



Stakeholders' Involvement in School Based Management in Malaysian Cluster School

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ABSTRACT

Under the Cluster Schools program, the guided autonomy through School Based Management (SBM) encourages and welcomes involvement and contribution from stakeholders in order to enhance quality of education and produce excellent students. The purpose of the study was to identify the direct effects of stakeholders on SBM practices in cluster schools. Secondly, the aim was to explore the moderating effects of stakeholders' on the relationship between cluster school's background factors with the SBM practice. Data for this study was collected using a set of questionnaire from 788 trained teachers from 60 cluster schools (25 from high performance cluster schools, 20 from Cohort 1 cluster schools and 15 from Cohort 2 schools) across the 14 states of Malaysia. The findings revealed that the level of stakeholders' involvement in School Based management practices in the Malaysian cluster school was high. Apart from that, the findings also showed that stakeholders' such as Ministry of Education, school administrators, local community, and school related bodies' involvement has direct significant effects on the SBM practices. Meanwhile, stakeholders' involvement was identified as the moderator on the relationship between school categories factor and SBM practices in cluster school, leadership effectiveness. As conclusion, this study recommends that school administrators should fully exploit the role of stakeholders' involvement through SBM practices in order to increase schools' performance.

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Introduction

One of the initiatives under The Malaysian National Education Blueprint 2006-2010 was the establishment of the Cluster Schools program. Under this program, cluster schools were given autonomy to manage the schools because the central bureaucracy management was found to be a restraining factor to innovation in education management and teachers' professionalism (Malaysia, 2006). The initiatives to decentralise from a central management authority to Malaysian cluster school management were aimed at enhancing quality of education and producing excellent students. In this case, the guided autonomy through School Based Management (SBM) encourages and welcomes involvement and contribution from stakeholders, for example the Ministry of Education, School Management Bodies, parental involvement, local community and bodies related to the school, e.g. Alumni, Parents' Teachers' Association. Stakeholders (PTA) according to Freeman and Reed (1983, p.89), has conceptualised as "those groups without whose support the organization would cease to exist". However, Bryson et. al., (2002), and Freeman and Mcvea (2001) have suggested to include those groups or individuals who are affected by the organization as well as those who can effect it among the number of an organization's stakeholders. Therefore, capturing stakeholders' input, opinion, concerns and support to better facilitate the schools' development is viewed as an element that poses a direct or indirect influence in improving school based management practices in cluster schools. Upon these realizations, this research pivots within two aims. First, it aims to identify the direct effects of stakeholders on SBM practices in cluster schools. Secondly, to explore the moderating effects of stakeholders' on the relationship between cluster school's background factors with the SBM practice.

Stakeholders and School Based Management

One of the fundamental aspects underlying the implementation of the cluster schools is the school based management practices. In this practice, cluster schools acquire more power in managing the running of their schools from human resources to assets, funds and students' intake (Ministry of Education, 2006; PEMANDU, 2010). Caldwell (2005) defined school-based management as "... the systematic decentralisation to the school level of authority and responsibility to make decisions on significant matters related to school operations within a centrally determined framework of goals, policies, curriculum, standards and accountability" (p.10).

Based on this definition, SBM can be very closely related to the decentralisation of authority, which is from a central based management to the school based management that allows the school authorities to be actively involved in the areas of decision making. This is done to ensure that all decisions made are narrowed towards achieving the vision and mission of the Malaysian education system. Pertaining to this, Walker (2002) expressed that the underlying assumption behind the concept of decentralisation, adapted from private sectors, is that, educational improvement is only possible if parties closest to the point at which decisions are enacted become the architects of these decisions. On top of that, decentralisation gives schools more authority in decision making and has proven to impart a positive impact in improving schools performance and effectiveness (Caldwell, 2005; Dykstra & Kucita, 2008). In fact, the objectives of implementing SBM are as follows:

- (i) to enhance parents' and communities' participation in schools management and administration.
- (ii) to heighten principal's and teachers' empowerment.
- (iii) to build local capacities.

(iv) to enhance the quality and efficiency of schools that directly improves students' performances.

(World Bank, 2008, p.10)

Previous studies indicated that SBM is viewed as a means to incorporate the voices of parents, teachers and the community in the management of their schools in a formal manner. Gamage (2003) in his findings from both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, suggested that when compared with what schools have experienced under centralised bureaucratic models, school-based management has created more autonomous, flexible, better quality, effective schools, accountable not only to the system managers, but also to school communities. Volansky (2007: 352) in her study on School Autonomy for School Effectiveness and Improvement stated that "in the case of Israel, it was argued that SBM is perceived by teachers as having the potential to increase their professional autonomy. Yet at the same time, it is perceived as an immediate demand to increase the effectiveness of the teaching processes they conduct. In fact, many evidences revealed that staff members working with SBM are encouraged and empowered to create more education initiatives besides having a deeper internal locus of control in managing schools targets and a greater self efficacy together with the principal and senior school staff".

Although the forms and methods of SBM practiced vary in different sectors, the main objective is similar, that is to shift authorities from a hierarchical centralized management to administrative groups (e.g. parents and teachers) who are closely related to schools. The implementation of SBM brings changes in the roles of several parties in the schools, especially to the principal, teachers, parents and students. The principal's role also shifts into 3 basic forms: a) distributing leadership responsibilities and developing collaborative decision-making processes, b) enabling and supporting teachers' success through a democratic, participative and consultative management styles, and c) broadening the school communities through expanding networking and public relation activities with external constituents and cooperating with the school boards and the parents.

SBM also helps to improve the principal's, parents' as well as students' work satisfaction. This is because SBM possesses a high potency which provides space to teachers, parents and occasionally, the community members or students to express themselves in schools decision making processes. The parties involved in the SBM perceive their schools to be more responsible as they now have the ability to adapt resources and disposition to cater students' needs. The SBM adherences believe that this process provides a flexible structure that counteracts with the communities' unique personality.

Research Methodology

This research applies the survey method using questionnaires in collecting data from the respondents. These respondents are teachers from 60 cluster schools (25 from high performance cluster schools, 20 from Cohort 1 cluster schools and 15 from Cohort 2 schools), selected randomly from 14 states in Malaysia. Generally, 788 teachers were randomly chosen from 60 cluster schools to provide response to the questionnaires. The questionnaires are constructed according to a combination of theory and interview outcomes from the research team. 72 items have been used to identify the stakeholders' involvement in cluster school management with a 10-point Likert scale. In this research, the respondents are requested to mark the level of influence from the listed parties in the schools' policy constitution process in their respective schools. The Cronbach Alpha reliability value obtained from the

questionnaires is consistent, which is 0.92. All the data obtained from the respondents are then analysed using the double regression method.

Findings

Stakeholders' level of involvement in the cluster schools' SBM

Table 1 shows the mean value of the stakeholders' involvement in cluster schools.

Table 1: Stakeholders involvement in the cluster schools' SMB

Stakeholders	Mean	Standard Deviation
Ministry of Education	9.13	1.38
School Administrators	9.00	1.31
Parents	7.02	2.08
Other communities that related to school e.g. school alumni, NGO etc.	6.23	2.35

The findings from Table 1 showed that the level of parents' involvement in the schools' policy constitution process are high (mean=7.02), subsequently to Ministry of Education (mean=9.13) and school administrators (mean=9.00). On the other hand, the involvement of other communities related to school is in a moderate level (mean=6.23).

Stakeholders' Effects on the SBM practices in cluster schools

Research findings from Table 2 showed that all predictor's variables (stakeholders) have contributed a 26.3% of variance change in the SBM practices. Meanwhile, the findings also revealed that stakeholders' variables, for example, Ministry of Education ($\beta = .222$; $p < .01$); school administrators ($\beta = .140$; $p < .01$); local community ($\beta = .110$; $p < .01$); and school related bodies ($\beta = .132$; $p < .01$) were discovered to pose a significant influence towards the decentralisation practices in cluster schools.

Table 2: Standardized Beta Coefisyen (β) for SBM

Predictors	Standardized Beta Values
<i>Control Variables</i>	
School Categories ^a	.138**
School Types ^b	.011
School Location ^c	-.062
<i>Predictors</i>	
Ministry of Education	.222**
School administrators	.140**
Parents	.047
Local Community	.110*
Parties related to schools	.132**
R ² value	.263
Adjusted R ² value	.253
F value change	34.80**
Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. Dummy coded: ^a Cohort 1 and 2=0 school, High Performaing school =1; ^b Primary School=0, Secondary School = 1; ^c Rural School=0, Urban School=1	

The results explained that when roles of stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Education, school administrators, school community and parties related to schools shows relevant increase apart from, the increase in practice of SBM in cluster schools.

Moderation Effects of Stakeholders' Factors on the Relationship between School Categories and SBM Practices in Cluster Schools

The findings from regression analysis from Table 3revealed that, only the additions of interaction variables of School Categories X School Related Bodies into the regression equation model have shown a 5% change in R value (from .164 to .169) besides obtaining a significant F ratio ($F=5.04$; $p < .01$). The findings revealed that the interaction variable of School

Category X School Related Bodies have increased the variance total which was involved significantly in explaining the practices of SBM in cluster schools. In other words, the variables of stakeholder factors in relation to school related bodies serve as a moderator towards the relationship between school categories with the decentralization practices in cluster schools. On the other hand, other stakeholder factors such as the Ministry of Education, school administrators and the local community are found to be not the moderators in this research.

Table 3 :Moderating Analysis for Stakeholders Factors

Moderating Variable	Model 1 DS=f(X ₁)		Model 2 DS=f(X ₁ , X ₂)		Model 3 DS=f(X ₁ ,X ₂ ,& X ₁ X ₂)		R ² Changes	Summary
	R ²	F value	R ²	F value	R ²	F value		
Ministry of Education	0.40	32.96**	0.08	59.84**	0.08	1.78**	-	Non-Moderator
School Administrators	0.40	32.96**	0.38	91.52**	0.40	2.48**	-	Non-Moderator
Local Community	0.04	32.96**	0.87	141.94**	0.90	2.51**	-	Non-Moderator
School Related Bodies	0.04	32.96**	0.64	116.25**	0.69	5.04**	5 %	Moderator

Note: DS=desentralization.; ** $p < 0.01$

Meanwhile, further analysis from Table 4 comparing the values of regression coefficient (β) displayed a variety of results in the regression coefficient that are obtain for the factor variables of school related bodies ($\beta_3 = -.195$; $p < .01$; $\beta_2 = .399$; $p < .01$; $\beta_1 = -.387$; $p < .01$). The coefficient value (β_3) has a different sign (negative) compared to regression coefficient value (β_2) and (β_1) that has a positive value although significant. This result implies that the moderator factors of school related bodies, such as the alumni and PTA, act as substitutes according to the criteria set by Howell et. al., (1986) in the relationship between school categories and decentralization practices.

Table 4: Findings of Regression Coefficient (β) School Related Bodies Factors

School Category (β_2)	Moderator (β_1)	Interaction (β_3)	Form of Moderator
School Category (KS) (0.399**)	School Related Bodies Factors (BBS) (0.389**)	KS X BBS (-.195**)	Substitute

Note: All β values are sig. at $p < 0.01$

The findings also explains that, the factors of school related bodies such as the alumni and the PTA plays a prominent role in increasing the decentralization practices in cluster schools regardless of the school categories. In other words, school categories is not the inhibiting factor in the efforts of increasing decentralization practices by the alumni or the PTA.

Besides that this is generally in parallel with the suggestions by Stone and Hollenbeck (1989) and Aiken and West (1993), further analysis were carried out to identify the levels where moderators (factors of school related bodies) work best in influencing SBM practices in cluster schools. Before this analysis was conducted, the moderator variables which is the school related bodies factor, was divided into 2 categories according to the median value, which comprises of the high group (value above median) and the low group (value less than median). The double regression analysis was then conducted on respective moderator groups as mentioned above to obtain the R² value. Research findings discovered that school related bodies such as the alumni, PTA are able to play a positive role,

acting as the substitute in situations to increase SBM practices in cluster schools, regardless of whether these schools are high performance cluster school, Cohort 1 or Cohort 2.

Discussion

The cluster school concept fundamentally requires school based management and much autonomy to make decisions (World Bank, 2007). Therefore Caldwell (2005) suggested that the practices of SBM must allow individuals or groups who are closely related to the school to collaborate and be involved in the decision making process, enabling schools to attain their reputations. In line with this, the findings of this research revealed that stakeholders' involvement was high and have positive effects in the process of SBM where, the stakeholders possess the jurisdiction in the school's policy constitution, besides taking the roles of Ministry of Education into account. In fact the stakeholder factors related to the alumni association, PTA and so forth were found to play a positive role as substitutes in situations to increase the SBM practices in cluster schools regardless whether these schools are high performance cluster school, Cohort 1 or Cohort 2.

Nevertheless this research proves that there is a collaboration existing between stakeholders and school as mentioned in the Education Act 1996 (Malaysia, 1996) but the cluster schools' administrative team needs to consider beyond other than their network with the PTA. Understanding the application methods of SBM practices in strengthening the role of stakeholders, one issue that cluster school management teams in Malaysia should examine was to enhance and built strong network out of the norm. Besides that, a continuum of creative efforts with integrity should be administered by the cluster school management including the sharing and operation of authority to influence resources and various claims from the stakeholders. In fact, schools administrators must be wise in their capability of influencing stakeholders, forming a structure of roles and directions or in other words, working towards a change.

Conclusion

The administration of cluster schools into achieving excellence is a tough challenge as the school needs a unified direction agreed upon by the school body and the stakeholders. Besides, the cluster school management team in Malaysia should master functional knowledge and skills towards their job and responsibilities which will lead to a different and particularistic education management principles. In fact, it is desirable that the team increase their initiatives in playing a public role, building a relationship with the external community, generally to ensure a close rapport between the school and the community. Principals, whom are viewed traditionally as a passive recipient of resources from the stakeholders are encouraged to shift into a "resource - recruitment" role, where the relationship with the community becomes more significant in the efforts of ensuring Malaysia's cluster school policy a success.

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