Revolutionizing School Autonomy: Insights from the School-Based Management (SBM) System in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the School-Based Management (SBM) system in the Department of Education schools in the Philippines. This mechanism decentralizes the governance of the country's primary education system. It grants autonomy to the local school's key leaders and players in its daily operation, academic production, and school conditions. This paper investigates its implementation, revealing three challenges encountered by its implementers and researchers, and proposes actionable items for its enhancement. The researchers reflect on these and implicate policies that can serve as standpoints of improvement for the system. This material will be an insightful resource for SBM key leaders and players, policymakers, and researchers seeking to advance the cause of education in the country.

Keywords: *Local School, School Autonomy, School-Based Management, School Operation*

INTRODUCTION

The School-Based Management (SBM) system holds the operating principle of the dynamics of autonomy afforded to local school operations. Studies display its significant effects on the edifice of academic institutions, providing quality education (Rohma et al., 2022; Iswan et al., 2021; Bafadal et al., 2019). Similarly, SBM affects the community's perception of the school, as reflected by the high involvement of different stakeholders in participatory decision-making (Bandur, 2018; Elmelegy, 2014). The nexus of positive findings on its role in fostering quality education has enticed agencies globally to incorporate it into their systems.

In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) issued the SBM system to enrich school operating conditions in the early 2000s (World Bank Group, 2016). Believing that the global trend can provide better school stances, the agency acknowledges the importance of decentralizing school operations and encourages local vital players to enforce it. Published materials relative to SBM disambiguating its successes and misgivings helped researchers find insights about its operations (Roque, 2023; Ballarta et al., 2022; Bucud, 2018). Accordingly, the mechanism catalyzes the junction of good school governance, academic performance, and community presence. Varying

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methodologies inquiring about its potency have affirmed its strength, enabling academic institutions to be foundations of greatness.

Nevertheless, the ever-evolving landscape of the educational system keeps bringing a wide array of fresh challenges to the school gates. The challenges yielded perennial difficulties that hamper the proceedings of SBM and drag its operations to pace the implementing institutions towards their grand vision slowly. This phenomenon permeates the corpus of educational management and leadership themes, keeping the area always demanding deeper explorations. This analysis intends to be a contribution to these necessities.

This policy brief critically investigates the SBM system across the country and scrutinizes its operation through case studies, reports, agency memoranda, and presentations. This study proposes revolutionizing the mechanism with adaptive countermeasures capable of dealing with the rising challenges of the times. The revolutionized SBM assumes efficacious means of dealing with the threats that the challenges project and implicate new policy considerations across government agencies.

## THE SCHOOL-BASED MANAGEMENT (SBM) SYSTEM IN THE PHILIPPINES

The SBM mechanism ushers in avenues of innovation in the multifaceted operations of local schools (Maca, 2019). School governance, canteen management, infrastructure development, ICT integrations, classroom instructions and management, and other aspects benefit heavily from implementing this autonomy-granting mechanism. Implementers of this system initially focused on fundamental dimensions:

autonomy, participation in decision-making, accountability, and transparency in its earlier operations (World Bank Group, 2016). The agency kept modifying the system's operation to ensure better implementation among its schools. In 2021, DepEd issued a memorandum to reconstruct the SBM mechanism into six new dimensions: leadership, curriculum and instruction, finance and resource management and mobilization, governance, human resource and team development, and the learning environment. Each dimension has rubric descriptors that dictate the levels a school should comply with for classification. Means of Verification (MOV) documents are necessary to prove the presence of the descriptors in the school operation. The SBM school nomenclature comprises four levels, with one being the lowest tier (DepEd, 2021). The agency provides training for the monitoring teams across all schools to ensure that the teams can objectively assess the local schools for tier categorization. DepEd (2023) issued better support systems and endorsed a mechanism for delivering technical assistance to support and assist division offices and local schools in achieving good SBM tiers. Chavez and Doromal (2018) recognize the agency's efforts in supporting the schools, leading to a working mechanism for schools to comply.

This decentralizing approach to school governance has undeniably influenced the production of positive impacts in different settings. Studies elucidate that stakeholders perceive the SBM as a promising avenue for connecting to the school leadership and network, suggesting its resumption, enhancement, and development (De Lara & Panares, 2023; Obias, 2023). Different studies concerning these dimensions reveal insights displaying high satisfaction levels (Pasubillio & Asio, 2023; Capacite, 2021; Anub, 2020), and the

school's key players' performance correlates to the significant values these materials showcase. The confidence towards SBM observed in these studies promotes the mechanism as a trustworthy system capable of contributing to the educational visions of the country.

Figure 1. Dimensions of SBM
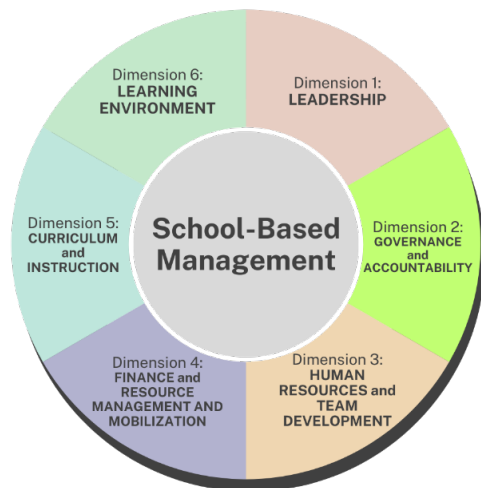
The SBM system in the Philippines could be more novel regarding its global presence. Other ASEAN countries have showcased their integrations of SBM, highlighting its role in their educational aspirations. Explorations in Malaysia present the strong presence of the mechanism in their local schools. However, their autonomous system navigated differently and anchored itself on two models, the administration control and the professional control SBMs (Isa et al., 2020; Vally & Daud, 2015). In both Indonesia and Thailand, SBM has been mandated among the local government schools since the early 2000s, hoping to augment the difficulties in their local school operations (Bandur et al., 2021; Jihan et al., 2023; Hardiansyah, 2022; Setiawan, 2021). The presence of the system in neighboring countries encourages local agencies to establish mechanisms in their schools.

Implementing SBM in the Philippines enriches student experiences in academic enterprises. With the autonomy granted at the school level, school leaders and teachers enjoy the instructional liberty and management granted within its premises. SBM is pivotal to these privileges that lead to transformative institutions. Hence, optimizing its mechanism is essential to realize maximal academic production.

ANALYZING THE CHALLENGES IN SBM

The typical agenda among all implementing agencies of SBM, irrespective of setting, is to achieve optimal school conditions and academic output. Nevertheless, the presence of challenges hinders the positive influence of the mechanism on school operations, causing a slower pace of advancement toward progress. School leaders receive repeated memoranda on visiting monitoring teams, and teachers rush their way between their classrooms and MOV preparations.

Studies reveal common challenges nationwide in implementing the system in different settings. One is the need for better managerial competencies among the school leaders (Alvarado et al., 2019; Mante, 2023; Berhanu, 2023). This challenge implicates the school heads and critical players tasked with accomplishing SBM tasks. Berhanu (2023) emphasizes leadership challenges consisting of indifference towards the SBM tasks and the low administrative capacity of the SBM key leaders. Considering the findings of Desamparo and Barrameda (2019), who posit that school leaders ought to enhance their competencies relative to community building, curriculum management, and educational administration, the observations regarding skills are justified. Chua (2019) dissects Republic Act 9155, or the Governance of Basic Education Act

of 2001, which gives provisions for school leaders' empowerment amidst the educational crisis in the country, including dysfunctional bureaucracy and systemic corruption. These problems in the agency placed school leaders in institutions whose skills could be better in managing SBM demands. This phenomenon aggravates the complex mechanism of SBM as a strong relationship between leadership competencies and SBM implementation significantly impacts one another (Origines, 2022).

Another problem observed in the practice of SBM is related to the dimension of the learning environment. This dimension emphasizes the infrastructural aspects of the school relative to safety, security, and innovative features. However, one of the disconcerting challenges is the disparity of educational infrastructures, which leads to weak learning environments in some areas (Marasigan et al., 2021; Villanueva & Cruz, 2021). While the agency constructed present schools considering seismic activities and typhoon- disasters, other parameters in this dimension must comply with the same emphasis (Nassirpour, 2018; Rico, 2022). For example, Chavez and Doromal (2018) reveal this disparity among their participating schools, wherein some could provide optimized learning environments while others could not.

Studies also raise issues around the authenticity and veracity of the MOVs (Osea, 2023). Lopez (2022) posits similar findings concerning confounding documents when schools display inconsistent and improper documentation. SBM nomenclature levels have a strong contingency on the MOVs presented during monitoring, and concerns related to the authenticity of these documents raise questions about the genuineness of the school operation itself. Regardless of the dimension presented, doubt on

the veracity of the materials cast questions on the leadership, values, network, and collaboration of the key players. Moreover, this leads to a complicated mark of the school's compliance regarding its SBM tier level.

Figure 2. School-Based Management Challenges
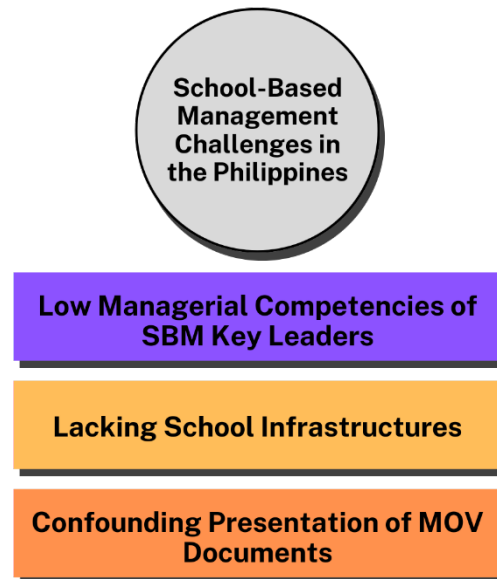
Schools are continuously challenged with underdeveloped portions of the SBM mechanism yet utilize every means possible to overcome it. The researchers found three significant challenges in this study: managerial competencies of SBM key players, needing more educational infrastructure, and confounding presentations of MOV documents. The following section provides feasible action items intended to address the analyzed challenges of the system.

## REVOLUTIONIZING THE SBM: A RESOLUTION

Recognizing the positive influence of the SBM system on the local school operation, this resolution proposes to boost its implementation amidst its present challenges since studies show that SBM contributes to better

stakeholder engagement to shared leadership (Pasubillio & Asio, 2023; Capacite, 2021; Anub, 2020) and school overall academic production (Rohma et al., 2022; Iswan et al., 2021; Bafadal et al., 2019), the paper recommends to keep the solid stances and strengthen its needy sections.

Several resolutions are proposed concerning the low managerial competencies of key leaders and players in SBM administration. Since critical leaders and players are already in place, training workshops should be prioritized to improve the necessary knowledge and competencies in dealing with SBM tasks. It will help if particular leaders are in place for a long time to give critical people high levels of exposure, leading to mastery of the competencies demanded by the mechanism. This proposed training may address Alvarado et al.'s (2019) and Mante's (2023) concerns about the leaders' observed lack of managerial skills. Moreover, since SBM is an institutionalized framework adhered to by the DepEd schools, it will help all teachers to have the system ingrained in all training, starting from the teacher induction program (TIP).

Rigorous support from the technical support teams will also boost the presence of key players in accomplishing the demands of the six dimensions of the system. This will deload burden the chief players and include more personnel in accomplishing SBM-based tasks. Similarly, Berhanu's (2023) observation about indifferent leaders will be forced to engage more since the mechanism will be felt more than just a program but as an institutional framework to abide by. In doing so, the suggestion of Desamparo and Barrameda (2019) will be realized in an orderly manner since the SBM framework will be ingrained in the entire career of a DepEd teacher from induction to SBM role assumption.

Figure 3. Revolutionized School-Based Management
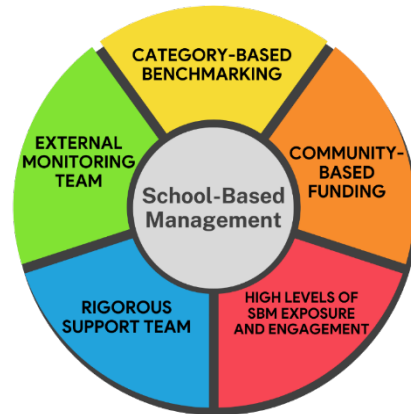
The issue raised on the school infrastructures that do not meet SBM standards may also be approached differently. Presently, DepEd categorizes schools into small, medium, and large based on the number of student population. It allows benchmarking within schools to learn the best practices and infrastructure of high-tiered schools. One feasible resolution utilizing this system is to enforce regular tier-based benchmarking. This will provide the exposure of schools with the same level of funding to construct structures appropriate to their level. The disparity observed by Chavez and Doromal (2018), while undeniably exists, may be acknowledged but will be addressed since the agency provides levels of standards for schools to adhere to. Considering this, the observation regarding lacking and underdeveloped infrastructures may be resolved. Even small schools with low funds can comply with SBM standards by considering necessary items in their environment as set by their tier. The unequal emphasis of schools that leads to varying levels of infrastructures regarding environmental aspects (Marasigan et al., 2021; Villanueva & Cruz, 2021), while remaining unequal, can be addressed by constructing ideal considerations. Hence, compliance with the SBM demands is essential regardless of the school's tier.

Moreover, schools can organize community-based projects to alleviate the difficulties set by their limited funding. The stakeholders can organize different ways of helping their local schools comply with the standards considering environmental infrastructures. Ensuring that the community-based funding assistance does not violate agency mandates is essential in pursuing this action.

Lastly, deploying external monitoring teams may address the observed issues on the MOV confounding documents. Supposedly, the technical support teams organized by the agency can ensure the authenticity, consistency, and coherence of the documents as proof of tier compliance. The similar findings of Osea (2023) and Lopez (2022) regarding these documents may be avoided by having external SBM accrediting units evaluate objectively. The common bureaucratic approach in organizing monitoring teams from the agency has a lesser presence since the external evaluating team does not have any ties with the school observed.

CONCLUSION POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The challenges investigated in implementing the SBM mechanism provide valuable perspectives toward providing quality education to the country's young generation. Similarly, these weak perspectives serve to strengthen the system for better operation. This process implicates policy considerations to help the local schools generate a better system of the SBM.

1. Robust SBM Exposures in Teacher Education Institutions
Higher education institutions (HEI) offering education courses should heavily consider their students' longer and deeper exposure to the local DepEd schools. Institution representatives should collaborate with the SBM key leaders and provide involvement opportunities for students deployed in their schools. Familiarity with the SBM mechanism will be built at this phase, benefiting the student's learning and performance. It also prepares student-teachers to assume benchmarking exposures and helps them think of innovations within the limits of their host schools.

2. SBM-Specific Year-Long Program
DepEd schools organize in-service training for professional teachers twice every academic year. SBM-specific programs beyond the in-service training will help the schools develop a better awareness of accomplishing their demands, especially if the mechanism keeps developing and introducing dimensions. Considering the strong presence of the SBM in the school operation, organizing year-long activities that promote awareness of the roles and tasks of key players and leaders will help strengthen its implementation. This also helps improve the organization of MOV documents without authenticity, veracity, and consistency issues.

3. Better Agency Funding
Education receives good funding in the country, but morality is needed at the infrastructure levels. Improved funding for educational needs can help the schools operate in better settings, considering the various aspects of the proposed strengthening in SBM training and workshops, environmental dimension, and allowance for the provision of an external

accrediting team to evaluate SBM accomplishment. Ultimately, intentional expenditures toward quality education translate to generating better students.

This investigation of the studies concerning school-based management presents various challenges, and this brief provides actionable resolutions. While the vision of an institution providing quality education to its constituents still stands at the operation's helm, challenges hamper the agency's progress toward its goal. This study admits the factors contributing to these challenges but affirms resolutions capable of helping the schools operate optimally. Considering the proposed resolution, strengthening the SBM system will implicate significant policies in optimizing school performance. Future explorations on how the proposed resolution and policy implications actualize at the grassroots may be considered locally and internationally in the different SBM tiers. Case studies in local schools and field studies on student-teachers deployed in these schools may also be considered for future research directions.

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This study was conducted without any request for external funding. The authors report that there are no competing interests to declare.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI IN SCIENTIFIC WRITING
The authors did not appeal to any AI-generating application in writing any section of the paper.

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ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Research ethics was capitalized in the study to ensure integrity and respect. Fairness, accountability, and equity were heavily emphasized in formulating the proposal in the paper

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