

The Implementation of School-Based Management Policy in Indonesia: A Survey on Public Junior High School Principals' Perceptions

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify principals' perceptions and implementation of school-based management at twenty-four public junior high schools in Jambi City, Indonesia. A questionnaire was used as a research instrument to twenty-four public junior high schools principals. Data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics. The results of the study indicated that the policy of school-based management placed principals to have autonomy and the shared decision making to run their school programs. Additionally, being a principal under school-based management [hereinafter termed SBM] allowed principals to work with the school advisory council as an integral part of the development of the school's improvement plan, particularly the school advisory council was involved in developing school plans, including objectives, strategies, and actions. Principals also indicated that the policy contributed positively to improvements in student achievement. However, the findings indicated that the policy of school-based management necessitated participants to spend too much time on administrative tasks. Also some participants were not sure if the policy of school-based management contributed to a climate which enhanced stakeholders' satisfaction. The findings also indicated that student representative, staff, and administrators other than principals were missing in the school advisory council. This study provided information for policy makers, principals, parents, and teacher educators to understand how the policy of school-based management is implemented at the school level. Implications for practice and further research are also discussed.

Key words: Indonesian school-based management policy, principal, perceptions, junior high schools

1. Introduction

Indonesia's education system used to be a centralized and bureaucratic mode as introduced by the Dutch as the colonial power. In addition, in the Old Order (Sukarno's regime) and in the New Order Regime (a 32 year of Suharto's regime), Indonesian education system was still dominated by a centralized system of administration. However, after the collapse of Suharto's regime in May 1998, the Indonesian education policy has significantly changed from centralization to decentralization - which is popularly known as school-based management (SBM). This change is because of the arrival of the Law No.22/1999 (later reviewed by the Law No. 32/2004) about "Local Government" (provinces and districts). Both laws describe the key relationship between the central government and local governments in their powers and authorities with regard to education.

The terms of decentralization and school-based management are very popular in Indonesia because of educational policy reforms after the downfall of New Order Regime in May 1998. Decentralization means "to disperse away from a central point" (Lauglo, 1996, p.18) and school based management refers to the decentralization of authority from the central government to the school level (Caldwell, 2005). World Bank (2008) notes that school-based management is the strategy to decentralize education decision-making by increasing parental and community involvement in schools. Thus, in school level, decision-making authority and school operations are transferred to principals, teachers, and parents, and sometimes to students and other school community members.

Nationally, the central government has introduced the idea of educational decentralization when the government issued the Law No.22/1999 (later reviewed by the Law No. 32/2004) about "Local Government", which was officially implemented in January 2001. Both acts have logical consequences that educational administration, management and leadership, goals, budgets, personnel, curriculum, and structure should be adapted to the soul and the spirit of autonomy. It means in the era of autonomy, the former bureaucratic notions, based on hierarchical powers within a single school system, are now old-fashioned (Chapman, 1996). Therefore, the so-called central-based educational management that had been practiced in the Indonesian education system for long time should be changed into school-based management.

The motives of most governments to apply school-based management aim at both improving the financing and delivery of education services and increasing the quality and quantities (enrollment) in education (World Bank, 2007, 2008). In Indonesia, the central government wants to give, principals, teachers, parents, and communities broader opportunities to take part in the management of education program and at the same time, it can ease the burdens of the central government financially and operationally by giving more authorities to local governments and schools to arrange their schools to meet local needs (Minister of National Education, 2004). Eliason (1996) says that decentralization refers to have greater citizen participation, influence, and greater local autonomy in order to meet local needs and demands. In other words, Indonesian government has been decentralizing the control of education systems in an effort to lower costs, overcome unmanageable central bureaucracies, and to provide young people a better education and give local government officials and schools much greater scope to decide how to meet those goals.

Although some research (Sumintono, 2006; Sitepu, 2005) has been done related to school-based management policy in Indonesia since its outset, research on the perceptions of school principals on school-based management is very limited, especially on the success or failure of school-based management practices at school level. As discussed earlier, the centralized education system had been practiced for more than 53 years from the Old Order (Sukarno's regime) to the New Order Regime (Suharto's regime). Hence, it is not considerably easy to change all those actors' mind and work habits. They might be still used to working with a centralized system, in particular, principals and educational administrators. For example, principals still depend on the upper actors such as central and provincial governments and district levels to make key decisions and school programs.

The purpose of this study was to identify principals' perceptions and implementation of school-based management at 24 junior high schools in Jambi City, Indonesia. The following research questions were developed in this study in an attempt to understand and describe the principals' viewpoint on the implementation of school-based management as a public policy at public schools.

1. What do individual principals perceive School-Based Management?
2. How is the school level of an individual principal related to his perceptions and implementation of School-Based Management?

2. Literature Review on School Based Management

Governments around the globe are introducing a wide range of ways to improve the quality as well as quantity (enrollments) in education. In Indonesia, one of the ways is to decentralize education decision-making by increasing parental and community involvement in schools—which is popularly known as school-based management (SBM). The effort of implementing school-based management for all levels of education has been forced since 1999. According to David (1996), SBM may be the most significant reform of the decade— a potential force for empowering educators and communities. Also, Ainley and MacKenzie (2002, p. 1) added, “decentralization of decision making, increasing local authority and enhanced autonomy of schools have been common features of the reorganization of public education”. Additionally, Murphy and Beck (1995) have identified other terms, including school-site autonomy, school-site management, school-centered management, decentralized management, school-based budgeting, and shared governance. Beck and Murphy (1998, p 359) added that SBM is “a complex phenomenon that may be implemented in a variety of ways”.

However, Caldwell (2005) argued that school-based management refers to the decentralization of authority from the central government to the school level. Thus, at school level, decision-making authority and school operations are transferred to principals, teachers, and parents, and sometimes to students and other school community members.

Research evidence on Indonesian SBM is still limited. However, Sumintono (2006) who conducted research at two secondary schools in Mataram, Indonesia and surveyed 83 participants and interviewed 24 participants, found that the SBM policy was not clear in terms of guidelines for low level stakeholders. The policy forced an identical model irrespective of school level, size, location, and type of community across the country. Also, at school level, it depended on principals to inform school level stakeholders. As a result, the roles of school committee were not clear and functioned to legitimize school principals' policies.

Another research on Indonesian SBM was done by Sitepu (2005) at one junior high school in Bandar Lampung, Sumatra, Indonesia. She found that the principal had a level of knowledge about SBM; however teachers, administrative staff, and school committee had no enough level of knowledge about SBM. She also found that although the relationships among stakeholders were good, the principal was challenged by the lack of facilities, human resources, and community participation.

Although the findings of these studies might offer some useful insight into the implementation of SBM in Indonesia, the major sources of problems to implement SBM across schools in Indonesia might not be the same since Indonesia has more than 250,000 schools (World Bank, 2007; Jalal, et al., 2009). In response to the limited research on the implementation of SBM in Indonesia, particularly principals' perceptions on the implementation of SBM, this research would contribute to provide policymakers, school leaders, communities, and teachers with more understanding on the implementation of SBM at school level.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Site and Participants

The purpose of the study was to identify principals' perceptions and degree of SBM implementation at 24 public junior high schools, particularly the functions of the school advisory committee and shared decision-making processes. This study was conducted at 24 public junior high schools in Jambi City, Sumatra, Indonesia. These schools received the school based quality improvement management fund from the government. The participants of this study were 24 public junior high schools principals in Jambi City. Of the 24 participants, 7 were female and 15 were male. The age ranged from 40 to 55 years. In terms of principalship experience, all held principalship positions for some years. All participants held an undergraduate degree. The 24 participants were recruited through a variety of networking sources and permission from the authorities was also acquired.

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

This study used a survey questionnaire in order to identify principals' perceptions and degree of SBM implementation, particularly, to identify the elements of SBM that were being implemented at an individual school level and the degree to which those elements were being implemented and to identify principals' leadership behaviors and principals' perceptions of various aspects of SBM. The survey questionnaires were personally administered to each principal at 24 public junior high schools from January to November 2010.

The questionnaire consists of two sets of questions. The first set of questions asks what principals think on certain aspects and major components of school-based management, including principal autonomy, the importance of the advisory council, principal work load, student achievement, overall attitude, and stakeholder satisfaction. The second set of questions asks what principals think on how school-based management is implemented at their school, particularly the role of the school advisory council or committee.

The data were analyzed statistically by the SPSS software program. A five-item Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4); Agree (3); Not Sure (scored as 2.5); Disagree (2); and Strongly Disagree (1) was used to measure the principals' perceptions and degree of SBM implementation at 24 public junior high schools

4. Results

Previous literature (Arbogast, 2004; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Hay Group, 2000, Hallinger & Heck, 1998) reveals that the position of a principal at a school plays an important role in succeeding the school programs, which finally influence the student achievement. In school-based management, the position of a school principal also holds an essential part. The purpose of this study was to identify principals' perceptions and implementation of School-Based Management at 24 junior high schools in Jambi City, Indonesia, which will be illustrated below.

4.1. What do individual principals perceive School-Based Management?

Data analysis of the first set of questions asks what principals thought on certain aspects and major components of school-based management suggested that 70, 8 % of the 24 principals who responded to the survey strongly agreed that as a principal, they had a collection of autonomy to develop and achieve school goals, while 20, 8% of the principals disagreed, 4, 2% strongly disagreed, and 4, 2% were not sure. In terms of "as a principal, I have a collection of autonomy to develop my school's budget," 70, 8% of the principals strongly agreed and 29, 2% agreed. When asked whether being a principal under SBM placed them as the one who was finally responsible for the progress of students, 41, 7% of the participants strongly agreed, 50% were strongly in favor, and 8.3%.

Furthermore, 66, 7% of the principals strongly agreed, 20, 8 % of them agreed, 8, 3% disagreed, and 4, 2 % strongly disagreed that the policy of school-based management necessitated them to spend too much time on administrative tasks. Also, 62, 5% strongly agreed and 37, 5% agreed that the school advisory committee was an integral part of the development of the school's improvement plan. When principals were asked whether they perceived that the shared decision making that was part of school-based management allowed principals to function

as instructional leaders, 66, 7% strongly believed that this was the case and 33, 3 % of them also agreed with the statement. Moreover, when asked whether the policy of school-based management contributed positively to improvements in student achievement, 79.2% of the participants strongly perceived and 20, 8% felt that this was the case. One of the interesting things from the data analysis was that 54, 2% of participants were not sure and 45, 8% of them strongly perceived that the policy of school-based management contributed to a climate which enhanced stakeholder satisfaction.

4.2. How is the school level of an individual principal related to his perceptions and implementation of School-Based Management?

The results of data analysis on the second set of questions asking what principals thought on how school-based management was implemented at their school, particularly the role of the school advisory council or committee indicated that 54, 2% of the participants perceived that the school advisory council was involved in developing school plans, including objectives, strategies, and action, while 20, 8% of the participants did not perceive the involvement of the school advisory council, 16, 7% strongly perceived that the council did not participate, and only 8, 3% strongly perceived that the council participated. Furthermore, the data analysis indicated that 66, 7% of participants perceived and 16, 7% strongly perceived that the school advisory council was involved in aligning the school plan and action plans with the division's strategic plan, while 8, 3% disagreed and 8, 3% strongly disagreed with the case. Additionally, to a question on whether the school advisory council was involved in aligning the school budget with the school plan, 50% of the participants believed that that was the case, while 20, 8% did not see it, 6,7% strongly perceived the school advisory council did not involve in the process, and 4, 2 % were not sure.

In response to another question as to whether the school advisory council participated in reviewing the alignment of the school professional development plan with the school plan, 50 % of participants were supportive, 20, 8% were strongly supportive, whereas 16, 7% were not supportive and 12, 5% were not strongly supportive. When asked whether the school advisory council was involved monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the plan, 50 % of the 24 participants were supportive, 45, 8% were strongly supportive, but 4, 2 % were not supportive the case. Also, when the question of the school advisory council's involvement in training on school-based management for staff or Advisory Council was asked, 62, 5% perceived that the school advisory council was involved, 20, 8% strongly indicated the school advisory council's involvement, but 16, 7% disagreed with the case. Regarding the current groups of people that are represented on the school advisory council, 100% of participants indicated that the members consisted of parents, teachers, Community members/business. So, student representative, staff, and administrators other than principal were missing in the council.

5. Discussion

A number of educational policy initiatives have been initiated in recognition of the significance of quality education, and the school-based management has long been a focal point of educational policy in Indonesia. The central government through the Ministry of National Education is determined to apply the school-based management, aiming at both improving the financing and distribution of education services and increasing the quality and quantities (enrollment) in education in Indonesia. Particularly, the Indonesian government wants to give, principals, teachers, parents, and communities broader opportunities to take part in the management of education program and at the same time, it can ease the burdens of the central government financially and operationally by giving more authorities to local governments and schools to arrange their schools to meet local needs (Minister of National Education, 2004).

The purpose of this study was to identify principals' perceptions and degree of SBM implementation at 24 public junior high schools. As previous research (Sumintono, 2006) indicated that the Indonesian SBM policy was not clear in terms of guidelines for low level stakeholders. However, the findings of this study indicated that participants perceived that being a principal under the policy of SBM provided them with autonomy to reach their school goals, suggesting that they had enough knowledge on what principals should do under the SBM policy. The findings of this study supported what Sitepu (2005) found that the principal had a level of knowledge about SBM.

Additionally, the success of school-based management practices at school level depends on how ready school principals are. As discussed earlier, the centralized education system had been practiced for more than 50 years from the Old Order (Sukarno's regime) to the New Order Regime (Suharto's regime). Hence, it is not considerably easy to change all those actors' mind and work habits. They are still used to working with a centralized system, in particular, principals and educational administrators. For example, principals still depend on the upper actors such as central

and provincial governments and district levels to make key decisions and school programs. Nevertheless, the findings of the current study indicated that principals perceived that the policy contributed positively to improvements in student achievement and working with the school advisory council as an integral part of the development of the school's improvement plan, particularly the school advisory council was involved in developing school plans, including objectives, strategies, and actions, which were in line what Caldwell (2005) and Ainley and MacKenzie (2002) claimed that in school based management, there is a transfer of the authority from the central/local governments to the school level, suggesting that in this study at school level, decision-making authority and school operations did not depend on one actor.

However, the findings of the study indicated that the policy of school-based management forced participants to spend too much time on administrative tasks, implying that principals in this study had more workload under the policy of SBM. In SBM, administrative tasks or other activities should be distributed to other actors since the policy of SBM suggests team leadership in achieving the school goals, student achievement.

Another interesting finding from this study showed that student representative, staff, and administrators other than principals were missing in the school advisory council. Ideally, in SBM, there should not be an actor who is too dominant since the main ideas in implementing school based management are to increase all school level stakeholders roles, including parents, teachers, administrative staff, and community members related to bottom – up planning, decision making, transparent management, community empowerment, and quality improvement continuously.

Additionally, from this study, it indicated that although student representative, staff, and administrators other than principals were missing in the school advisory council, principals perceived that the council was involved in monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the plans. The finding suggested that relationship and interactions between principals and the council worked to reach the goals of school as Chapman (1996) says, “the key to success of educational reform lies in the implementation and application of policy at local and institutional level” (p.36).

6. Limitations and Implications for Further Research

The findings of this study should be considered in the view of some limitations. Firstly, participants may not be representative of all Indonesian public junior high schools principals. There may be differences between the principals' perceptions of school-based management in this study and other principals' perceptions from any other areas across Indonesia. Generalizability of the findings to other Indonesian public junior high schools principals is cautioned. Future research may include a larger sample of Indonesian public junior high schools principals from different areas in Indonesia, which may provide different principals' perceptions and implementation of school-based management policy.

Another limitation of the study was that it was based on only principal input on their perceptions and their implementation of SBM. Next, future research could investigate and include a survey to teachers, parents, community members, students, staff, or other administrators other than principals.

7. Implications for Practice

A variety of educational policies have been presented in recognition of the significance of quality education and the school-based management policy has been one of the examples of the educational policies that the central government through Ministry of National Education has proposed to improve the educational quality in Indonesian schools. Indonesian Government has decentralized the control of education systems in an effort to lower costs, overcome unmanageable central bureaucracies, and to provide young people a better education and give local government officials and schools much greater scope to decide how to meet those goals. In other words, decentralization and school-based management in Indonesia's education system have become the means to decentralize the authority from the central government to the school level (Caldwell, 2005), to improve the financing and delivery of education services and increase the quality and quantities, to give parents and communities broader opportunities to take part in education. At the same time, the success of SBM is overly reliant on how well all school and district actors put it into practices and change their work habits from a centralized to decentralized practice.

The findings of this study indicated that the policy of school-based management forced participants to spend too much time on administrative tasks. The implication here is clear that principals need training in transferring and distributing administrative tasks to other actors who are involved in SBM. Training should be ongoing, not a onetime event. Additionally, one of the interesting things from the findings was that 54, 2% of participants were not sure and 45, 8% of them strongly perceived that the policy of school-based management contributed to a climate which

enhanced stakeholders' satisfaction. This response should not be ignored and principals should be trained to make sure that within the SBM policy, stakeholders' satisfaction related to the school goals should be communicated.

In addition, regarding the current groups of people that are represented on the school advisory council, 100% of participants indicated that the members consisted of parents, teachers, community members/business, suggesting that student representative, staff, and administrators other than principal were missing in the council. This should not be ignored since the success of principals in SBM depends on how a principal could involve other actors in reaching the school goals.

This study provides evidence for actors such as policy makers, school leaders, principals, teachers, students, parents, and communities (key components in achieving the school goal, student achievement) that school-based management (decentralization) in the term of the decision making authority and school policy will become critical for schools in order to be more effective.

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