Striking a Balance between Centralized and Decentralized Decision Making: A School-Based Management Practice for Optimum Performance

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Abstract: This study explores the balance between centralized and decentralized decision-making within school-based management systems. The aim is to identify how combining these approaches can enhance school autonomy, improve staff performance, and increase accountability. A systematic literature review was conducted, involving an extensive search of major academic databases. Out of 35,822 studies initially identified, 9 studies met the inclusion criteria for in-depth analysis. The selected studies were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key patterns and themes related to decision-making in school management. Two major themes emerged from the analysis: (1) decision-making as a school-based management practice, and (2) decision-making towards school performance. The findings highlight that while decentralized decision-making empowers schools and fosters a sense of autonomy, a balanced approach incorporating both centralized and decentralized strategies is essential for optimal educational outcomes. The study concludes that a hybrid approach to decision-making, which blends centralized and decentralized methods, is most effective in enhancing school performance. This approach not only strengthens the decision-making process within schools but also aligns school management with broader educational goals. The findings suggest that increasing the involvement of internal and external stakeholders in decision-making processes can significantly boost school autonomy and accountability. Further research is recommended in two key areas: (1) the decision-making practices of school principals, and (2) decision-making related to school operating expenses and expenditures. These insights will be valuable for policymakers, school administrators, and educators aiming to improve educational outcomes through effective decision-making practices.

Keywords: Decentralization, Decision Making, School, Management, Performance, Philippines

1. Introduction

Decision-making involves selecting alternative actions to achieve specific goals (Forman & Selly, 2001). The effectiveness of a decision largely depends on the process underlying it (Secchi, 2011). In the context of school environments, decision-making is one of the key managerial tasks assigned to school principals (Mailool et al., 2020). Brunsson (2007) suggests that decisions can either facilitate or hinder action and the manner in which decisions are made significantly influences how actions are carried out. Therefore, the principal's decision-making process plays a critical role in steering all aspects of the school towards achieving its objectives. It is crucial for this process to be conducted effectively to ensure that all elements of the school align with and support the decisions made.

There is substantial evidence supporting the positive impact of effective decision-making in schools. This has fostered the belief that decisions establish accountability and guide action. According to Olcum and Titrek (2015), effective decision-making is beneficial for organizational progress, solving problems, and influencing the activities of organizational personnel. When school principals make well-informed decisions, it positively impacts teacher performance (Mailool et al., 2020). Furthermore, involving all relevant groups within the school community in the decision-making process is vital for achieving quality school improvement (Juharyanto et al., 2020; Martinez, 2014). Consequently, this study aims to explore the significance of decision-making within school-based management practices and highlight the importance of participative decision-making for enhancing school productivity and performance.

1.1. Centralized Decision-Making

Centralized decision-making is often criticized for stifling creativity, innovation, and the quality of education in schools. In such systems, there is a perception that improving education solely depends on increasing central government resources, rather than effectively utilizing the resources available within schools to enhance educational quality (Karmila & Wijaya, 2020). The negative consequences of centralized policies on education have led to a shift towards decentralized education models, where schools play a more active role in the decision-making process. This

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shift aims to improve the quality of teaching and human resources by empowering schools to make decisions that are more responsive to their unique contexts.

1.2. Decentralized Decision-Making

In contrast, contemporary approaches emphasize that effective school functioning and development are typically achieved through decentralized decision-making. This approach allows organizations to delegate tasks to subordinate administrators, making them integral to the organizational process and solution. By involving and motivating them, organizations can enhance their overall effectiveness. However, decentralized decision-making must be implemented properly to avoid operational issues (Sobotkiewicz, 2014). Delays in decision-making can increase knowledge transfer costs (Jensen & Meckling, 1992). When these costs exceed the cost of transferring decision-making powers, more decision-making authority is delegated. This flattens the organizational hierarchy, facilitating quicker decision-making processes (La Rooy, 2012).

Research by Tran (2014) indicates that decentralization involves transferring decision-making from higher to lower organizational levels, promoting school autonomy and success. Caldwell (2005), Dykstra and Kucita (2008), and Gamage (2003) have shown that decentralization empowers schools in decision-making, positively influencing school performance. Moreover, it enables schools and communities to address educational challenges more effectively (Bandur, 2012). Studies also demonstrate that bringing decision-making closer to schools improves learning environments, teacher accomplishments, and the performance of school personnel (Patel et al., 2006). Therefore, decentralizing decision-making enhances the influence of knowledge carriers on organizational decisions (Young & Tavares, 2004).

1.3. School-Based Management

School-Based Management (SBM) represents a system of decentralization where decision-making and responsibility for school affairs are transferred from higher authorities to school principals, teachers, parents, students, and other stakeholders (Caldwell, 2005; UNICEF, 2012). This approach formally transforms the bureaucratic style of school administration into a more democratic structure, fostering a bottom-up approach to educational planning and management. Decision-making powers are vested in schools to encourage and sustain improvements (Gamage, 2003). SBM, now a prominent feature of public schools in many countries worldwide (Bandur, 2012), emerged in the late 1980s in response to school administration failures. It aims to establish relationships between parents, school staff, policymakers, and the community, thereby making schools more accountable, flexible, and innovative (Shatkin & Gershberg, 2007).

SBM emphasizes the use of relevant teaching and learning practices in schools (Karmila & Wijaya, 2020). It is a policy approach designed to reshape school management by empowering school leaders and enhancing community participation in performance improvement. School-based quality management reflects a school's autonomy in improving staff performance and community understanding of education.

Botha (2006) confirmed that SBM increases stakeholder involvement, which can enhance autonomy and accountability within schools. The primary goal of SBM is to improve student performance and other school outcomes by promoting closer monitoring of school staff, better student assessment, and inclusive decision-making. The leadership role of the school principal is widely recognized as a crucial dimension of successful school management. Lazwardi (2018) argues that the implementation of SBM essentially grants schools more autonomy, with the ultimate goal of improving educational outcomes.

However, integrating decentralization into educational transformation may not always guarantee success (Bjork, 2006). Edwards & Mbatia (2013) caution that decentralization reforms are often adopted without sufficient consideration of their effectiveness. This indicates that while considerable research has focused on the positive effects of decentralization in schools, less attention has been paid to the collective benefits of centralized and decentralized decision-making. Despite early observations, the effects of both decision-making processes in schools remain unclear. Therefore, it is essential to study the balance between centralized and decentralized decision-making within school management.

This paper undertakes a systematic review of the literature on balancing centralized and decentralized decision-making within the sociological perspective of SBM. The researcher develops themes that are reviewed in greater detail, offering a comprehensive understanding of the effects of balanced centralized and decentralized decision-making in school management. The remainder of this paper focuses on two key themes: decision-making as a school-based management practice and decision-making towards school performance.

2. Methodology

A systematic review was conducted to establish trustworthy, evidence-based recommendations related to balancing centralized and decentralized decision-making from the sociological perspective of school-based management. A systematic literature review is a scientific process guided by a set of explicit and rigorous rules, aimed at ensuring completeness, reducing bias, and promoting transparency in both technique and execution (Dixon-Woods, 2011). Systematic reviews serve several crucial functions. They synthesize the current state of knowledge in a field, identify future research priorities, answer questions that individual studies alone cannot, recognize problems in primary research, and develop or evaluate theories about phenomena (Page

et al., 2021). As such, systematic reviews generate various types of knowledge for different users, including researchers, policymakers, and educators (Gurevitch et al., 2018; Gough et al., 2019).

While systematic reviews have been criticized for potentially restrictive results (MacLure, 2005), they offer significant benefits, such as the convergence of quantitative and qualitative research findings, which is often a methodological necessity. Combining qualitative and quantitative studies through a systematic review provides a broader perspective and strengthens the review of research questions (Bicer, 2021).

Given the extensive literature on decision-making in schools, this study focused on filtering the most significant and relevant papers, concentrating on centralized and decentralized decision-making in school management from 2017 onward. Following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) Statement 2009, as suggested by Moher et al. (2009), this study presented a robust evidence base for identifying the collective benefits of centralized and decentralized decision-making in the sociological context of school management. PRISMA 2009 is a reporting guide designed to address the poor reporting of systematic reviews (Moher et al., 2007), consisting of a checklist of 27 items recommended for systematic review reporting, along with an explanation and elaboration document that provides additional guidelines for each item (Liberati et al., 2009). The recommendations have been widely endorsed and adopted, evidenced by their publication in multiple journals, citation in over 60,000 reports, and support from nearly 200 journals and systematic review organizations (Page et al., 2021).

The first step in the process involved conducting a database search. A comprehensive search of major databases like Google Scholar and ERIC journals identified 32,600 and 3,222 studies, respectively, totaling 35,822 studies on the topic. The inclusion criteria used to filter these sources included keywords like "centralized and decentralized decision-making," "school-based decision-making," "school administration," and "participative decision-making." Additionally, studies focusing on decision-making within the sociological context of school management were included. In contrast, studies involving decision-making in other public sectors, such as health and politics, were excluded. The initial search resulted in 187 references.

The second step was removing duplicates. Articles appearing more than once were deleted, reducing the number to 173 studies.

The third step involved screening studies based on the inclusion criteria developed in the second step. Screening abstracts and full-text articles with comprehensive inclusion criteria helps minimize hidden bias concerning centralized and decentralized decision-making in school management. Initially, the author screened each abstract. In cases of uncertainty, the author reviewed all decisions by screening the full text, resulting in 74 articles qualified for full-text eligibility. The second round of full-text screening applied the same inclusion criteria, ultimately excluding 65 articles.

Finally, after detailed and careful reading and analysis, 9 studies remained for in-depth analysis. These studies were selected for review under each keyword, with 6 focusing on school management and 3 on performance. Two key themes emerged from the analysis: decision-making as a school-based management practice and decision-making in relation to school performance.
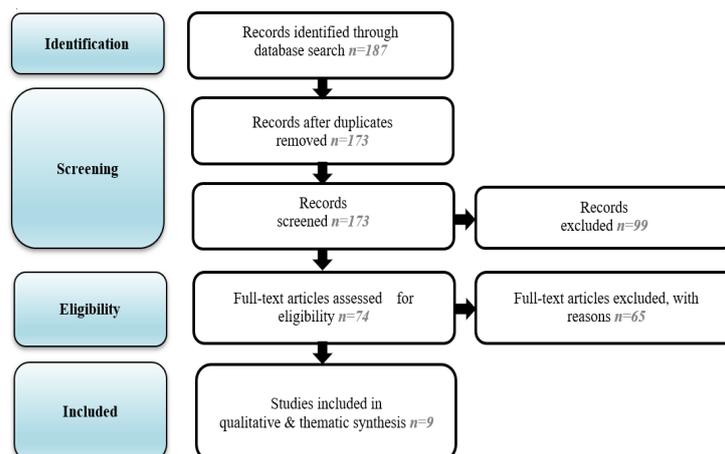

Figure 1: Selection of the Studies in this Systematic Review for Striking a Balanced between Centralized and Decentralized Decision-Making in School Management.

3. Results And Discussion

Across the reviewed articles, it is evident that decision-making is crucial in schools. Striking the right balance between centralized and decentralized decision-making can lead to robust school performance. As Hawkins (2000) notes, centralization and decentralization are not ends in themselves but are means to an end. Therefore, combining both centralized and decentralized approaches, or "walking on two legs," is essential for leading and enhancing education. Nine articles from our database discussed the importance of balancing centralized and decentralized decision-making in schools. These articles include case studies, research papers, and articles published in open-

access and peer-reviewed journals. From our analysis and interpretation of the data, two themes emerged, which are presented in the following sections.

3.1. Decision-Making As A School-Based Management Practice

School-Based Management (SBM) can be understood as the practice of utilizing resources appropriate to the school's teaching and learning process. Implementing SBM has been shown to bring significant benefits, including more efficient use of resources, improved education quality due to more efficient and transparent use of resources, and the creation of a more open and welcoming school environment (Liberati et al., 2009). Since the community is involved in its administration, there is greater stakeholder involvement in decision-making processes, leading to stronger relationships, better learning outcomes, and improved student performance, as evidenced by reduced repetition and drop-out rates (Patrinos et al., 2009).

According to Moradia et al. (2012), SBM involves the collective participation of parents, students, teachers, principals, and other stakeholders, which can increase the independence, accountability, and responsibility of schools. As a school administration model, SBM grants comprehensive authority and greater power to schools for carrying out school activities. Furthermore, SBM represents a devolution of authority, where decision-making and accountability in school matters are transferred from higher authorities to principals, teachers, parents, students, and other external stakeholders (Caldwell, 2005). In this context, a study by Gamage and Zajda (2005) emphasized that SBM is a logical approach that modifies the bureaucratic style of school administration into a more autonomous structure. Additionally, it introduces a bottom-up approach to educational planning and management, empowering schools to autonomously inspect, budget, prioritize, employ, and oversee their targets.

Table 1 below lists the selected studies on decision-making as a school-based management practice. The common theme across these studies centers on SBM's core, where decision-making is a vital factor in accountability and responsibility. Karmila and Wijaya (2020) provided a comprehensive understanding of how decision-making affects the successful implementation of SBM. Their study argued that school stakeholders should be involved in decision-making to improve school quality. In this context, school principals should enhance their professional abilities to balance decision-making to advance school management effectively. This idea is supported by Mustiningsih et al. (2020), who highlighted the importance of school principal leadership in implementing SBM.

Table 1: Studies on decision-making as a school-based management practice

Author	Title	Country	Conclusion
Karmila & Wijaya (2020)	Implementation of School-Based Management in Tambilung Elementary School	Indonesia	The involvement of school residents in decision-making should be integrated to bring better changes to the school's progress of education.
Mustiningsih et al. (2020)	Analysis of Autonomic Needs for Autonomic Leadership of Schools with Religious Culture in the Implementation of School-Based Management in the Era of Disruption	Indonesia	The leadership of the school principal is important in implementing SBM. Thus, decision-making autonomy at the criterion level is required.
Rini et al. (2019)	School-Based Management in Indonesia: Decision-Making, Problems, and Problem-Solving Strategy	Indonesia	School-Based Management can facilitate practitioners in the involvement of school committees in strategic decisions. The shortage of power to make decisions should be addressed to replace the old centralized pattern of school management.
Umar et al. (2017)	Youth Voice in Nigerian School-based Management Committees	Nigeria	Findings of the study revealed that youth committee members stated their voice in the committees through participation in several committees' activities.
Çankaya et al. (2020)	Generation Z Support Autonomous Management in School: Evaluation of Teacher Candidates' Views	Turkey	From the viewpoint of generation Z, the school should be empowered to make decisions for the effective maneuver of the school.
Shiwakoti (2020)	Relationship between Policy and Practices of Decision Making in Public Schools	Nepal	Mixed-model is considered wherein there is the blending of headteacher, teacher, and community control model for the collaboration of major stakeholders to make appropriate decisions for better quality.

Source: by the author

On the other hand, a study by Rini et al. (2019) examined the decision-making practices integrated with SBM in Indonesia, emphasizing the strategic decision-making required to facilitate SBM practitioners, particularly regarding school committee involvement. The findings revealed that the opinions of school board members on decision-making are considered in a consensus-based manner. The study mentioned above is also supported by Daresh (1998), who confirmed that school leaders always involve board members in making shared decisions at village elementary schools. This notion is also echoed by Bandur (2009), who highlighted that shared decisions are mutually agreed upon by individuals connected to those affected. These decisions are typically based on broad consensus. Therefore, effective SBM shares authority throughout the school, allowing more elements to participate in the decision-making process.

School-based management has become a global phenomenon involving communities in basic education management. Various terms such as site-based management, autonomous school programs, and self-managing schools have emerged. Studies by Barnett (2012) and Parker and Raihani (2011) describe the transfer of decision-making authority from higher government entities to individual schools, including internal and external stakeholders, such as Generation Z youth.

The UNG Assembly (1989), in its Convention on the Rights of the Child, is believed to have sparked the idea of encouraging youth participation and voice in community decision-making. Article 12 of the convention calls for young people to have their voices heard in all major decisions affecting their lives. Supporting this, a study by Umar et al. (2017) revealed that youth committee members expressed their voices by participating in numerous committee activities. Additionally, Çankaya et al. (2020) noted that Generation Z members are more vocal and eager to contribute to management decisions.

Regarding decision-making practices in Nepalese schools, Shiwakoti's (2020) study concluded that decentralization appears to be a more practical approach to running schools. However, to make appropriate decisions for better quality, it emphasized the "mixed-model" or balanced centralized and decentralized decision-making approach. This approach fosters a sense of belonging towards the school and contributes to its inclusive progress in a more participatory way.

In summary, studies falling under the first theme—decision-making as a school-based management practice—share the common point that schools should be at the center of decision-making on educational issues. Thus, the right blend of centralized and decentralized decision-making can empower schools to perform at their best.

3.2. Decision-Making Towards Performance And Outcomes

Decision-making in schools is a critical factor in cultivating teacher quality and overall school progress. Olcum and Titrek (2015) highlighted that decision-making is beneficial for advancing organizations, solving organizational problems, and influencing organizational employees' activities.

When a principal's decision-making is well-executed, it positively impacts teachers' performance in carrying out their duties. Conversely, a principal's decision-making, if conducted in a less organized and less democratic style, can negatively affect teachers' acceptance of decisions. This is supported by Hussain et al. (2017), who found that decisions made by principals have a significant impact on teacher and school performance. Shen and Xia (2012) also recommended that a principal's decisions regarding teacher classroom strategies, the distribution of working hours, school budget allocation, learning outcomes assessment, and teacher coursework directly influence teacher performance.

The study by Mailool et al. (2020) also demonstrated that principals' decision-making, organizational commitment, and school environment are integral components of school management that contribute positively to teacher performance. This finding is supported by Gill and Berezina (2020), who found that empowering teachers to make more choices about their professional development can enhance school performance.

TABLE 2: Studies on decision-making towards school performance

Author	Title	Country	Conclusion
Gill & Berezina (2020)	School performance in three southeast Asian countries: lessons in leadership, decision-making, and training	Malaysia	Empowering teachers to make more decisions about their training and professional development could be a relatively simple and easy reform that would help to lift school performance in all the countries of Southeast Asia.
Mailool et al. (2020)	The Effects of Principal's Decision-making, Organizational Commitment and School Climate on Teacher Performance in Vocational High School Based on Teacher Perceptions	Indonesia	The results showed that the principal's decision-making, organizational commitment, and school climate had a positive and significant effect on the performance of vocational school teachers, both partially and simultaneously.
Torlak et al. (2021)	Decision-making, leadership, and performance links in private education institutes	Iraq	The leaders at K12 schools could encourage the participation of all units, levels, and layers in a debate through evaluating various suggestions in the decision-making. In doing so, the leaders might secure fair treatment, judgment, honesty, creativity, shared vision, lenience, modesty, and graciousness easing conciliation and consensus among the members of a discussion. In this way, the leaders will respect the right of organizational members to monitor their work and facilitate their involvement and autonomy.

Source: By the author

The three studies presented in Table 2 show that participative decision-making (PDM) has become widespread in education as a response to the autocratic managerial style. Similarly, a decentralized management style challenges the bureaucratic structure, enabling educators to participate in planning events, which increases their commitment, morale, innovation, and job satisfaction, and fosters a dynamic corporate culture (Somech, 2010).

Torlak et al. (2021) further emphasize that leaders at K12 schools should encourage the participation of all units, levels, and layers in the decision-making process to contribute to the overall well-being of the schools.

To sum up, studies under the second theme indicate that PDM is essential for school productivity. Decisions made at the school level lead to significant improvements in teacher performance. Therefore, school administrators play a crucial role in planning and designing a strategic combination of centralized and decentralized policies and decisions to enhance school performance.

4. Conclusion

This research conducted a comprehensive thematic literature analysis and identified nine essential studies to explore the collective benefits of centralized and decentralized decision-making within the sociological perspective of school management. The research was organized around two themes: decision-making as a school-based management practice and decision-making in relation to school performance.

Studies under the first theme focused on the significance of decision-making in school-based management practice. Effective School-Based Management (SBM) involves sharing authority across the school, allowing more stakeholders to participate in the decision-making process. Decentralization, as part of SBM, shifts decision-making and responsibility for school affairs from higher authorities to both internal and external school stakeholders. This approach fosters a bottom-up model of educational planning and management, empowering schools to drive and sustain improvements. Moreover, SBM is a policy approach aimed at reshaping school management by empowering school leaders and enhancing community participation in performance improvement. In this context, school-based quality management is a reflection of a school's autonomy in improving staff performance and fostering a deeper community understanding of education.

Meanwhile, the second theme highlights the importance of participative decision-making for school productivity. Decisions made at the school level can lead to significant improvements in teacher performance. As such, school administrators have a critical role and responsibility in strategically combining centralized and decentralized policies to enhance school performance.

Thus, SBM is an indicator of a school's autonomy in enhancing staff performance and community engagement in education. Botha (2006) established that SBM involves greater participation of internal and external stakeholders, which can increase school autonomy and accountability. The main features of school management are expected to improve student performance and other school outcomes, as the school community is encouraged to closely monitor staff, assess students more effectively, and engage in decision-making. As a prominent management feature of public schools in several countries worldwide (Bandur, 2012), SBM fosters a sense of belonging within the school community, contributing to the inclusive progress of schools in a participatory manner. Therefore, the right blend of centralized and decentralized decision-making within SBM can empower schools to achieve their full potential while enabling organizations to attain optimal performance.

5. Recommendations

The literature review emphasizes the importance of striking a balance between centralized and decentralized decision-making in school management. It highlights two crucial areas for further exploration: decision-making practices among school principals and decision-making related to school operating expenses and expenditures. Effective decision-making by school principals is essential for guiding all aspects of school operations and ensuring that school objectives are met. Therefore, it is recommended that future research delve deeper into understanding how school principals navigate the complexities of centralized and decentralized decision-making processes. Moreover, examining the impact of decision-making on school operating expenses and expenditures is critical to improving resource allocation and financial management within schools. This exploration could inform strategies that enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of school-based management, ultimately leading to better educational outcomes.

6. Implications And Future Research

The findings from this study have significant implications for school administrators, policymakers, and educators. A balanced approach to decision-making, incorporating both centralized and decentralized elements, can lead to more responsive and adaptive school management. This approach empowers schools to tailor their strategies to the specific needs of their communities while maintaining alignment with broader educational policies and objectives. For policymakers, the study underscores the need to support school leaders in developing the skills and frameworks necessary for effective decision-making. Additionally, the findings suggest that schools should be given the autonomy to manage their resources and make decisions that best support their unique educational environments.

Future research should build on these findings by conducting empirical studies that explore the decision-making practices of school principals in various contexts. Comparative studies across different regions and educational systems could provide valuable insights into how cultural, economic, and social factors influence decision-making processes in schools. Additionally, research could investigate the long-term effects of different decision-making models on school performance, student outcomes, and teacher satisfaction. Another area for future exploration is the role of participatory decision-making in enhancing the sustainability of school-based

management practices. By examining these aspects, future research can contribute to the development of more effective and equitable school management models that promote both academic success and holistic development in students.

Data availability statement: Data is available at request. Please contact the corresponding author for any additional information on data access or usage.

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