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## Beyond bureaucracy: Rethinking educational governance through school-based management in Indonesia

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### Abstract

This analysis examines the contemporary state and future trajectory of school-based management (SBM) in Indonesian basic education, evaluating its implementation two decades after national decentralization reforms. Drawing on policy documents, empirical studies, and institutional data, this paper analyzes how SBM has transformed governance structures in elementary and junior secondary schools across Indonesia's diverse educational landscape. The analysis reveals a complex implementation pattern characterized by significant regional disparities: urban schools demonstrate greater capacity in exercising managerial autonomy, while rural and remote schools struggle with limited resources and inadequate leadership training. Current situations indicate that while legislative frameworks grant schools substantial authority over budgeting, personnel, and instructional decisions, practical implementation is constrained by several factors including ambiguous delegation of authority, insufficient school committee functionality, persistent bureaucratic oversight, and weak accountability mechanisms. However, promising developments emerge in schools that have successfully integrated local cultural content, established productive community partnerships, and utilized participatory planning processes. Prospects for strengthening SBM depend on addressing fundamental capacity gaps through comprehensive professional development for principals, establishing transparent performance indicators, empowering school committees. This analysis concludes that realizing SBM's transformative potential requires systemic reforms that align policy intentions with implementation realities, strengthen grassroots capabilities, and balance school autonomy with national quality assurance in Indonesia's heterogeneous educational context.

### Keywords

school-based management, educational governance, decentralization, basic education Indonesia, school autonomy, policy implementation

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## **Introduction**

The global imperative toward educational decentralization has precipitated fundamental reconceptualizations of governance architectures across developing nations, with school-based management (SBM) emerging as a pivotal mechanism for democratizing educational administration and enhancing institutional effectiveness. Indonesia's embrace of SBM, institutionalized through Law No. 22/1999 on Regional Governance and subsequently consolidated via Law No. 20/2003 on the National Education System, epitomizes one of Southeast Asia's most comprehensive endeavors to dismantle centralized educational bureaucracies in favor of localized decision-making paradigms (Bjork, 2016; Kristiansen & Pratikno, 2006). Two decades following these watershed reforms, Indonesia's educational terrain presents a compelling empirical site for interrogating the dialectical tensions between decentralization aspirations and implementation actualities, particularly within basic education—the foundational stratum upon which national human capital development trajectories are constructed.

School-based management, as articulated within Indonesian legislative and policy frameworks, encompasses the systematic devolution of administrative authority from central and provincial governmental apparatus to individual school institutions, incorporating fiscal stewardship, human resource allocation, curricular adaptation, and pedagogical innovation (Sumintono et al., 2015). This governance metamorphosis was predicated upon theoretical assumptions positing that proximate decision-making structures would amplify educational responsiveness to contextual exigencies, cultivate stakeholder participation, optimize resource deployment efficiency, and consequently ameliorate learning outcomes (Bandur, 2012). Nevertheless, the operationalization of SBM across Indonesia's sprawling archipelagic geography—encompassing more than 17,000 islands characterized by profound socioeconomic stratification, geographical fragmentation, and ethnolinguistic diversity—has engendered heterogeneous outcomes demanding rigorous scholarly scrutiny.

Contemporary empirical investigations illuminate the multifaceted complexities inherent in SBM implementation across Indonesian basic education contexts. Nurabadi et al. (2021) conducted extensive research spanning East Java province, demonstrating that while metropolitan schools exhibited considerable proficiency in exercising managerial autonomy, rural counterparts persistently confronted resource scarcity and deficient administrative capacity. Their findings substantiate claims that geographical positioning functions as a critical mediating variable in decentralized governance efficacy, with urban institutions leveraging superior infrastructural endowments, qualified personnel concentrations, and robust civil society engagement mechanisms. Conversely, research by Raihani (2017) examining principal leadership across diverse Indonesian school contexts revealed significant preparedness deficits, particularly regarding financial management competencies, strategic planning capabilities, and facilitation of participatory decision-making processes essential for substantive SBM actualization.

The operational efficacy of school committees—conceptualized as democratic forums enabling community participation in educational governance—constitutes a particularly contentious domain within scholarly discourse. Pradhan et al.'s (2014) seminal randomized controlled trial, encompassing over 500 Indonesian schools, demonstrated that merely disbursing block grants and promoting community involvement yielded negligible improvements in pedagogical quality or managerial effectiveness. Their research challenges reductionist assumptions regarding the automaticity of community engagement, underscoring instead the indispensability of comprehensive capacity-building interventions accompanying financial resource provision. Subsequently, Kholis et al. (2020) identified substantive disjunctures between policy mandates and grassroots implementation, observing that numerous school committees functioned predominantly as fundraising mechanisms rather than authentic collaborative partners in educational planning, monitoring, and evaluation processes.

Financial autonomy, ostensibly constituting SBM's definitional characteristic, manifests as another dimension of implementation ambiguity and constraint. Pioneering work by Kristiansen and Pratikno (2006) established that notwithstanding legislative provisions conferring budgetary discretion, schools remained substantially dependent upon governmental fiscal transfers, thereby circumscribing authentic financial independence. Subsequent investigations have corroborated these observations, with research documenting how bureaucratic approval protocols, rigid expenditure categorizations, and inadequate own-source revenue generation capacities fundamentally constrain schools' fiscal maneuverability (Raihani, 2017). This tension between formal authority attribution and practical implementation constraint epitomizes broader paradoxes characterizing Indonesian educational decentralization trajectories.

The dialectical relationship between school autonomy and national standardization constitutes a critical analytical concern demanding theoretical and empirical attention. While SBM discourse philosophically champions localized decision-making prerogatives, Indonesia's centralized assessment regimes, standardized curricular frameworks, and national quality benchmarks impose considerable constraints upon institutional autonomy (Bjork, 2016). This structural contradiction provokes fundamental interrogations regarding the authentic parameters of school-level authority and whether decentralization represents genuine power redistribution or merely administrative responsibility transfer devoid of commensurate decision-making capacity (Bandur, 2012). Recent scholarship by Kholis et al. (2020) emphasizes that principals navigate labyrinthine accountability architectures, simultaneously responding to hierarchical bureaucratic imperatives and horizontal community expectations, frequently without adequate institutional scaffolding or professional development support.

Notwithstanding these formidable implementation challenges, emerging evidence suggests promising trajectories wherein contextually responsive implementation strategies have yielded demonstrable positive outcomes. Schools successfully integrating indigenous knowledge systems and local cultural wisdom into pedagogical practices, cultivating authentic partnerships with community stakeholders, and employing genuinely participatory planning methodologies have evidenced enhanced student engagement, improved learning climates, and strengthened institutional legitimacy (Nurabadi et al., 2021; Raihani, 2017). These exemplary cases illuminate SBM's transformative potential when enabling conditions—encompassing committed leadership, adequate resource provisioning, meaningful stakeholder empowerment, and supportive policy environments—converge synergistically.

Despite two decades of implementation experience and burgeoning scholarly attention, significant lacunae persist in comprehending SBM's multidimensional dynamics within Indonesian basic education. First, while extant research has documented implementation obstacles, insufficient systematic analysis has examined the specific generative mechanisms through which regional disparities in SBM effectiveness are produced, reproduced, and potentially ameliorated across Indonesia's heterogeneous educational landscape. Second, the literature inadequately theorizes how competing and potentially contradictory accountability demands—vertical bureaucratic surveillance versus horizontal community engagement—shape principals' strategic orientations, institutional practices, and professional identities. Third, limited empirical attention has been directed toward identifying the precise nature, sequencing, and delivery modalities of capacity-building interventions most efficacious in transforming school committee functionality from tokenistic consultation to substantive co-governance. Fourth, the nexus between SBM implementation patterns and educational equity outcomes, particularly for marginalized populations including students in remote regions, ethnic minorities, and economically disadvantaged communities, remains inadequately theorized and empirically underexplored within Indonesian scholarship.

These conceptual and empirical gaps necessitate comprehensive analytical inquiry into the contemporary state and prospective trajectories of school-based management within Indonesian basic education. This analysis endeavors to address these lacunae through systematic examination of policy architectures, implementation patterns, institutional practices, and stakeholder experiences across

varied geographical, socioeconomic, and institutional contexts. Specifically, this investigation is guided by the following research questions:

- How do legislative frameworks and policy directives delineate the scope, boundaries, and substantive content of school autonomy in Indonesian basic education, and what structural tensions emerge between formal authority configurations and practical implementation realities?
- What constellation of factors—institutional, geographical, socioeconomic, and political—account for significant regional disparities in SBM implementation effectiveness between urban and rural schools, and through what mechanisms do these variations impact educational quality and equity outcomes?
- In what ways do school committees function within prevailing governance structures, what roles do they actually perform versus those formally mandated, and what enabling conditions or constraining factors mediate their evolution from perfunctory fundraising entities to authentic partners in educational decision-making?
- How do school principals navigate the inherently contradictory accountability demands embedded within decentralized governance systems, and what leadership competencies, institutional supports, and professional development interventions prove most critical for effective SBM operationalization?
- What systemic reforms, policy recalibrations, and capacity-building interventions hold greatest promise for strengthening school-based management effectiveness while simultaneously maintaining educational equity and quality assurance across Indonesia's profoundly heterogeneous basic education landscape?

By systematically addressing these questions through integrative analysis of contemporary policy documents, empirical research, and institutional data, this paper seeks to contribute nuanced theoretical understanding and practical insights regarding SBM's transformative potential and pragmatic constraints within Indonesian basic education, ultimately informing evidence-based policy deliberations and strategic reform initiatives for the forthcoming decade.

### **Legislative frameworks and school autonomy in Indonesian basic education: Formal authority versus implementation realities**

#### ***Legislative architecture of school autonomy***

The legislative architecture undergirding school-based management in Indonesian basic education comprises a hierarchical framework of laws, regulations, and ministerial decrees that theoretically devolve substantial decision-making authority to individual school units. The constitutional foundation resides in Law No. 20/2003 on the National Education System, which articulates principles of educational decentralization and community participation (Sumarsono et al., 2016). This foundational legislation is operationalized through Government Regulation No. 19/2005 (subsequently revised as No. 13/2015 and No. 4/2022) on National Education Standards, which delineates eight standards encompassing content, process, competency, educators, facilities, management, financing, and assessment dimensions (Fahmi et al., 2022).

The Ministry of Education and Culture's Regulation No. 19/2007 on Education Management Standards constitutes the most explicit articulation of school autonomy parameters, mandating that schools exercise authority over curriculum implementation, personnel management, financial administration, and community relations (Rahmadani et al., 2023). Furthermore, Law No. 23/2014 on Regional Governance reinforces provincial and district responsibilities for basic education provision while simultaneously affirming school-level prerogatives in operational matters. This legislative constellation ostensibly establishes a robust legal infrastructure for autonomous school governance,

theoretically aligning with new institutionalism's emphasis on formal rules and organizational structures shaping institutional behavior (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

### *Delineation of autonomy scope and boundaries*

Indonesian legislative frameworks delineate school autonomy across four principal domains: curriculum adaptation, financial management, human resource administration, and facilities management. Regarding curricular autonomy, schools possess discretion to develop locally relevant content comprising 20-30% of total instructional time, theoretically enabling contextualization of national curriculum frameworks to local cultural, linguistic, and environmental circumstances (Rahmadani et al., 2023). This provision reflects curriculum theory's emphasis on contextual responsiveness and culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris & Alim, 2017), positioning schools as sites of curriculum co-construction rather than mere implementation.

Financial autonomy provisions authorize schools to formulate annual budgets, allocate resources across expenditure categories, and mobilize supplementary funding through community contributions, provided such activities adhere to Ministry of Finance regulations governing educational fiscal management (Fahmi et al., 2022). School principals, in conjunction with school committees, theoretically exercise substantial discretion in resource prioritization decisions. Human resource management authority encompasses teacher assignment across grade levels and subjects, performance evaluation, and professional development planning, though recruitment, promotion, and dismissal decisions remain centralized at district education offices (Sumarsono et al., 2016).

However, these autonomy provisions are circumscribed by numerous boundaries and caveats embedded within regulatory frameworks. National curriculum standards specify core competencies and minimum content requirements that schools must implement, effectively delimiting the substantive scope of curricular adaptation (Rahmadani et al., 2023). Financial expenditure categories, reporting requirements, and audit protocols impose considerable constraints on budgetary flexibility. Personnel management autonomy excludes authority over teacher certification, salary determination, and permanent appointment decisions—arguably the most consequential human resource functions (Sumarsono et al., 2016).

### *Structural tensions between formal authority and implementation realities*

Profound disjunctures emerge between legislative articulations of school autonomy and implementation actualities, generating what institutional theory characterizes as decoupling—the disconnection between formal structures and actual organizational practices (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Recent empirical investigations illuminate multiple dimensions of this structural tension. Rahmadani et al.'s (2023) qualitative study across West Java schools revealed that principals perceived curricular autonomy as largely symbolic, constrained by standardized national assessments that effectively dictate instructional priorities and content emphases. This finding exemplifies what Au (2007) theorizes as high-stakes testing's curricular narrowing effect, wherein assessment systems undermine ostensible curricular autonomy by establishing de facto mandatory content boundaries.

Financial autonomy manifests similar contradictions between formal authority and practical constraint. Fahmi et al.'s (2022) analysis of school budget execution across Central Java documented that while schools nominally exercise budgetary discretion, bureaucratic approval processes, rigid line-item specifications, and protracted disbursement procedures substantially circumscribe autonomous financial decision-making. Schools reported that over 80% of budgetary allocations were predetermined through centralized categorical programs, leaving minimal flexibility for context-responsive resource allocation. This phenomenon aligns with Hanson's (1998) observation that educational decentralization frequently devolves administrative responsibilities without commensurate fiscal authority, creating what he terms "unfunded mandates."

Personnel management presents perhaps the most acute manifestation of autonomy-implementation tensions. Research by Sumarsono et al. (2016) demonstrated that principals' human resource authority remained confined to marginal administrative functions, with substantive decisions regarding teacher recruitment, placement, promotion, and compensation centralized at district education offices. This arrangement generates coordination challenges, accountability ambiguities, and principal frustration regarding inability to align human resources with institutional priorities. Such dynamics reflect principal-agent theory's insights regarding information asymmetries and misaligned incentives when decision-making authority and operational responsibility reside at different organizational levels (Pratt & Zeckhauser, 1985).

Recent scholarship identifies additional structural tensions emanating from contradictory accountability architectures. Rahmadani et al. (2023) documented that principals navigate competing accountability demands: upward accountability to district education offices emphasizing regulatory compliance and standardized performance metrics, alongside horizontal accountability to school committees and communities prioritizing contextual responsiveness and participatory governance. These multiple, often contradictory accountability streams create what institutional theorists characterize as competing institutional logics—divergent principles organizing institutional behavior and conferring legitimacy (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). Principals reported experiencing role ambiguity, strategic dilemmas, and professional stress navigating these incompatible expectations.

Furthermore, capacity deficits exacerbate structural tensions between formal authority and implementation effectiveness. Fahmi et al.'s (2022) research revealed that many principals lack requisite competencies in financial management, strategic planning, and participatory leadership essential for exercising autonomy productively. This capacity gap reflects what Grindle (2004) identifies as a fundamental paradox of decentralization: effective autonomous governance demands sophisticated managerial capabilities often absent in contexts where centralized systems have historically monopolized decision-making expertise and provided minimal leadership development opportunities.

### *Theoretical perspectives on authority-implementation tensions*

These empirical patterns align with multiple theoretical frameworks elucidating decentralization dynamics. Institutional isomorphism theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) illuminates how schools maintain conformity to centralized expectations despite formal autonomy provisions, responding to coercive pressures (regulatory requirements), mimetic pressures (imitating successful schools), and normative pressures (professional norms emphasizing standardization). The persistence of centralized control mechanisms through standardized curricula and national examinations exemplifies coercive isomorphism, constraining autonomous innovation despite legislative rhetoric promoting school-level flexibility.

Additionally, these tensions reflect what Spillane et al. (2002) conceptualize as implementation problems in distributed cognition theory—the phenomenon whereby policy intentions undergo transformation through interpretation and enactment processes shaped by implementers' cognitive schemas, contextual constraints, and available resources. School principals interpret autonomy provisions through lenses shaped by prior centralized governance experiences, existing capacity limitations, and bureaucratic oversight expectations, frequently resulting in conservative implementation approaches that preserve familiar practices rather than leverage autonomy for transformative innovation.

The structural tensions between formal authority configurations and implementation realities ultimately suggest that realizing school autonomy's transformative potential requires more than legislative articulation of decentralization principles. As Hanson (1998) argues, authentic educational decentralization demands comprehensive reforms addressing not merely authority redistribution, but also capacity development, accountability system redesign, resource provisioning, and cultural transformation challenging entrenched centralized governance norms. Indonesian basic education's

experience substantiates this analysis, demonstrating that legislative frameworks, while necessary, constitute insufficient conditions for actualizing meaningful school autonomy absent complementary systemic reforms addressing the multifaceted determinants of effective decentralized governance.

### **Regional disparities in school-based management implementation: a multifactorial analysis institutional factors and capacity differentiation**

Regional disparities in SBM implementation effectiveness emanate fundamentally from institutional capacity differentials between urban and rural educational contexts. Urban schools typically possess superior organizational infrastructures, including established administrative systems, qualified personnel concentrations, and accumulated institutional knowledge regarding decentralized governance practices (Rahmadani et al., 2023). Conversely, rural institutions confront profound capacity deficits manifesting in inadequate managerial expertise, limited technological infrastructure, and insufficient access to professional development opportunities. Fahmi et al.'s (2022) comprehensive analysis across Indonesian provinces demonstrated that urban principals exhibited significantly higher competencies in financial management, strategic planning, and stakeholder engagement—competencies essential for effective SBM operationalization.

These capacity disparities reflect what resource dependence theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) characterizes as differential access to critical organizational resources, wherein urban schools leverage proximity to district education offices, universities, and professional networks to acquire necessary capabilities, while rural schools remain isolated from such enabling environments. Furthermore, institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) operates differentially across contexts: urban schools engage in mimetic processes by observing and adapting successful SBM practices from peer institutions, whereas rural schools lack proximate exemplars, perpetuating traditional centralized management approaches.

#### ***Geographical and infrastructural constraints***

Geographical factors constitute critical mediating variables in SBM effectiveness disparities. Indonesia's archipelagic topography creates transportation and communication barriers that disproportionately affect rural and remote schools (Kristiansen & Pratikno, 2006). Limited internet connectivity, inadequate road infrastructure, and geographical isolation impede rural schools' access to training programs, technical assistance, and information systems essential for autonomous management. Recent research by Azzahra (2020) documented that internet penetration rates in rural Indonesian regions remain below 30%, substantially constraining digital financial management systems, online professional development participation, and electronic reporting compliance required under contemporary SBM frameworks.

These infrastructural deficits exemplify what spatial inequality theory conceptualizes as cumulative disadvantage—whereby geographical marginalization generates cascading impediments across multiple institutional functions (Sheppard & Leitner, 2010). Rural schools expend disproportionate resources and time on basic administrative compliance, diminishing capacity for strategic planning and innovative programming that SBM theoretically enables. Consequently, geographical positioning functions not merely as a descriptive variable but as a structural determinant shaping institutional capabilities and governance outcomes.

#### ***Socioeconomic stratification and community resources***

Socioeconomic factors profoundly mediate SBM implementation through multiple mechanisms. Urban schools serve communities with higher average educational attainment, income levels, and social capital—resources facilitating robust school committee functionality and supplementary resource

mobilization (Rahmadani et al., 2023). Conversely, rural communities confronting poverty, limited educational backgrounds, and subsistence economic activities demonstrate constrained capacity for meaningful governance participation. Azzahra's (2020) research revealed that urban school committees comprised professionals with financial, legal, and educational expertise, whereas rural committees predominantly consisted of community members lacking relevant technical competencies.

This phenomenon aligns with Bourdieu's (1986) capital theory, wherein educational institutions function as sites where economic, cultural, and social capital converge. Urban schools accumulate advantages through community members' professional networks, fundraising capacities, and advocacy effectiveness, while rural schools experience resource scarcity perpetuating institutional vulnerabilities. Coleman's (1988) social capital framework further illuminates how dense social networks in urban contexts facilitate information exchange, collective problem-solving, and accountability enforcement—conditions largely absent in dispersed rural communities where social networks prioritize kinship over institutional governance.

### ***Political economy and resource allocation***

Political factors constitute another critical dimension of regional disparity. District-level political dynamics, including elite capture and patronage networks, shape resource distribution patterns favoring urban centers (Kristiansen & Pratikno, 2006). Urban schools benefit from greater political visibility, stronger advocacy coalitions, and proximity to decision-makers, enabling preferential access to discretionary funding, infrastructure investments, and policy support. Rural schools, politically marginalized and lacking organized advocacy mechanisms, receive proportionally fewer resources despite often serving more disadvantaged populations.

This dynamic exemplifies what critical political economy perspectives identify as structural inequalities embedded within ostensibly neutral administrative processes (Apple, 2013). Decentralization rhetoric promising equitable empowerment obscures persistent power asymmetries whereby well-resourced urban constituencies leverage SBM frameworks to consolidate advantages, while under-resourced rural communities lack capacity to capitalize on nominal autonomy provisions.

### ***Mechanisms linking disparities to educational outcomes***

These multifactorial disparities impact educational quality and equity through several mechanisms. First, capacity differentials directly affect instructional leadership quality, with urban principals implementing evidence-based pedagogical innovations while rural counterparts struggle with basic administrative compliance (Fahmi et al., 2022). Second, resource mobilization disparities generate funding gaps: urban schools supplement government allocations substantially through community contributions, enabling enhanced facilities, supplementary programs, and teacher incentives unavailable to rural schools (Azzahra, 2020). Third, human capital flight from rural to urban areas creates teacher quality gaps, as qualified educators preferentially seek urban positions offering superior professional development, working conditions, and career advancement prospects (Rahmadani et al., 2023).

These mechanisms exemplify cumulative advantage theory (DiPrete & Eirich, 2006), wherein initial disparities amplify over time through feedback loops: superior resources enable better outcomes, attracting additional resources and creating widening performance gaps. Consequently, SBM implementation—rather than mitigating educational inequities as policy rhetoric suggests—risks exacerbating existing disparities absent deliberate compensatory interventions addressing structural disadvantages confronting rural schools.



### **School committee functionality: Formal mandates versus operational realities formal mandates and theoretical functions**

Indonesian legislative frameworks formally position school committees (*Komite Sekolah*) as democratic participatory organs facilitating community engagement in educational governance. Ministry of Education Regulation No. 75/2016 delineates four principal functions: advisory (providing recommendations on educational policies), supporting (mobilizing resources and community participation), controlling (supervising educational quality and transparency), and mediating (facilitating communication between schools and communities) (Rahmadani et al., 2023). This institutional design reflects deliberative democracy theory (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004), which posits that legitimate educational governance emerges through inclusive deliberation among diverse stakeholders, theoretically positioning committees as embodiments of participatory decision-making.

#### ***Actual operational roles: the fundraising predominance***

Empirical investigations reveal substantial disjunctures between formal mandates and operational realities. Research by Fahmi et al. (2022) across Central Java documented that approximately 78% of school committee activities concentrated on fundraising and resource mobilization, while strategic planning participation, quality monitoring, and policy advisory functions remained marginally exercised. Rahmadani et al.'s (2023) qualitative study corroborated these findings, revealing that committee meetings predominantly addressed financial contributions rather than pedagogical quality, curriculum development, or school improvement strategies. This functional reduction exemplifies what Fung and Wright (2003) characterize as "participatory capture"—wherein democratic institutions become instrumentalized for resource extraction rather than substantive governance participation.

School committees frequently function as auxiliary administrative bodies legitimizing predetermined principal decisions rather than engaging in authentic collaborative governance (Sumarsono et al., 2016). Principals reported utilizing committees primarily for regulatory compliance—fulfilling mandated consultation requirements—while substantive decisions remained concentrated within administrative hierarchies. This pattern reflects what Arnstein (1969) conceptualizes as tokenistic participation on her participation ladder: committees occupy symbolic positions without genuine power-sharing or influence over consequential decisions.

#### ***Constraining Factors: Capacity, power asymmetries, and institutional culture***

Multiple factors constrain committee evolution toward authentic partnership. First, capacity deficits critically limit effectiveness: committee members frequently lack educational expertise, governance knowledge, and financial literacy necessary for meaningful oversight (Azzahra, 2020). Second, power asymmetries between professionally credentialed principals and community members create epistemic hierarchies wherein educational expertise becomes weaponized to marginalize lay participation (Rahmadani et al., 2023). Principals invoke professional authority to dismiss community perspectives as uninformed, perpetuating what Bourdieu (1986) identifies as symbolic violence—the imposition of dominant group meanings as universally legitimate while delegitimizing alternative viewpoints.

Third, institutional cultures privileging hierarchical decision-making over collaborative governance impede committee functionality. Fahmi et al. (2022) documented that prevailing organizational norms emphasize principal authority and bureaucratic accountability over horizontal community engagement, reflecting path dependency wherein historical centralized governance patterns persist despite formal decentralization reforms (Pierson, 2000). Additionally, inadequate legal

protections and accountability mechanisms enable principals to circumvent committee input without consequences, rendering formal authority provisions practically unenforceable.

### ***Enabling conditions: Pathways to authentic partnership***

Limited evidence suggests specific conditions enabling committee effectiveness transformation. Schools demonstrating robust committee functionality exhibit several characteristics: comprehensive capacity-building programs developing members' governance competencies; transparent information-sharing systems enabling informed participation; institutional cultures valuing collaborative leadership; and explicit accountability mechanisms linking committee recommendations to administrative responses (Rahmadani et al., 2023). These conditions align with empowerment theory (Zimmerman, 2000), emphasizing that authentic participation requires not merely structural opportunities but also psychological empowerment (perceived competence and influence) and organizational cultures legitimizing shared authority.

Furthermore, external accountability pressures—including parental advocacy, civil society monitoring, and media scrutiny—appear to strengthen committee influence by creating reputational incentives for principals to engage communities substantively (Fahmi et al., 2022). This suggests that committee effectiveness depends not solely on internal school dynamics but broader accountability ecosystems establishing consequences for participatory governance quality.

### **Principal leadership in navigating contradictory accountability architectures contradictory accountability demands and strategic responses**

School principals in decentralized Indonesian governance systems confront inherently contradictory accountability demands operating along multiple dimensions. Vertical accountability to district education offices emphasizes regulatory compliance, standardized performance metrics, and bureaucratic protocols, while horizontal accountability to school committees and communities prioritizes contextual responsiveness, participatory decision-making, and local legitimacy (Rahmadani et al., 2023). This tension exemplifies what Bovens (2007) conceptualizes as accountability overload—the phenomenon wherein multiple, potentially incompatible accountability relationships generate role ambiguity, strategic dilemmas, and implementation paradoxes.

Recent research illuminates principals' strategic responses to these contradictory pressures. Fahmi et al.'s (2022) qualitative investigation revealed that principals employ various navigation strategies including compartmentalization (addressing different accountability demands in separate organizational domains), symbolic compliance (performing ritualistic adherence to bureaucratic requirements while pursuing alternative priorities), and strategic buffering (selectively filtering external demands to protect core instructional functions). These responses align with institutional theory's insights regarding organizational decoupling—the strategic separation between formal structures satisfying external legitimacy demands and actual operational practices addressing technical imperatives (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

However, such strategic adaptations frequently generate professional stress, ethical dilemmas, and suboptimal outcomes. Principals reported experiencing exhaustion navigating bureaucratic expectations while simultaneously cultivating community relationships, managing financial complexities, and maintaining instructional quality (Rahmadani et al., 2023). This phenomenon reflects what Spillane and Lee (2014) identify as distributed leadership challenges, wherein contemporary principalship demands capacities exceeding individual cognitive and temporal resources, necessitating collaborative leadership approaches distributing responsibilities across organizational actors.

### *Critical leadership competencies for effective SBM*

Empirical evidence identifies specific leadership competencies as particularly critical for effective SBM operationalization. First, adaptive leadership—the capacity to navigate complex, ambiguous situations through flexible problem-solving and stakeholder mobilization—emerges as foundational (Heifetz et al., 2009). Principals successfully implementing SBM demonstrate capabilities in diagnosing contextual challenges, facilitating stakeholder dialogue across diverse perspectives, and orchestrating adaptive responses balancing competing demands (Rahmadani et al., 2023).

Second, financial literacy and resource management competencies prove essential given SBM's fiscal dimensions. Fahmi et al.'s (2022) research documented that principals proficient in budgeting, financial reporting, and resource optimization achieved superior outcomes in leveraging fiscal autonomy for school improvement. Third, political competence—understanding power dynamics, building coalitions, and navigating bureaucratic systems—enables principals to secure necessary resources and institutional support while managing competing stakeholder interests (Sumintono et al., 2021). These competencies align with Leithwood et al.'s (2020) transformational leadership framework emphasizing vision articulation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration as core dimensions of educational leadership effectiveness.

### *Institutional supports and professional development interventions*

Effective SBM operationalization requires substantial institutional supports beyond individual principal capabilities. Research identifies several critical supports: mentoring programs connecting novice principals with experienced practitioners; professional learning communities enabling peer knowledge exchange; accessible technical assistance for financial management and strategic planning; and supportive district leadership cultures legitimizing innovation and calculated risk-taking (Rahmadani et al., 2023). These supports reflect organizational learning theory's emphasis on social knowledge construction through communities of practice (Wenger, 1998).

Regarding professional development interventions, evidence suggests that traditional workshop-based approaches prove insufficient. Sumintono et al.'s (2021) longitudinal study demonstrated that effective preparation requires sustained, practice-embedded learning incorporating case-based instruction, simulation exercises, mentored fieldwork, and reflective practice cycles. Programs integrating leadership theory with contextualized problem-solving—addressing actual dilemmas principals confront—yielded superior competency development compared to decontextualized skill training.

Furthermore, systemic reforms addressing workload rationalization, administrative burden reduction, and accountability system coherence emerge as prerequisites for sustainable principal effectiveness. Individual capacity enhancement remains insufficient absent structural reforms mitigating contradictory demands and creating enabling environments for leadership practice (Fahmi et al., 2022). This underscores that effective SBM implementation requires multilevel interventions addressing individual competencies, organizational supports, and systemic governance architectures simultaneously.

### **Systemic reforms and interventions for strengthening school-based management differentiated support systems and equity-oriented reforms**

Strengthening SBM effectiveness while maintaining equity necessitates differentiated support systems addressing contextual heterogeneity across Indonesian schools. Research by Rahmadani et al. (2023) advocates for tiered intervention frameworks providing intensive support to under-resourced rural schools while enabling advanced autonomy for high-capacity urban institutions. This approach

aligns with equity theory's principle of proportional resource allocation—distributing support inversely to existing capacity levels to achieve equitable outcomes rather than uniform treatment (Rawls, 1971). Specifically, rural schools require comprehensive packages encompassing infrastructure enhancement, sustained mentoring, simplified administrative procedures, and supplementary funding addressing capacity deficits constraining effective autonomy exercise.

Furthermore, compensatory financing mechanisms must replace current allocation formulas perpetuating resource concentration in advantaged areas. Fahmi et al. (2022) propose weighted student funding incorporating poverty indices, geographical remoteness coefficients, and infrastructure adequacy measures to ensure equitable resource distribution. Such reforms reflect adequacy-based financing theory emphasizing that equitable funding must account for differential costs of achieving comparable outcomes across diverse contexts (Baker & Corcoran, 2012).

### ***Accountability system recalibration***

Current accountability architectures require fundamental recalibration to resolve contradictions between standardization and decentralization. Rahmadani et al. (2023) recommend balanced scorecard approaches incorporating multiple performance dimensions—including learning outcomes, school improvement trajectories, stakeholder satisfaction, and innovation indicators—rather than singular reliance on standardized test scores. This multilayered accountability framework aligns with professional accountability theory (Darling-Hammond, 2004), which posits that educational quality emerges through professional communities exercising informed judgment rather than mechanistic compliance with external metrics.

Additionally, accountability systems should emphasize improvement trajectories relative to starting conditions rather than absolute performance levels, preventing inequitable penalization of schools serving disadvantaged populations. Value-added modeling accounting for student background characteristics enables fairer assessments of school contributions to learning (Braun et al., 2010). Such recalibrations would mitigate current tensions wherein standardized accountability undermines contextual responsiveness that SBM theoretically enables.

### ***Comprehensive capacity-building ecosystems***

Effective capacity-building requires systemic ecosystems transcending episodic training programs. Sumintono et al. (2021) advocate for professional learning communities connecting principals across schools, facilitated mentoring networks pairing experienced and novice leaders, and sustained coaching relationships providing contextualized support. These interventions operationalize situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), which emphasizes that expertise develops through authentic practice within communities rather than decontextualized skill acquisition.

Critically, capacity-building must extend beyond principals to encompass school committees, teachers, and district officials. Fahmi et al. (2022) document that comprehensive stakeholder capacity development—including financial literacy programs for committee members, participatory planning training for teachers, and facilitative leadership development for district supervisors—proves essential for creating enabling SBM environments. This multilevel approach reflects systems thinking perspectives recognizing that organizational effectiveness depends on aligned capacities across interdependent actors (Senge, 2006).

### ***Technology-enabled management systems***

Digital management platforms hold promise for reducing administrative burdens while enhancing transparency and efficiency. Azzahra (2020) identifies integrated financial management systems, digital reporting platforms, and online professional learning resources as critical technological

supports. However, technology deployment must address rural connectivity constraints through offline functionality, mobile optimization, and progressive enhancement strategies ensuring accessibility across diverse contexts.

### *Policy coherence and regulatory simplification*

Finally, regulatory frameworks require streamlining to eliminate contradictory mandates and excessive bureaucratic requirements. Rahmadani et al. (2023) recommend comprehensive policy audits identifying redundant regulations, establishing clearer authority delineations between governmental levels, and reducing reporting burdens. Such reforms operationalize new public management principles emphasizing results-oriented governance, streamlined procedures, and entrepreneurial flexibility within accountability frameworks (Hood, 1991).

Ultimately, strengthening SBM effectiveness while maintaining equity demands integrated reforms addressing capacity development, resource allocation, accountability design, and regulatory coherence simultaneously—recognizing that isolated interventions prove insufficient for transforming complex educational governance systems.

### **Conclusion**

This comprehensive analysis illuminates the paradoxical trajectory of school-based management in Indonesian basic education, revealing profound disjunctures between decentralization's emancipatory aspirations and implementation actualities. Two decades after legislative institutionalization, SBM remains characterized by what might be termed "constrained autonomy"—wherein formal authority provisions coexist with structural impediments undermining authentic school-level decision-making capacity. The persistence of centralized examination systems, bureaucratic oversight mechanisms, and resource dependencies fundamentally circumscribes the transformative potential that decentralization theoretically promises.

Regional disparities constitute perhaps the most troubling dimension of current implementation patterns, with geographical, socioeconomic, and institutional factors converging to perpetuate educational inequities. Rather than functioning as equalizing mechanisms enabling contextual responsiveness, SBM frameworks risk exacerbating existing disparities when advantaged urban schools leverage autonomy provisions to consolidate superiority while under-resourced rural institutions struggle with capacity deficits and systemic marginalization. This phenomenon underscores that decentralization absent deliberate equity-oriented interventions may amplify rather than ameliorate structural inequalities.

Nevertheless, emerging exemplars demonstrate SBM's transformative possibilities when enabling conditions converge: committed leadership, adequate capacity-building support, functional community partnerships, and supportive policy environments. These cases illuminate pathways forward, suggesting that realizing decentralization's democratic and pedagogical promise requires comprehensive systemic reforms transcending legislative articulation. Specifically, prospects for strengthening SBM effectiveness demand integrated interventions addressing principal professional development, school committee empowerment, accountability system recalibration, differentiated support mechanisms, and regulatory coherence simultaneously.

Ultimately, Indonesian basic education confronts a critical juncture requiring deliberate choices regarding governance architecture futures. Sustaining current trajectories characterized

by rhetorical decentralization alongside practical centralization will likely perpetuate implementation paradoxes and equity concerns. Alternatively, authentic commitment to school-based management necessitates courageous policy recalibrations that redistribute not merely administrative responsibilities but genuine authority, resources, and accountability—accompanied by comprehensive capacity-building ecosystems enabling diverse schools across Indonesia's heterogeneous landscape to exercise autonomy productively, equitably, and in service of enhanced educational quality for all learners.

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