Challenges in Globalising Public Education Reform

By Agustinus Bandur

Flores Primary Schools

Abstract: In a globalising and internationalising world, the spread of public education reforms across national boundaries and cultures has multiplied. More particularly, efforts to restructure public schools with an emphasis on implementing School-Based Management (SBM) have become the keystones of reform in many countries. In Indonesia, since the UNDP (1997) found how the poor quality of national education and low human resources quality impacted on severe economic and social problems in the late 1990s, national education decision-makers have been struggling to create better national quality education. With the turn of the 21st Century, Indonesian education reforms agenda have been emphasized on shifting public education policy and management from centralized bureaucratic fashion to more decentralized democratic structure. This paper highlights the challenges of the globalising world in education with particular reference to the adoption of effective SBM in Indonesia. The data reported here are on the basis of an empirical survey involving 504 school council members, including school principals from Ngada Flores followed by 42 interviews with all relevant stakeholders.

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Classification: GJHSS-C Classification: FOR Code: 130201,130213,130311

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Challenges in Globalising Public Education Reform

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I. Introduction

Since the twentieth century, the development of educational policy and practice has been dominated by Anglo-American initiatives with a pre-eminent position in terms of global economic development, education, communications and technology (Dimmock & Walker, 2000; Walker & Dimmock, 2000; Jones, 1971). They affirm that as developed societies, they possess the resources and ideas to innovate and to lead change. The continuation of this phenomenon, known as globalisation, seems assured as other developing countries follow suit. Jones (1971) points out the major reasons of globalisation for cultural borrowing, including: the overseas education of leaders, a belief in education as a vehicle for economic and social advacement, international legitimacy for policy formulation, and even the benefits of studying foreign systems of education, including the resultant improved understanding on one's own system. However, even if the globalisation has become an emergent phenomenon, yet as theory, policy and practice are transported globally. They always interface and/or interact with the cultures of different countries. In fact, as policies of SBM spread from Anglo-American

About: Research-Based Evidence from Flores Primary Schools

systems to become more globalised, what are the challenges confronted by school leaders in the context of Indonesia? Responding to this question can influence the effective implementation of decentralized education policy through SBM in Indonesia. This paper highlights the challenges of SBM within an increasingly rapid globalising educational context. The article is based on a doctoral dissertation study, with an empirical survey involving 504 school council members, including school principals from Ngada Flores followed by 42 interviews with all relevant stakeholders. One of the major objectives of the study was to analyse the challenges and problems hampering the implementation of SBM and seek remedial strategies. The first part of the paper clarifies the concepts of globalisation in the context of worldwide public education reforms through SBM. In the second part, the research methodology applied in the research is explained. The third part provides research findings and discussions. Finally, it presents a brief conclusion and relevant recomendations in coping with the challenges.

II. Globalisation in Education Policy Reforms

Globalisation is simply referred to the spread of ideas, policies and practices across national boundaries (Walker & Dimmock, 2000: 227). Globalisation in the form of educational management policy implies the export of theory, policy and practice from some systems, mainly the Anglo American world into developing countries (Dimmock & Walker, 2000). In the context of public educational management reforms, the imported theory, policy and practice is referred to School-Based Management (SBM). Bandur (2008: 31) explains SBM as the a worldwide education reform strategy that appears under various terms – *site-based management, site-based decision making, school-based decision making, shared decision making and school-based governance.* Nowadays, SBM has increasingly become a worldwide movement towards autonomy for shared-decision making and a partnership within the school community for the purposes of achieving school improvements and student achievements (Bandur, 2009; Bandur & Gamage, 2009; Cheng & Mok, 2007;

9

Gamage, 2006, 1996a, 1996b; Caldwell, 2005). On the basis of research conducted in Australia and other countries, Gamage (1996a: 65) defines SBM as a pragmatic approach to a formal alteration of the bureaucratic model of school administration with a more democratic structure. It identifies the individual school as the primary unit of improvement relying on the redistribution of decision-making authority through which improvements in a school are stimulated and sustained. Other scholars consider SBM as the approach to serve students better by improving the school practices in meeting the diverse expectations of the stakeholders in a changing environment towards increasing student achievements (Cheng & Mok, 2007; Caldwell, 2005). For these reasons, models of SBM have become largely accepted as a major reform initiative both in developed nations including Australia, New Zealand, the UK, the USA and developing countries such as Indonesia, Hong Kong and Thailand. In Australian context, decades of research have revealed that school governance with devolving of decision-making authority to school level has provided greater freedom and autonomy, achieving greater equity among schools as well as creating equality of opportunity for students and flexibility in using school facilities (The ACT Department of Education & Training, 2004; Bush & Gamage, 2001; Gamage, 1996b; Caldwell, 1993). However, the implementation of SBM in Australia faces certain challenges. Chapman (1988) has reported some principals who lost their legal authority and regulatory powers experienced ambiguity of roles. Even though other principals welcome the collaboration in decision-making, some Victorian principals claimed that their councils and teaching staff were inexperienced, incapable, lacked necessary knowledge, and were unprepared. Other scholars in England and Wales reported that school governing bodies have been given greater power to manage their own affairs within clearly defined national frameworks (Ranson, 2008; Bush & Gamage, 2001). However, a large-scale quantitative survey conducted by Dempster (2000), involving 1,053 in the first survey and 699 respondents in the second one in England and Wales, as well as interviews in ten schools, indicate that workloads of principals have increased as a result of more responsibilities in financial planning and management.

III. Research in Flores Primary Schools

a) Methodology and Sampling Design

The research methodology consisted of both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of research, comprising an extensive empirical survey followed by semi-structured and focused group interviews and examination of relevant documents. In particular, the data gathered from the empirical survey were analysed using SPSS, while interviews and other documents were analysed using NVivo. For the purpose of both quantitative and qualitative data analyses, this study used probability (systematic random) sampling and non-probability (purposive) sampling. These sampling techniques were employed based on the requirements of a good sampling design: (1) goal orientation, (2) measurability, (3) practicality, and (4) economy (Kish, 1965, cited in Wiersma & Jurs, 2005: 302). For these purposes, a sample of 42 schools was then randomly selected from 287 schools located both in urban towns and rural areas. With respect to sample size for quantitative analysis, 675 questionnaires were delivered to 42 schools. Seventy-five percent of the questionnaires were returned (N = 504). In addition to the empirical survey, 42 interviews were conducted with different categories of school stakeholders.

b) Instruments

The questionnaire developed by Gamage (1996a) was adapted with appropriate modification. The instrument was then refined further with a pre-test after approval by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Newcastle, Australia. The questionnaire was further refined and finalized after a pilot study. The pilot study was conducted in seven primary schools comprising of urban and rural schools in two districts (Western Manggarai and Manggarai) of Flores. A total of 180 questionnaires were distributed to the schools that agreed to take part in completing the questionnaire and 155 questionnaires were completed and returned.

c) Reliability and Validity of the Questionnaire

Even though the items were adapted from questionnaires which were previously validated in early research (San Antonio & Gamage, 2007; Gamage & Sooksomchitra, 2004; Gamage, 1996a), the items were measured using the factor analysis and Cronbach's Alpha. In this study, the values of coefficient alpha ranged from .75 to .84, indicating an acceptable and good reliability (Gregory, 2000 cited in Manning & Munro, 2006). On the basis of the Principal Component Analysis (PCA), the results of pilot study demonstrate that the factor loadings ranged from .732 to .787. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy was .640 with the Barlett's Test of Sphericity was significant at less than .05, indicating an acceptable factorability. However, after the revision of item variables, the results of factorability in the main study were higher. The results of data analysis demonstrate that the factor loadings ranged from .779 to .883. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) of Sampling Adequacy was .682 with Barlett's Test of Sphericity $p = .000$, indicating a good factorability (Brace, Kemp, & Snelgar, 2006: 318).

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS MAJOR PROBLEMS AND/OR CHALLENGES

The following table presents the responses of principals and other representatives of school councils (teachers, school administrative staff, parents, community members, local government, and alumni) on the common problems and/or challenges community members, local government, and alumni) on the common problems and/or challenges.

Table 1 shows that 55.6% of respondents either agreed (41.7%) or strongly agreed (14.9%) that lack of appropriate professional development for school leaders was a problem. Lack of school facilities was another problem, identified by 60.5% of the respondents who either agreed (36.9%) or strongly agreed (23.6%). Sixty-eight per cent of respondents either agreed (51.4%) or strongly agreed (16.9%) that lack of knowledge about SBM was a problem, while 64% of them either agreed (40.7%) or strongly agreed (23.4%) that inadequate finances was a problem confronted in the implementation of SBM.

Table 1 : Opinions of respondents with regard to
Problems/challenges confronted in the process of the implementation of SBM

Problems	SD		Disagree		Agree		SA	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Inadequate parental participation	43	8.5	272	54.0	115	22.8	65	12.9
Lack of adequate authority for decision-making	34	6.7	332	65.9	106	21.0	24	4.8
Difficulties of coordination	24	4.8	294	58.3	143	28.4	34	6.7
Lack of clarity in roles between principals and school councils	15	3.0	288	57.1	144	28.6	49	9.7
Lack of appropriate professional development for school leaders	18	3.6	188	37.3	210	41.7	75	14.9
Lack of school facilities	13	2.6	177	35.1	186	36.9	119	23.6
Lack of knowledge about SBM	10	2.0	140	27.8	259	51.4	85	16.9
Inadequate school finances	7	1.4	163	32.3	205	40.7	118	23.4

SD: Strongly Disagree   D: Disagree A: Agree   SA: Strongly Agree

The qualitative data of this study revealed that there had been a lack of coordination in decision-making between the president of the school council and the principal. In this case, the school council president made decisions with regard to grant proposals for external funding without coordinating it with the school principal. Two principals stated: I don't find any major difficulties, but there are always problems in terms of difficulties of coordination and clarity of roles. A couple of times our head of the school council made grant proposals without consulting me. This is certainly not a good practice as no single authority figure can take decisions in school matters (Principal, W10).

Interestingly, this study found that there was a statistically significant difference in terms of opinions of the respondents on the problem related to difficulties of coordination (Chi-Sq = 8.61, N = 441, p = .03), as shown in *Table 2* below:

Table 2   Problems in terms of coordination difficulties by school location

School location	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Chi-Sq	p	N
Urban	1.6%	54.3%	38.0%	6.2%	8.61	.035	441
Rural	6.7%	59.0%	27.2%	7.1%			

Table 2 demonstrates that 44.2% of the respondents in urban areas either agreed (38.0%) or strongly agreed (6.2%) that difficulties of coordination is one of the problems confronted in the implementation of SBM, compared with 34.3% of respondents from schools in rural areas either agreed (27.1%) or strongly agreed (7.1%) with the statement. This indicates that problem with regard to difficulties of coordination is more likely faced by school council members in the urban areas rather than council members in the rural areas.

V. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

A female principal reported about the conflict of interests between the District Education Department and her school in terms of decision-making authority relating to textbook selection. The decision-making authority for selecting school textbooks was given to the school by Minister. However, two principals referred to instances where the District Education Department interfered:

11

School council has provided input and control of textbooks to the school and actively participated in decision-making in annual planning for new school buildings, school building renovations, and textbooks. But the District Education Department has approached us, asking to sign the form they have made in order to approve a particular publisher dropping books to the school. Then we refused immediately. I approached the school council to hold a meeting and we decided to determine ourselves a publisher to provide quality books for us (Principal, W15). It is true that with the block grants for book expenditure, each student has two textbooks. This could help teachers and students in the school. With the implementation of SBM, we are helped [Sir] and the governments gave special authority to school to find books from any publisher that printed the serial number indicating the Ministry approval (Principal, W21).Moreover, six teacher representatives complained about the intervention of District Education Department in terms of decision-making in selecting school text books. In connection with this case, a teacher representative commented: In practice, local government officials have taken over decision-making authority which is supposed to be made by the school. I refer particularly to how the school text books are dropped by the local education department, whereas the block grant for books has been allocated directly to the school bank account from the central government. I think this is still a problem (Teacher representative, W05). We finally received math textbooks from the District Education Department after a long argument because the decision for distributing the books was without the approval from the school council. When the teachers counted the books, the total books were double than what was needed by 26 students. We did not need such books and the books were supposed to be distributed or given to other schools (Teacher representative, W08).

VI.   BUILDING AWARENESS

Other principals faced the challenges in conjunction with building up the awareness of the whole communitymembers and parents to actively participate in school decision-making. Respondents Nos. 12 and 17 have raised some concerns as follows:To build up the awareness of members of th whole community is difficult. At the moment, principal, teachers, government, and parents who have children in the school are those who are actively participating in school programs. School council members have encouraged the whole community to actively participate in school programs but it takes time to involve the whole community (Principal, W12)There are some parents who are too busy in the garden and don't pay attention to their children's homework. In this case, we call the parents and have a dialogue. Finally,

they are aware of the importance of education (Principal, W17)

VII.   LACK CLARITY OF AUTHORITY

Six teachers also reported that there had been a problem relating to the lack of clarity of authority between school and district government. In relation to this case, a teacher representative stated: Again, the government may think that they have absolute power and authority. I think they are the people who need more training about SBM, not just provide training for school principals. Other challenge is that how to create strong collaborative work-practices to create better quality schools (Teacher representative, W06). In a school where the principal still controls the decision-making authority in the school, a government representative stated: It is not 100% clear because the school principal still controls the whole school, but in general the school principal himself cannot make all decisions (Government representative, W41).

VIII.   LACK UNDERSTANDING AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRAINING

Other teachers acknowledged that the lack of comprehensive understanding about SBM has become the challenge and stated: "With my lack of knowledge about SBM, I just tend to follow higher level authorities in the education departments" (Teacher representative, W07). Four community representatives stated that they have not being provided with access to attend professional sessions and training on SBM provided by both District Education Department and Nusa Tenggara Timur Primary Education Partnership (NTT-PEP). In regard to this case, respondents 33 stated: The principal is the person who always joins training on SBM. I hope all school council members will be able to involve in training on SBM" (Community representative, W33). Another community representative stated:In terms of professional development for principals and council members, as far as I know, the principals are guided by the local district government and NTT-PEP advisors in terms of leadership and roles as principals, but I'venever attended any professional development sessions or training (Community representative, W34). The findings of this study are associated with similar problems in other developing countries. Researchers have indicated many problems and issues confronted by school leaders and school councils in the implementation of SBM, including poor resources in schools, lack of school textbooks, lack of professional development in leadership for school leaders and confusion on the part of school councils in relation to new roles and responsibilities, difficulties of coordination, lack of decision-making authority, lack of knowledge, low parental participation, under funding of education by

governments, dependency on central government, and even lack of time (Gamage and Sooksomchitra, 2004; Indriyanto, 2004; Cotton, 2003; Munn, 2000).

IX. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, importing education policy reforms implemented elsewhere under different economic, political and cultural conditions can present many challenges. Therefore, imported educational policy may be accepted, but should be adapted for implementation in order to minimize problems at the implementation stage. In coping with the problems and/or challenges, first of all, school council members should be encouraged to attend regular workshops on SBM. The District and/or Provincial Education Departments should facilitate such programs for the school principals, the heads of school councils, and other representatives of school councils. The training/workshops should be aimed at providing better knowledge and understanding about SBM policies and programs at the regional, national, and international levels.

Then, sustainable training programs for all primary school principals should be considered as a matter of urgency, enabling them to effectively implement SBM in school settings. These programs need to be designed for the purpose of providing comprehensive knowledge and better understanding for school leaders in leading and managing effective schools under the new SBM system. These recommendations are primarily aimed at building capacity in education which would help address the challenges and opportunities lying ahead for Indonesian school system in the 21st century.

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14