneficiaries of Mexico's large and successful conditional cash transfer program (Oportunidades, formerly Progressa). This is strong evidence of the positive effects of decentralizing education to the lower levels (Gertler, Patrinos and Rubio forthcoming). Various evaluations of SBM programs in the United States have found evidence of decreased dropout and student suspension rates but no impact on test scores. (Gertler, 2010)

SBM Goals and Objectives:

- (1) Increase parent & community participation
- (2) Empower principals & teachers
- (3) Build local capacity
- (4) Improve school quality & efficiency

The Theory behind School-Based Management:

Good education is not only about physical inputs, such as classrooms, teachers, and textbooks, but also about incentives that lead to better instruction and learning. Education systems are extremely demanding of the managerial, technical, and financial capacity of governments, and, thus, as a service, education is too complex to be efficiently produced and distributed in a centralized fashion. Hanushek and Woessmann (2007) suggest that

most of the incentives that affect learning outcomes are institutional in nature, and they identify three in particular: (a) choice and competition; (b) school autonomy; and (c) school accountability. The idea behind choice and competition is that parents who are interested in maximizing their children's learning outcomes are able to choose to send their children to the most productive that they can find. This demand-side pressure on schools will thus improve the performance of all schools if they want to compete for students. Similarly, local decision-making and fiscal decentralization can have positive effects on school outcomes such as test scores or graduation rates by holding the schools accountable for the "outputs" that they produce. The World Development Report, *Making Services Work for Poor People*, presents a very similar framework, in that it suggests that good quality and timely service provision can be ensured if service providers can be held accountable to their clients. In the case of the education sector, this would mean students and their parents. In the context of developed countries, the core idea behind SBM is that those who work in a school building should have greater control of the management of what goes on in the building. In developing countries, the idea behind SBM is less ambitious, in that it focuses mainly on involving community and parents in the school decision making process rather than putting them entirely in control. However, in both cases, the central government always plays some role in education, and the precise definition of this role affects how SBM activities are conceived and implemented. SBM in almost all of its manifestations involves community members in school decision-making. Because these community members are usually parents of children enrolled in the school, they have an incentive to improve their children's education. As a result, SBM can be expected to improve student achievement and other outcomes as these local people demand closer monitoring of school personnel, better student evaluations, a closer match between the school's needs and its policies, and a more efficient use of resources. For instance, although the evidence is mixed, in a number of diverse countries, such as Papua New Guinea, India, and Nicaragua, parental participation in school management has reduced teacher absenteeism. SBM has several other benefits. Under these arrangements, schools are managed more transparently, thus reducing opportunities for corruption. Also, SBM often gives parents and stakeholders opportunities to increase their skills. In some cases, training in shared decision-making, interpersonal skills, and management skills is offered to school council members so that they can become more capable participants in the SBM process and at the same time benefit the community as a whole.

Summary of behind SBM:

- Good education not only about physical inputs but about incentives leading to better instruction and learning
- Choice, competition and demand-side pressure can influence & alter practice
- Schools can be held accountable for the 'outputs' they produce
- Accountability mechanisms that put people at center of service provision can go long way in making services work & improve outcomes

How School-Based Management Can Increase Participation and Improve School Outcomes:

Unlike in developed countries where SBM is introduced explicitly to improve students' academic performance, how school decentralization will eventually affect student performance in developing countries is less clear. This section tries to define the ways in which SBM can increase participation and transparency and improve school outcomes. First, the SBM model must define exactly which powers are vested in which individuals or committees and how these powers are to be coordinated to make the plan work-able within both the school culture and the available resources. However, the structure of authority needs to remain flexible enough to enable school managers to deal with any unexpected events, which always seem to emerge during implementation. Second, the success of SBM requires the support of the various school-level stakeholders, particularly of teachers. Also vital to the success of SBM is for school principals to support the decentralization reform. This is not a foregone conclusion, as principals will remain personally accountable for the performance of their school but will no longer have complete control over its management. In effect, they are being asked to give up some authority without a corresponding decrease in personal accountability. Once SBM is in place, principals can no longer blame the policies of the school district when things go wrong. The support of both local and national governments is also required. SBM by definition requires these governments to surrender some power and authority to the school level, but they retain the right and ability to reverse their earlier decision in favor of SBM if they feel their power is being usurped. The final and most important source of necessary support is from parents and other community members. It is important, however, to distinguish between parents and other community members. While parents are always part of the community that surrounds a school, school councils do not have to include parents as members. For instance, in the United States, many schools are locally controlled in the sense that a school board of local residents officially sets policy, but there may be no parental participation in these schools. In some cases, wealthy individuals in a community may be members of a school council simply because they financially support the school. Particularly in developed countries, parental

participation as members of school councils or of the group that is implementing SBM is distinct from community participation.

However, in developing countries, in particular in isolated small or rural communities, parental participation tends to be synonymous with community participation, since in these small communities almost everybody has a family member in school. (Abu- Duhou, 1999)

The expectation underlying SBM is that greater parental involvement will mean that schools will be more responsive to local demands (for example, for better teaching methods or more inputs) and that decisions will be taken in the interests of children rather than adults. A further hope is that involved parents will become unpaid or minimally paid auxiliary staff who will help teachers in classrooms and with other minor activities. Furthermore, even if parents are too busy working to help in the classroom, they can still encourage their children to do their homework and to show them, in this and other ways, that their family really values schooling and academic achievement. Since parents are networked in various ways with community leaders, the further hope is that parental support for SBM will encourage local community leaders to put schools higher on their political agendas and thus provide the schools with more material resources. Once the nexus of autonomy-participation and accountability has been defined and a realistic management plan has been drawn up that has the support of all stakeholders, then it becomes possible to expect better school outcomes. Thereafter, the hope is that the school climate will change as the stakeholders work together in a collegial way to manage the school. However, there is little evidence that this really happens in practice. Also, the possibility exists that teachers and principals will come to resent being constantly monitored by parents and school council members, which will cause relations within the school to deteriorate. (King, 1998)

At the same time, the teaching climate of a school is predicated on, among many other factors, how motivated teachers are to teach well, whether they know how to teach well, how good the various curricula are, how eager pupils are to learn, and how much parents actually support their children's learning in whatever ways are practical for them. Any school that wants to improve its academic record will have to work actively on some or all of these factors. Sometimes, the obstacles to improving the quality of instruction are motivational, sometimes they are cognitive in the sense of what teachers know, and sometimes they are social in the sense of petty personal matters that can prevent teachers from behaving professionally. Ideally, under SBM, because those who run the school are intimately acquainted with the individuals who work there, they will be able to identify the specific problems that need to be fixed and use their authority to find and implement solutions. Some caveats must be mentioned about SBM. Decentralization or devolution does not necessarily give more power to the general public because it is susceptible to being captured by elites. As for the relationship between decentralization, pro-poor growth, and reduced corruption, the evidence is mixed. Bardhan and Mookherjee, (2002) suggested that there may be numerous reasons why local control over resource allocation or decision-making may not yield the desired outcomes. First, local democracy and political accountability is often weak in developing countries and can lead to capture of governance—at the various levels—by elite groups. Second, in more traditional and rural areas with a history of feudalism, the poor or minorities may feel the need for a strong central authority to ensure that services are delivered to them and not just to the more powerful local citizens. Third, and related to this, is the issue that there may be no culture of accountability within communities, meaning that no one would think to question any actions taken by the group running the school . This can be a problem in places where the teacher is regarded as the ultimate authority by the virtue of being the only “highly” qualified individual in a community. Finally, those given the responsibility for managing the school may not have the capacity to do so, which points up the need to build the capacity of education stakeholders at the grassroots level to ensure that SBM reforms do not fail in their execution. These caveats help to strengthen our understanding of the pattern of SBM in developing countries as discussed above. In particular, the caveats strengthen the notion that the specific type of SBM introduced in any given country depends or should ideally depend on the political economy of the particular country. For instance, strong SBM reforms have been introduced, and have been quite successful, in those countries where communities have been forced by some calamity such as war or a natural disaster to come together as a group to find ways to deliver basic services, including education as in the Central American countries. (Bardhan and Mookherjee, 2002)

From SBM to Outcomes: The Pathways:

1. Those at the local level have more / better information.
 - A. Key decisions about school personnel
 - B. Key decisions about spending
 - C. Changes in the educational process
 - D. Resource mobilization

2. More involvement by the community and parents imply better monitoring and more accountability.
 - A. Direct involvement of parents & community in school

- B.** Links between parental involvement and decisions
- C.** Changes in accounting
- D.** Changes in the school climate

A Few Caveats:

Notwithstanding the basic theory of SBM, no theorist disputes the interdependence of governments, school administration, teacher classroom behavior, and, in most cases, parental attitudes. So by definition, putting SBM into practice involves ensuring that all of these actors work together in a system of mutual dependence. However, devolving power to the school level means that some groups outside of the school, such as district or local education offices, are likely to lose some of their power, thus changing the power dynamics within each school. For instance, this might mean that teachers have to surrender some control over how they run their classrooms or that local education offices lose control over funds and, hence, the power that comes with that. Thus, describing SBM in terms of the transfer of powers will inevitably make it difficult to implement because, while some stakeholders will gain, others will lose. This can be exacerbated by the fact that the powers that are most commonly devolved to the school level are those that matter most to schools, such as its administration (budgets and personnel), its pedagogy (curriculum and teaching practices), and its external relations (with governments and the local community). As more decision-making reverts to school staff, parents, and local community members, it is central and local government officials who are most likely to lose the authority that comes with making budgetary decisions and with hiring and firing personnel, and many are likely to resent the loss. For instance, in Chicago, decision-making authority over school management was transferred to local school councils consisting of the principals, teacher representatives, parents, and local community members. In some cases, local community members took over one or more school councils and then proceeded to use them for their own political ends (such as increasing community control over city resources and their say in non-educational matters) rather than for the education of children. As a result, the mayor ended the SBM experiment by reclaiming authority and budgets and thus essentially making the local school councils redundant. (Cook, 2007)

Also, SBM often requires teachers to play greater roles in the governance and management of the schools where they teach. While this enlarges the scope of their job, it also requires more time and energy from them and can sometimes limit their traditional freedom to do whatever they want inside the classroom. Not all teachers appreciate having to take on additional managerial roles and responsibilities, even when these changes are marginal. By making the school the centerpiece of educational policy change, SBM does not assume that the roles played by either the government or by individual teachers will be negligible. Public schools will always exist in some larger policy and administrative context that affects their operations. The key is to identify exactly what the government's role in decision-making should be. (Wohlstetter, 1996)

Conclusions:

While SBM is conceptually clear, there are many ways in which its components can be combined and implemented. Pragmatically, this makes SBM a concept of only modest, in other words, a concept that cannot have a unique form in all the places where it is implemented. There are numerous ways to combine different degrees of autonomy, participation, and accountability to create a particular reform. Each variation has to be appropriate for the particular culture and politics of the country in question. The difficulties of designing the ideal reform for a given set of circumstances have not deterred countries from adopting SBM. Most countries have adopted SBM to increase the participation of parents and communities in schools, or to empower principals and teachers, or to raise student achievement levels, or, by devolution of authority, to create accountability mechanisms to make the decision-making process more transparent. In any case, the hope is that giving power to the people who are close to the core of the service will increase the efficiency and improve the quality of the service. This report has focused on the concept of SBM in its different forms and the conceptual framework for understanding it.

The costs of reform are likely to be smaller than the benefits, thus increasing the appeal of the reform. Many SBM reforms have multiple goals, which include participation as an outcome rather than a way to achieve a goal such as improving learning outcomes. Other SBM reforms have aimed to encourage parental interest in the school as a way to supplement its recurrent cost financing. It is important to keep the goals of the program clear, to ensure that adequate resources go into the program to fulfill its specific goals, and to build the necessary capacity at all levels. Complex reforms with multiple goals and limited resources in a constrained environment can be very difficult to implement.

Because of the dearth of widespread evidence on the impact and effectiveness of SBM in practice, we still have a number of questions that must go unanswered until more evidence is available. As the knowledge base grows, more attention needs to be given to the specific outcomes that are produced by different forms of SBM.

For example, do administrative controls SBMs work better than, say, professional control SBMs, and in what contexts? Does more autonomy need to be devolved to the school level to improve intermediate and long-term outcomes? What sort of accountability arrangements work best and under what conditions? What role do parents play in practice? Do they need to be active participants in school management? What about the larger community? And is there a difference in impacts by countries' levels of development? Does it matter if the form of SBM is strong or weak? Does the number and type of functions devolved to school managers make a difference to the outcomes? Does it matter which group is given the decision-making authority and over what functions?

Also, more cost-benefit analysis is needed. As introduced in developing countries, SBM appears to be a relatively inexpensive initiative since it constitutes a change in the locus of decision-making and not necessarily in the amount of resources in the system. If the few positive impact evaluations are true, then SBM is a very cost-effective initiative. For example, in Mexico, the rural school-based management program is estimated to cost about \$6 per student, which, in unit cost terms, is only about 8 percent of primary education unit expenditures.

Another element that will need more analysis as the study of SBM reforms evolves over time are political economy issues, such as the roles played by teachers' unions and political elites, and issues of governance. SBM, like any other kind of reform, requires some level of political support, which may be more important than the technical merit of the planned reform in the success or failure of a strong SBM reform. The extent to which a shared vision is a key element of different types of SBM reforms is an important future research issue. However, teachers and their unions may want to resist any SBM reforms that give parents and community members more power. How they will react to the reform is a crucial factor in its eventual success or failure.

In general, there are a number of steps that national governments can take to increase the probability that SBM reforms will succeed. First, central governments can make local education authorities more accountable by requiring them to involve all school stakeholders in their discussions and to use their feedback to design policies and interventions that meet local needs. Meanwhile, national governments should design prospective impact evaluations of new programs before they are implemented. Furthermore, they could subject more existing programs to rigorous impact evaluation, perhaps conducted by a group within the Ministry of Education devoted to analysis and research, while at the same time encouraging independent organizations to undertake their own impact evaluations of all programs. Finally, there is a need for governments—and perhaps international agencies—to spread the word about SBM innovations at the school level and to disseminate examples of best practices of SBM programs from around the world.

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