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SCHOOL-BASED MANAGEMENT IMPLEMENTATION IN RURAL PHILIPPINE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS: CHALLENGES AND BEST PRACTICES IN ORAS EAST DISTRICT, EASTERN SAMAR

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the implementation of School-Based Management (SBM) in elementary schools located in Oras East District, Eastern Samar, Philippines. Using a descriptive quantitative approach, the research surveyed 100 respondents including school heads, teachers, and parent or community representatives on their perceptions of SBM implementation across four core domains: leadership and governance, curriculum and learning, accountability and continuous improvement, and resource management. Data were gathered through a structured questionnaire based on the Department of Education's SBM framework and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Results revealed that leadership and governance received the highest overall rating, suggesting strong participatory practices and policy transparency among school administrators. Curriculum and learning, and resource management scored slightly lower, reflecting limitations in professional development and resource accessibility. Open-ended responses highlighted key challenges such as inadequate funding, insufficient stakeholder engagement, and administrative workload. Conversely, best practices included collaborative leadership, strategic planning, and inclusive governance. The findings confirm the crucial role of local leadership, stakeholder engagement, and context-sensitive support systems in sustaining SBM initiatives in rural settings. The study contributes to the broader discourse on educational decentralization and offers evidence-based recommendations for improving SBM implementation in underserved communities.

KEYWORDS: *School-Based Management, Leadership And Governance, Rural Schools, Stakeholder Engagement, Resource Management*

INTRODUCTION

School-Based Management (SBM) has been widely recognized as a transformative governance strategy aimed at improving educational outcomes through the decentralization of decision-making to school-level stakeholders. Globally, SBM has been linked to improved student achievement, more efficient resource allocation, and heightened accountability (World Bank, 2021; Bruns, Filmer, & Patrinos, 2019). In the Philippine context, SBM was institutionalized under Republic Act 9155, the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001, positioning schools as self-managing units tasked with delivering contextualized and inclusive education (Department of Education [DepEd], 2022).

Despite national policy support, implementation remains uneven, especially in rural areas where contextual limitations such as geographic remoteness, limited funding, and insufficient professional development pose ongoing challenges (Cabrera & Cayubit, 2023; Bautista, Bernardo, & Ocampo, 2021). Prior studies have underscored the importance of leadership capacity, community participation, and accountability structures as drivers of effective SBM (Schleicher, 2020; Gurr, Drysdale, & Goode, 2021). However, much of the literature focuses on urban or well-resourced schools, leaving a gap in understanding how SBM unfolds in geographically isolated and disadvantaged communities.

This study aimed to address that gap by examining the implementation of SBM in elementary schools in the Oras East District of Eastern Samar – a rural setting with unique socioeconomic and logistical constraints. Specifically, the research assessed the perceived effectiveness of SBM practices across four domains: leadership and governance, curriculum and learning, accountability and continuous improvement, and resource management. It also explored the challenges encountered and best practices adopted by stakeholders, with the goal of informing policy and practice in similar rural education contexts.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

School-Based Management (SBM) is a decentralized education reform model that transfers decision-making authority from central offices to individual schools, thereby promoting transparency, stakeholder participation, and local accountability (World Bank, 2021). SBM is widely adopted in various countries as a strategy to improve learning outcomes, enhance resource utilization, and increase community involvement (Bruns, Filmer, & Patrinos, 2019). In the Philippines, SBM was institutionalized through Republic Act 9155 and further reinforced by DepEd's national framework (DepEd, 2022), aiming to empower schools to become more effective and self-managing.

Leadership and Governance

Leadership and governance are widely regarded as the most influential pillars of SBM. According to Schleicher (2020), transformational school leadership that promotes shared vision, collaboration, and evidence-based decision-making directly contributes to improved institutional performance. Bush (2020) emphasized that school leaders must serve not only as administrative managers but also as instructional leaders who align people, structures, and values. In the Philippine context, Cabrera and Cayubit (2023) found that in rural schools where leadership is inclusive and participatory, SBM implementation is more coherent and school morale is significantly higher.

Curriculum and Learning

One of the goals of SBM is to make curriculum delivery more adaptive to local needs. However, curriculum innovation remains limited in many rural schools due to inadequate professional development and lack of instructional resources (Cheng, 2021). Darling-Hammond et al. (2019) argue that while decentralization allows for contextualized instruction, it requires sustained teacher training and leadership support. In the Philippines, the Department of Education (2021) has encouraged curriculum localization, but implementation varies due to inconsistencies in teacher preparedness and access to development programs.

Accountability and Continuous Improvement

SBM emphasizes the use of school-based assessments, regular planning, and data analysis to inform decision-making. Fullan and Quinn (2020) highlight the need for systemic feedback and peer learning to create a culture of accountability. In rural schools, however, Garcia and Rivera (2023) observed that accountability is often reduced to compliance with forms and documentation, rather than used as a genuine improvement tool. The same study reports a lack of training in data interpretation among school staff, leading to challenges in developing evidence-based school improvement plans.

Resource Management and Stakeholder Engagement

Proper resource allocation and stakeholder participation are essential to sustainable SBM. Bautista, Bernardo, and Ocampo (2021) found that despite clear policies, many Philippine schools, particularly those in rural regions, struggle with delayed budget releases and insufficient material support. On the other hand, Palarca and Sumalpong (2022) noted that schools with active community partnerships, even in low-income areas, were able to mobilize local support for feeding programs, minor infrastructure, and community-based learning initiatives. OECD (2022) reinforces that community trust and shared ownership are critical to resource sustainability under SBM.

Challenges in Implementing SBM

Various challenges continue to hinder the full realization of SBM objectives, especially in underserved regions. Among the most frequently cited are the lack of financial and material resources (Bruns et al., 2019; Bautista et al., 2021), weak stakeholder participation (Palarca & Sumalpong, 2022), limited access to professional development (Cheng, 2021), and overburdened administrative tasks (Garcia & Rivera, 2023). Moreover, leadership turnover and inconsistencies in LGU support contribute to stalled implementation in some areas. These challenges are particularly pronounced in geographically isolated and disadvantaged schools, where SBM often relies on the individual capacities of school heads and teachers rather than systemic support.

Best Practices in SBM Implementation

Despite these barriers, several best practices have emerged in literature. Schleicher (2020) and Gurr et al. (2021) identified collaborative governance, teacher empowerment, and data-informed planning as central to effective SBM. Successful schools often integrate school improvement planning with teacher mentoring and community engagement. Harris and Jones (2019) stressed the value of professional learning communities and structured feedback loops in building shared accountability. In the Philippine setting, Cabrera and Cayubit (2023) found that schools that institutionalized regular stakeholder consultations, maintained budget transparency, and fostered school-community trust exhibited stronger implementation outcomes. These practices serve as benchmarks for other schools in similar contexts.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design to assess the level of School-Based Management (SBM) implementation and identify perceived challenges and best practices among elementary schools in the Oras East District, Eastern Samar, Philippines. The research focused on four SBM dimensions established by the Department of Education (2022): leadership and governance, curriculum and learning, accountability and continuous improvement, and resource management.

A structured survey questionnaire, adapted from the national SBM Assessment Tool and relevant studies (Cabrera & Cayubit, 2023; Garcia & Rivera, 2023), served as the primary data collection instrument. The tool contained twelve Likert-scale items (rated from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) aligned with the four SBM domains, as well as open-ended questions to elicit qualitative responses on challenges and best practices.

The study employed stratified purposive sampling, targeting 10 elementary schools across the district. A total of 100 respondents participated, comprising 10 school heads, 50 teachers, and 40 parents or community stakeholders who were

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directly involved in SBM-related activities. This approach ensured representation from key stakeholder groups actively engaged in school governance.

Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were used to determine the level of SBM implementation per domain. Responses to open-ended questions were analyzed using content analysis to identify recurring themes related to implementation barriers and effective practices. Ethical clearance was obtained from relevant school authorities, and all participants provided informed consent prior to the data collection.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Level of Implementation of School-Based Management

The implementation of School-Based Management (SBM) across elementary schools in the Oras East District was examined through four key domains: leadership and governance, curriculum and learning, accountability and continuous improvement, and resource management. Table 1 presents the overall mean and standard deviation scores for each domain, while Table 2 shows the variation in ratings by stakeholder role. The findings revealed that School-Based Management (SBM) was generally perceived as positively implemented across all four domains.

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation per SBM Domain

SBM Domain	Mean	SD
Leadership and Governance	4.34	0.58
Curriculum and Learning	4.11	0.66
Accountability and Continuous Improvement	4.21	0.57
Resource Management	4.11	0.73

Leadership and Governance

Among all SBM domains, leadership and governance received the highest mean score of 4.34, as shown in Table 1, suggesting that school heads in Oras East District are perceived to be effective in establishing shared vision, transparency, and collaborative decision-making. School heads themselves rated this domain most favorably (M = 4.85), while teachers and parents offered slightly lower but still favorable ratings (M = 4.11 and 4.50, respectively), as illustrated in Table 2. These findings are consistent with Schleicher (2020), who emphasized that participatory leadership and clear strategic direction are critical in successful SBM systems. Bush (2020) also supports this, identifying leadership as a key enabling factor for aligning school structures and fostering a culture of accountability. In rural Philippine settings, Cabrera and Cayubit (2023) found similar outcomes: school heads who actively involve stakeholders tend to produce more coherent and responsive school improvement plans. Thus, the present study's findings reinforce the notion that strong school leadership is central to effective SBM.

Table 2. Mean Ratings per SBM Domain by Stakeholder Group

Role	Leadership and Governance	Curriculum and Learning	Accountability and Continuous Improvement	Resource Management
School Head	4.85	4.56	4.63	4.74
Teacher	4.11	3.92	4.01	3.81
Parent	4.50	4.22	4.33	4.39

Accountability and Continuous Improvement

The domain of accountability and continuous improvement received a mean score of 4.21 shown in Table 1, suggesting that most schools maintain mechanisms for performance monitoring and self-assessment. School heads rated this domain highly (M = 4.63) as illustrated in Table 2, while teachers and parents were less satisfied of formal accountability structures (M = 4.01 and 4.33, respectively). However, open-ended responses noted that documentation and compliance processes are time-consuming and burdensome. These findings are supported by Fullan and Quinn (2020), who argued that successful SBM systems cultivate internal accountability through data use and collective reflection. However, Garcia and Rivera (2023) noted that in many Philippine public schools, especially rural ones, accountability often becomes a compliance exercise rather than a tool for improvement. This study's findings confirm that while mechanisms for self-assessment are in place, their effectiveness is limited by administrative workload and uneven data literacy among school personnel.

Curriculum and Learning

The domain of curriculum and learning recorded a mean score of 4.11, received moderate ratings from teachers (M = 3.92) and parents (M = 4.22), while school heads gave relatively higher scores (M = 4.56). Teachers expressed concerns about the adequacy of contextualized learning materials and access to training for curriculum implementation. This is evident in Table 2, which shows a drop in ratings for this domain across stakeholder groups. Qualitative responses also revealed that curriculum adaptation is limited by a lack of training and instructional materials. These concerns are supported by existing research indicating that resource-constrained schools often struggle to implement localized curriculum innovations effectively. Cheng (2021) observed that rural schools in Asia struggle with curriculum localization due to resource constraints and low teacher capacity. Similarly, Darling-Hammond et al. (2019) highlighted that professional development is essential for instructional innovation under

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decentralized models. In the Philippine context, although DepEd (2021) promotes curriculum contextualization, implementation is often hindered by insufficient teacher support systems. Therefore, the current study's findings confirm that while curricular reform is a core feature of SBM, it remains a significant challenge in disadvantaged settings.

Resource Management

With an overall mean of 4.11 as revealed in Table 1, the domain of resource management revealed mixed perceptions. School heads again rated this domain highly (M = 4.74), while teachers and parents gave lower scores (M = 3.81 and M = 4.39, respectively), as shown in Table 2. Key issues cited include limited Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE) funds, lack of supplemental support, and limited involvement of external partners. These themes also appeared frequently in the word cloud of open-ended responses (Figure 1). These findings are echoed in the work of Bautista, Bernardo, and Ocampo (2021), who reported persistent resource limitations in rural Philippine schools despite SBM mandates. Palarca and Sumalpong (2022) similarly found that while policies encourage stakeholder support, actual community engagement remains low in resource-deprived areas. On the other hand, OECD (2022) found that schools that institutionalize budget transparency and involve parents in financial planning are more likely to sustain their programs. Thus, the results of the present study confirm effective resource management under SBM remains contingent on both administrative efficiency and genuine stakeholder participation.

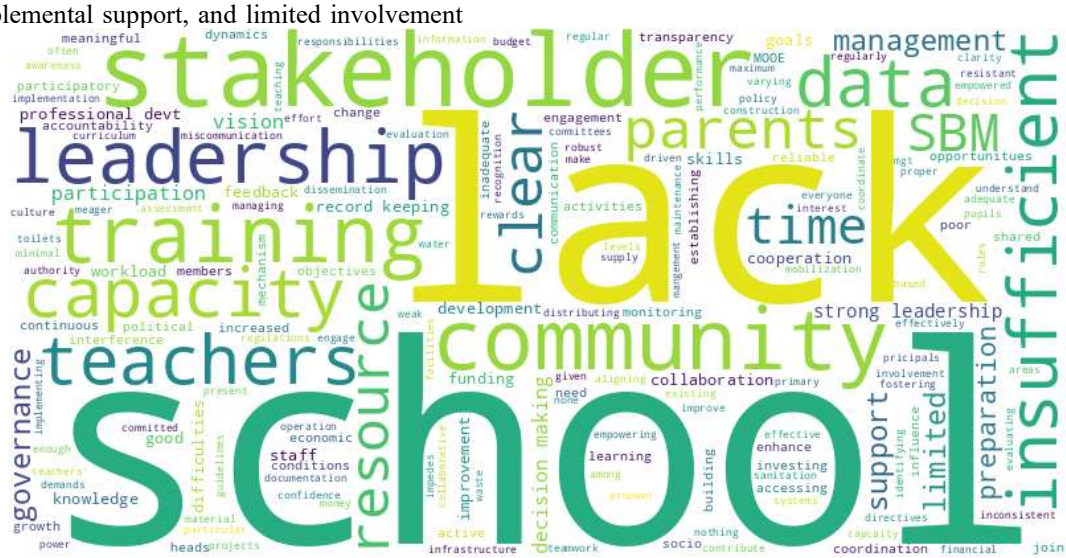

Figure 1. Word cloud showing most common terms from responses on SBM challenges and best practices.

Challenges and Best Practices

Qualitative responses identified recurring challenges such as financial limitations, administrative overload, and stakeholder disengagement. These challenges align with those identified by Bruns et al. (2019) and Garcia and Rivera (2023), who reported similar patterns in low-resource SBM contexts. In contrast, best practices included regular stakeholder meetings, transparent decision-making, and shared leadership, echoing findings by Schleicher (2020) and Harris and Jones (2019), who emphasize that a culture of trust and collaboration is central to SBM success. Figure 1 (Word Cloud) visually captures the most frequently cited themes in the open-ended responses, highlighting terms such as transparency, vision, cooperation, and training, which reinforce the statistical trends reported across domains.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aimed to assess the level of implementation of School-Based Management (SBM) in the elementary schools of Oras East District and to identify the challenges encountered and best practices adopted across four core domains: leadership and governance, curriculum and learning, accountability and continuous improvement, and resource management. Through quantitative analysis and thematic interpretation of open-ended responses, the study provides a localized understanding of SBM performance in a rural Philippine context.

Findings confirmed that leadership and governance is the most effectively implemented domain, driven by participatory decision-making, shared vision, and strong school head engagement. However, gaps remain in curriculum contextualization, consistent stakeholder involvement, and sustainable resource mobilization. These results are supported by recent research in both Philippine and international settings, which highlight training, transparency, and collaboration as critical enablers of effective SBM.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that the Department of Education and district-level leadership develop structured capacity-building programs for school personnel, particularly focused on localized curriculum design, instructional leadership, and data-informed planning. These programs should be context-sensitive and recurring, not one-time interventions. In addition, mechanisms for authentic stakeholder engagement—especially involving parents and barangay officials—must be institutionalized to ensure broader participation and co-ownership of school improvement goals.

To address administrative burdens, streamlined documentation and digitized reporting tools should be introduced to allow educators to focus more on instructional improvement. Moreover, promising practices observed in high-performing schools in the district—such as budget transparency forums,

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teacher-led learning action cells (LACs), and participatory SIP development—should be replicated through peer mentoring and inter-school collaboration.

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