

## SCHOOL-BASED MANAGEMENT: A MODEL OF IMPLEMENTATION FOR MALAYSIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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*School-based management (SBM), defined as the decentralization of decision-making authority to the school site, is one of the most popular strategies that came out of the 1980s school reform movement. Over the past decade, many school districts have implemented this method of managing school budget, curriculum, and personnel decisions. It attempts to give school constituents administrators, teachers, parents, and other community members more control over what happens in schools. The foundation of school-based management is the concept of decentralized management, which has a longer history in the private sector. Studies of decentralization in the private sector suggest that high-involvement management is most appropriate in organizations where the work is complex, such as teaching in schools; is best done collegially or in teams; involves uncertainty in its day-to-day tasks; and exists in a rapidly changing environment. Research on the private sector also points out that control over four resources, namely power, knowledge, information, and rewards needs be decentralized throughout the organization in order to maximize performance improvement. A study is being conducted on the implementation of school-based management in Malaysian primary schools, with particular focus on five major domains of school-based management: understanding about SBM; organizational dimensions; school leadership and strategy; decision-making; and effective implementation. A survey was administered to primary school headmasters to collect data on the five domains. Data were analyzed using structural equation modelling (SEM) and the research is expected to produce an SBM model that is appropriate for managing Malaysian primary schools.*

Educational reform is a worldwide movement since the last two decades. The educational authorities around the world have embarked upon an exercise known as the restructuring of education. Major changes in how schools are managed and organized have taken place in school systems of England and Wales, Canada, the United States, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Australia, and Indonesia. The origin of the movement can be associated with the introduction of an education voucher system in the United States in the early 1970s. However, it has become a movement in the early 1980s in the United States and the United Kingdom where decision-making had shifted to schools for some elements of organization. School effectiveness and school improvement provide the strong justification for restructuring activities, and the movement towards school-based management as the common implementation strategy.

Similar development has taken place in the Malaysian education system when the idea of decentralization was mooted more than a decade ago. However, the adoption of the concept is debatable, and it was not well-received especially at the political level. Malaysian public educational management is highly centralized with the Ministry of Education at the center, exercising power and authority over State Education Departments, District Education Departments, Teacher Training Colleges, and schools. The management structure of the educational organizations, including schools is predominantly bureaucratic with hierarchy of authority levels. The main rationale for such a system and structure is the need for strong central control which is believed to contribute towards nation building. But the strong wave of educational reform has placed tremendous pressure on the government, especially the Ministry of Education to reconsider the adoption and implementation of decentralization of education. Some aspects of the reform movement have been implemented in Malaysian schools, such as the effective school, quality assurance for schools, school improvement, and self-managing school (especially for private schools). In November 2006 the Malaysian government launched a blueprint for educational development, or "Pelan Induk Pembangunan Pendidikan" (PIPP) for the 2006-2010 period. This strategic plan put forth six strategic thrusts for future educational development with the human capital development as its core. Under the sixth

thrust, namely striving for educational institutions' excellence, the blueprint proposes granting greater autonomy to schools. A program, known as "the cluster schools" was launched to implement the strategy.

This paper presents the initial results and findings of a research project undertaken by a group of researchers from the Faculty of Education, University of Malaya. The research focuses on the concept and practices of school-based management in Malaysian public primary schools. The objective of the research is to examine the relationships between organizational tendencies and leadership strategies of headmasters in the implementation of school-based management in government primary schools in Malaysia.

### **Review of Literature**

This section presents past researches and writings on school-based management and related concepts. School-based management has been characterized in a number of different ways and definitions. Two comprehensive definitions are offered by Malen, Ogawa and Kranz (1990); and Hallinger, Murphy, and Hausman (1992), respectively. Malen et al. stated that "School-based management can be viewed conceptually as a formal alteration of governance structures, as a form of decentralisation 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 improvements might be stimulated and sustained". Hallinger et al. defined school-based management as efforts to decentralize educational organization, management, and maintenance; and bring these infrastructure closer to the stakeholders; create new roles and responsibilities for all actors in the system; and transform the teaching and learning process in classrooms. This model encompasses the planning of education where empowerment and responsibility for school functioning is shared between the central office and the school-based personnel who work on the basis of cooperation, collegial, and professional. School-based management demands greater parent and staff participation in the school decision making process. Decisions are collectively and collegially made by relevant stakeholders, rather than the principals or their representatives.

Devolution of authority is the fundamental concept in school-based management. Under this system of governance, schools, in effect, become deregulated from the central office. The basic message is one of expanded local control and influence with schools being given greater responsibility for their own affairs. The strategy of improvement is bottom-up change. School-based management is thus primarily an alteration in organizational arrangements in school systems. Authority and influence pass from higher to lower levels of the organization. Structural changes often accompany this devolution of authority. Internally, school-based management redistributes the decentralized authority to be shared by teachers, parents and other community members and, sometimes, students. Thus shared decision making among key stakeholders at the local level becomes a defining characteristic of school-based management.

### **Decentralization of Authority**

School-based management, defined as the decentralization of decision-making authority to the school site, focuses on aspects such as the management of budget, curriculum and instruction, and personnel decisions (Oswald, 1995). Murphy (1997) adds two other aspects to the focus namely goal, and organizational structures. These aspects represent the common areas of decentralization under school-based management. However, to be meaningful, argue Wohlstetter and Mohrman (1996), decentralization should include power, knowledge, information, and rewards. The combination of these aspects signify the transfer of real authority to school site.

Decentralization of authority provides schools with more control over the direction that the organization will pursue. Both the goals and strategies for reaching them are primarily determined at the site level. Equally important is the fact that the individual school exercises considerable discretion over the values upon which collective action is to be taken. This control helps each school develop a unique culture that is consistent with community needs.

Control over the budget is at the heart of efforts to decentralize authority. Without the ability to allocate resources as deemed most appropriate by local actors, the other dimensions of school-based management lack force. Decentralized budgeting often means the allocation of funds to the school in a lump sum rather than for predetermined categories of expenditures. This allows the school, rather than the district, to determine how funds will be used. The higher the ratio of lump sum funds to monies restricted by categories, the greater the amount of decentralization. The ability to roll over unspent money is the final element of site-based control of funds. In conventional practice, fund balances revert to the central office. When budget authority is decentralized, schools are able to carry over budget surpluses.

Closely connected to budgetary discretion is control over the defining of roles and staff hiring and development. In the least aggressive model of school-based management, the allocation of teaching positions is determined at the central level. Within this constraint, and subject to state regulations, members of the local school community exercise nearly full control over who will fill these slots; teachers are no longer sent to the school from the central office. Teachers and administrators interview candidates, make the final choice, and pass their selection back to the district. Under more nearly comprehensive models of local control, the allocation of professional positions is not predetermined. While schools are free to select personnel, and they also have the option of using funds budgeted for teachers for other purposes. In the most advanced cases of decentralization, authority – either full or partial – for employing the principal is held by members of the local school community.

Within a school-based management system, the school site has near total authority over curriculum matters. Within broad outlines defined by the board, and the state, the individual schools are free to teach in any manner they see fit (Lindelow, 1981). School-based curriculum means that each school staff decides what teaching materials are to be used, as well as the specific pedagogical techniques to be emphasized. It also means that the principal and teachers at the local level determine their own professional development needs and contract with whomever they wish to meet those needs.

Structures within which the educational process unfolds represent another area of control for teachers, administrators and parents under school-based management. These groups are free to alter the basic delivery structure in schools, to develop alternatives to the model of the individual teacher working with groups of 25 to 35 students in 50-minute time blocks. At the elementary level, schools are creating educational programs that dramatically change the practices of grouping children by age for classes and by ability for instruction. At the secondary level, a number of decentralized schools are experimenting with alternative programs, core curricula, and outcome-based education.

### **Control over Resources**

To maximize school performance with decentralized authority, schools need to control their resources. Four critical school resources that need to be decentralized are power, knowledge, information, and rewards. The main focus of school-based management has been the decentralization of power. Power is shifted most often from the central administration to a council at the school site. The council may be composed of administrators, teachers, parents, community members and sometimes students. In this way, school-based management empowers groups who typically have not had much power in managing schools. Beside group empowerment, a strong central leader, such as the principal, is the key to successful management. An effective leader can set the school's vision, serves as an instructional leader, coordinate reform efforts and rally support for the school. Transfer of power can be done using four strategies, namely self-contained teams, mini-enterprises, special purpose or parallel structures, and representative task teams.

Three kinds of knowledge and skills are important to decentralized management. First, the job skills which increase the breadth of employees' perspective so that they can contribute in more ways to the organization and more knowledgeably to decisions about improvements. Second, teamwork skills for participating in high-involvement management: problem-solving, decision-making, and communication skills. Third, organizational knowledge, which include budgeting and human resource management skills, as well as an understanding of the environment and strategies for responding to

environmental changes. School districts under school-based management must give serious attention to these areas of knowledge decentralization, and encourage a wider variety of training experiences that support new operating practices in both the district office and school site.

Power can only be decentralized if the individuals to whom power is entrusted have access to the information necessary to make good decisions. Unfortunately, historically much information has been available only at the top of the organization. School districts under school-based management need to provide sites or schools with the information about organizational performance needed to develop school-based plans, information about individual performance relative to their goals, and information about school performance relative to other schools. Finally schools need information about the extent to which they are meeting parents' and students' needs. All such information needs to be available to schools in timely fashion, so that modifications can be made to improve organizational performance. School districts under school-based management need to develop more systematic and varied strategies for sharing information at the school site, with the district office and with other schools serving similar student populations.

Translating decentralized reward structures based on skills and performance to schools poses a great challenge to school-based management. Skill-based pay schemes reward employees for the knowledge and skills they possess. In education, reward systems tend to use indirect, proxy measures of knowledge and skills, namely the years of education and experience a teacher has accumulated. A performance-based pay scheme rewards employees collectively for performance. Decentralized management is most effective when there is consensus on performance measures and units can be held accountable for performance. Teachers need to see the relationship between pay and performance.

Monetary rewards are not the only extrinsic motivator available. Other possibilities include sabbaticals or opportunities to pursue full-time studies. In addition, prestigious mentor teacher positions could be created to help guide less experienced teachers. Another possibility would be to provide teachers with opportunities to further their education through professional conferences, classes at local colleges and universities, or involvement in teacher networks focused on some aspects of curriculum, teaching and assessment. An effective reward system also must include opportunities for achieving intrinsic rewards; although pay is an important concern, substantial evidence shows that many teachers are motivated by intrinsic factors such as achieving success with students or enjoying collaborative work with peers. Rewards can motivate individuals to use their enhanced resources (power, information and knowledge) to further district-wide and school-based goals. Rewards also can be used to align the goals of people at the district office and the school sites who have different preferences and value different outcomes.

### **Implementation of School-based Management**

Many researches conducted on the implementation of school-based management revealed that there are so many variations on its practice. Under the system the authority can transfer from the state government to school boards, from school boards to superintendents, from superintendents to principals, from principals to other members of the school community such as teachers and parents, or some combination of two or more of these. Besides, schools and districts implementing school-based management vary widely in what decisions are distributed. A school may have an active school council – made up of teachers, parents, and the principal – involved in drawing up budgets, hiring and firing, and determining curriculum. Other school councils merely advise the principal in such decisions. Or the council membership might be only teachers, or the council's decisions may be limited to such topics as fundraising or textbook selection.

According to Oswald (1995) the principal must use a team approach to decision making to ensure the success of school-based management. Teachers will feel more positive toward school leaders and more committed to school goals and objectives. Parents and community members will be more supportive of schools because they have more of a say over decisions. Research has not found a link between school-based management and increased student academic achievement, lower dropout rates, increased attendance, and reduced disciplinary problems. But Drury and Levin (1994) say that school-based management contributes to four intermediate outcomes, which in turn have the potential

to lead improved student achievement: increased efficiency in use of resources and personnel, increased professionalism of teachers, implementation of curriculum reform, and increased community engagement. Wohlstetter (in Oswald, 1995) argued that the combination of governance reform with curriculum and instructional reform enables the council to focus on ways to improve student academic performance and make school a more interesting place to work.

Prasch (1990) identified some problems that stakeholders might encounter in implementing school-based management: more work for stakeholders, less efficiency, uneven school performance, an increased need for staff development, confusion about new roles and responsibilities, and coordination difficulties. Besides, a school may want authority over decisions, but the public and state statutes will still hold the school board accountable for the results. State and district policies may also require school board and district involvement. Other problems include lack of knowledge by stakeholders of what school-based management is and how it works; lack of decision making skills, communication, and trust among stakeholders; statutes, regulations, and union contracts that restrict decision making authority and teachers' time involvement; and the reluctance of some administrators and teachers to surrender decision making authority.

To ensure success, stakeholders need to understand what school-based management is and how it is implemented. New roles, responsibilities, and accountability must be fully understood. Most importantly, school-based management must be given sufficient time to succeed; researchers suggest from three to fifteen years' minimum commitment to school-based management. Schools have to ensure there is firm commitment to school-based management at the state, district, and school levels from the beginning; obtain assistance from qualified school-based management consultants; be willing to accept mistakes during the transition; and reward stakeholders for performance.

### The Research Framework

Guided by the research objective and relevant concepts and theories underpinning school-based management, a framework has been developed as the basis for this research. This framework is presented in Figure 1.

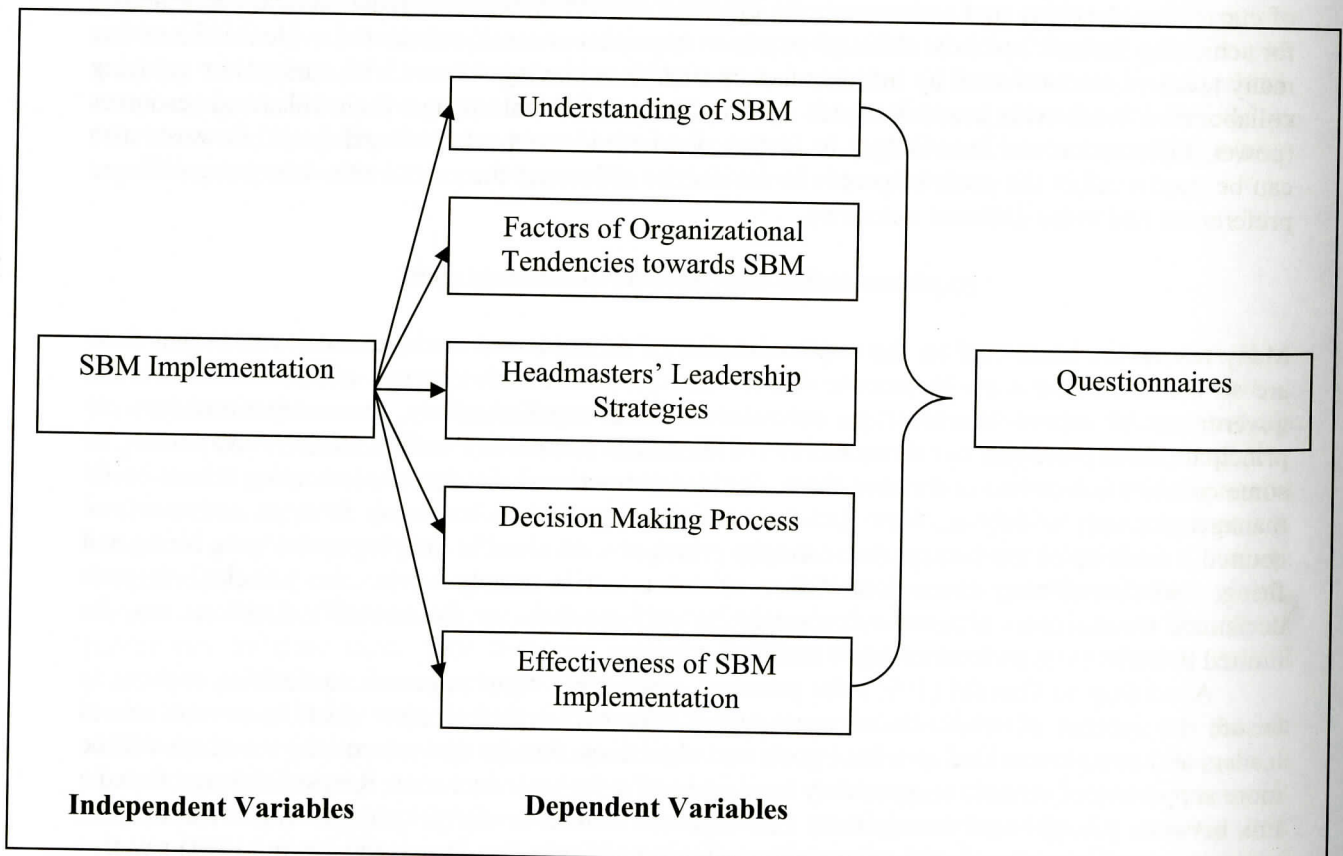


Figure 1. The research framework

In consonance with the research objective, the framework examines the relationships between school-based management implementation with five major aspects of school-based management, namely the understanding of the concept of school-based management, organizational tendencies towards school-based management, headmasters' leadership strategies, decision-making process; and effectiveness of school-based management implementation. However, in this paper, the relationship between school-based management implementation and two aspects are examined, namely the organizational tendencies towards school-based management, and headmasters' leadership strategies. The research hypothesis states that there is significant difference in terms of statistics between the factors of organizational tendency towards school-based management with the headmasters' leadership strategies in the implementation of school-based management in primary schools. The null hypothesis states that there are no significant differences between these variables. This research employs a quantitative approach using survey method. A research questionnaire was developed and tested for reliability and validity, with Cronbach alpha value of .96. The survey was conducted at primary schools in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor and Perak, using 927 respondents.

### Research Findings and Discussions

The data from the survey were analyzed using SPSS. The relationships are examined through correlation analysis. The findings of the analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Pearson Correlation Analysis*

Strategies Organizational Strategies	Vision and mission statement of the school	Human resource management	Financial management	Supervision and monitoring
School policy	.594	.434	.494	.179
Role of school principal	.841	.622	.694	.431
Role of teachers / parents, and community	.723	.537	.545	.429
Human resource management	.686	1	.535	.458
Vision and mission statement of the school	1	.686	.661	.522
Financial management	.661	.535	1	.556
Supervision and monitoring	.522	.458	.556	1

Table 1 clearly shows that the role of the school principal is highly correlated with the schools' vision and mission (.841), schools' financial management (.694) and human resource management (.622). These results support the notion that the school headmaster, as a leader, plays a crucial role in formulating and implementing the schools' vision and mission to strategically chart the future direction of the school. The headmaster is also involved in managing two important school resources, namely financial and human resources. This is consistent with the concept of autonomy in managing resources under the school-based management strategy. The role of teachers, parents and community

is strongly correlated with the school vision and mission (.723). It signifies the importance of their involvements and contributions towards formulating and implementing the school's vision and mission. These findings are consistent with the concept of school-based management, where stakeholder cooperation and involvement in shaping school policies and the school development plan constitute essential ingredients. The vision and mission statement of the school is highly correlated with the management of two school resources, human resources management (.686) and financial management (.661). It is logical because these two resources contribute directly to attainment of the school vision and mission. Hence, financial and human resources must be efficiently managed through decentralization. Greater efficiency can be gained through the practice of "let the managers manage", a tenet under school-based management. Since this is an ongoing research, other dimensions of the relationships in school-based management are being analyzed, and the results will be presented in another paper.

### Conclusion

School-based management typifies an element of educational reform in the field of school management. Management innovation changes the way managers do what they do, and do so in a way that enhances organizational performance. Under such circumstances, introducing innovation in school management is not easy for school managers. However, pressures are mounting towards making school management more efficient, autonomous and effective in order to deliver excellent service to the community and the nation. Worldwide evidence has demonstrated different experiences -- success as well as failures -- in countries that implemented school-based management. However, as in any reform program, failure does not deter efforts towards achieving the desired goals. In fact, failures of others can be taken as important lessons towards successful implementation in other countries.

For Malaysia, educational management is undergoing organized transformation within a strategic planning framework. This paved the way towards making schools truly autonomous, and more effective. School-based management can be successful if everyone involved in the process is ready to accept and implement it. Readiness includes changes in management philosophy, models, processes, structures, systems and changes in organizational and managerial culture. Most importantly, political commitment becomes the determining factor of successful implementation of school-based management in Malaysia.

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