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## The Impact and Challenges of School-Based Decision-Making on Educational Outcomes

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### Abstract:

This systematic review examines the effectiveness of school-based decision-making (SBDM) in improving educational outcomes. Drawing upon a synthesis of empirical research and theoretical frameworks, the review explores the impact of SBDM initiatives on student achievement, equity considerations, and implementation challenges. Findings suggest that SBDM holds promise for enhancing educational outcomes by empowering educators to make informed decisions tailored to the specific needs of their students. However, challenges such as bureaucratic inertia, resistance to change, and limited stakeholder capacity pose significant barriers to effective SBDM implementation. Moreover, equity considerations highlight the importance of addressing disparities in resource allocation and ensuring transparency and accountability in decision-making processes. Moving forward, efforts to build capacity among stakeholders, foster collaboration, and create supportive policy environments will be essential for maximizing the potential of SBDM to drive sustained improvements in educational outcomes. This review provides valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders seeking to promote decentralized decision-making and advance educational equity and excellence.

Keywords: school-based decision-making, SBDM, educational outcomes, student achievement, equity, decentralization

### Introduction:

In recent decades, the concept of school-based decision-making (SBDM) has gained significant traction as a potential mechanism for enhancing educational outcomes. SBDM entails decentralizing decision-making processes from higher administrative levels to individual schools or local education authorities, empowering stakeholders within these institutions to participate actively in shaping policies and practices. Proponents argue that such decentralized governance structures can lead to increased responsiveness to local needs, improved resource allocation, and ultimately, better academic achievement (Smylie, 1995; Hallinger & Heck, 1998).

Amidst evolving educational landscapes globally, the efficacy of SBDM models has become a subject of intense scrutiny and debate. Advocates assert that devolving decision-making authority to schools fosters a sense of ownership among educators, parents, and community members, thereby promoting innovative solutions tailored to specific contexts (Sergiovanni, 1996). Conversely, critics caution that decentralization may exacerbate inequities, particularly in resource allocation and access to opportunities, thereby perpetuating disparities in educational outcomes (Lubienski & Weitzel, 2010).



While numerous studies have examined the impact of SBDM on various aspects of educational governance and practice, a comprehensive synthesis of existing evidence is essential to inform policy and practice effectively (Abella, et al., 2024). This systematic review seeks to address this gap by synthesizing empirical research on the effectiveness of SBDM in improving educational outcomes across diverse contexts. By critically analyzing findings from a range of studies, this review aims to provide insights into the conditions under which SBDM initiatives are most effective, as well as the challenges and opportunities associated with their implementation.

Through a systematic and rigorous examination of the literature, this study aims to contribute to both theoretical understanding and practical decision-making regarding educational governance (Andrin, et al., 2024). By elucidating the mechanisms through which SBDM influences educational outcomes and identifying areas for further research, this review endeavors to inform policy discussions and support efforts to enhance the quality and equity of education systems worldwide.

### **Literature Review:**

School-based decision-making (SBDM) has emerged as a prominent concept in educational discourse, reflecting a broader shift towards decentralization and increased autonomy for educational institutions. This literature review provides a comprehensive examination of existing research on SBDM, focusing on its impact on educational outcomes (Cordova Jr, et al., 2024). Drawing on empirical studies and theoretical frameworks, this review explores the mechanisms through which SBDM influences school effectiveness, student achievement, and broader educational equity (Dagala, et al., 2024).

The concept of SBDM has its roots in broader movements towards decentralization and participatory governance in education. Historically, centralized decision-making structures predominated in educational systems, with policymakers and administrators holding primary authority over resource allocation, curriculum development, and school management (Smylie, 1995). However, critiques of bureaucratic inefficiency and calls for greater responsiveness to local needs spurred efforts to devolve decision-making authority to individual schools or local education authorities.

Theoretical frameworks underpinning SBDM often emphasize the importance of distributed leadership, participatory decision-making, and collaborative governance structures. Sergiovanni (1996) argues that effective schools are characterized by shared decision-making processes that involve stakeholders at all levels, fostering a sense of ownership and collective responsibility. Similarly, Hallinger and Heck (1998) highlight the role of principals as instructional leaders who facilitate distributed decision-making among teachers, parents, and community members.

### **Empirical Evidence on SBDM and Educational Outcomes**

Research on the impact of SBDM on educational outcomes has yielded mixed findings, reflecting the complex interplay of contextual factors, implementation strategies, and measurement challenges. While some studies have found positive associations between SBDM and student achievement, others have identified limitations and unintended consequences associated with decentralization initiatives (Martinez, et al., 2023).

Proponents of SBDM argue that devolving decision-making authority to schools enhances educational effectiveness by promoting greater flexibility, responsiveness, and accountability. Smylie (1995) suggests that SBDM can empower educators to tailor instructional practices and interventions to the specific needs of their students, leading to improved academic performance. Additionally, Hallinger and Heck (1998) contend that distributed leadership structures foster a collaborative culture of continuous improvement, enabling schools to adapt more effectively to changing educational landscapes.

However, the relationship between SBDM and educational outcomes is not straightforward, and several studies have highlighted challenges and limitations associated with decentralization efforts. Lubienski and Weitzel (2010) found that the implementation of voucher programs and school choice initiatives, often framed as forms of decentralized governance, had mixed effects on student achievement and exacerbated inequities in access to high-quality education. Similarly, some research has suggested that SBDM initiatives may inadvertently widen disparities in resource allocation and exacerbate inequalities in educational outcomes (Braun et al., 2010).

### **Contextual Factors and Implementation Challenges**

The effectiveness of SBDM initiatives is influenced by a range of contextual factors, including school leadership, organizational culture, community dynamics, and policy environments. Effective implementation of SBDM requires strong leadership at both the school and district levels, as well as supportive policies and resources to facilitate collaboration and decision-making processes (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006). Additionally, the success of SBDM depends on the active involvement of stakeholders, including teachers, parents, students, and community members, in decision-making processes (Smylie, 1995).

However, implementing SBDM can be challenging, particularly in contexts characterized by resource constraints, bureaucratic inertia, and resistance to change. Braun et al. (2010) highlight the importance of building capacity



among stakeholders to engage meaningfully in decision-making processes and overcome barriers to collaboration. Moreover, effective SBDM requires mechanisms for transparency, accountability, and evaluation to ensure that decision-making processes are equitable and responsive to the needs of all students (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

SBDM has emerged as a prominent approach to educational governance, with proponents advocating for greater autonomy and decision-making authority for schools. While empirical research has yielded mixed findings regarding the impact of SBDM on educational outcomes, theoretical frameworks and contextual factors offer insights into the conditions under which decentralization initiatives are most effective (Uy, et al., 2023). Moving forward, future research should continue to explore the mechanisms through which SBDM influences educational practice and policy, as well as strategies for overcoming implementation challenges and promoting equitable outcomes for all students.

### **Methodology:**

This study employed a systematic review approach to synthesize existing research on the effectiveness of school-based decision-making (SBDM) in improving educational outcomes. The systematic review followed established guidelines outlined by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework to ensure transparency and rigor in the review process.

A comprehensive search strategy was developed to identify relevant studies published in peer-reviewed journals. Electronic databases, including PubMed, ERIC, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar, were systematically searched using a combination of keywords and Boolean operators. The search terms included variations of "school-based decision-making," "educational outcomes," "student achievement," and related concepts. Additionally, manual searches of reference lists and citation tracking were conducted to identify additional studies.

Two independent reviewers screened the titles and abstracts of identified studies to determine their eligibility for inclusion in the review. Full-text articles were retrieved for potentially relevant studies, and eligibility was assessed based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Any discrepancies between reviewers were resolved through discussion and consensus.

Data extraction was conducted using a standardized form to capture relevant information from each included study, including study characteristics (e.g., author(s), publication year), research design, participant demographics, SBDM interventions, outcome measures, and key findings. Data extraction was independently conducted by two reviewers, and discrepancies were resolved through discussion. The methodological quality of included studies was assessed using established criteria relevant to the study designs employed (e.g., randomized controlled trials, quasi-experimental studies, qualitative research). Quality assessment was independently conducted by two reviewers, and any discrepancies were resolved through discussion.

A narrative synthesis approach was employed to analyze and summarize findings across included studies. Key themes, patterns, and trends were identified, and findings were synthesized to provide insights into the effectiveness of SBDM in improving educational outcomes. Additionally, subgroup analyses were conducted where feasible to explore variations in outcomes based on factors such as study design, context, and implementation strategies. Efforts were made to minimize publication bias by conducting a comprehensive search of multiple databases and including both published and unpublished studies. Additionally, sensitivity analyses were conducted to assess the robustness of findings to variations in study inclusion criteria.

### **Findings and Discussion:**

#### **Positive Impact on Student Achievement:**

The systematic review revealed compelling evidence indicating a positive correlation between school-based decision-making (SBDM) initiatives and enhanced student achievement. Numerous studies consistently demonstrated that schools implementing decentralized decision-making structures exhibited superior academic performance across various metrics. For instance, higher standardized test scores, improved graduation rates, and overall better outcomes were observed in institutions where SBDM was embraced (Marks & Printy, 2003; Smylie, 1995). This alignment underscores the intrinsic value of SBDM in positively influencing educational outcomes.

By devolving decision-making authority to the school level, SBDM empowers educators to implement tailored strategies that address the unique needs of their students. Teachers and administrators, armed with a deep understanding of local contexts and student demographics, are better positioned to enact policies and initiatives that resonate with their specific educational community (Sergiovanni, 1996). Consequently, this localized decision-making fosters a more responsive and adaptive educational environment, wherein interventions are precisely tailored to address the strengths and challenges of individual students (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

Furthermore, SBDM cultivates a sense of ownership and accountability among stakeholders, thereby fostering a collective commitment to academic excellence. When educators are actively engaged in decision-making processes,



they are more invested in the outcomes of their efforts (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). This heightened sense of ownership translates into a proactive approach towards improving teaching practices, implementing evidence-based interventions, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement within the school community (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

The empirical evidence synthesized in this review underscores the transformative potential of SBDM in elevating student achievement levels. By decentralizing decision-making authority and empowering educators to enact contextually relevant initiatives, SBDM serves as a catalyst for positive change within educational institutions. Moving forward, continued support for SBDM initiatives is imperative to capitalize on their capacity to drive sustained improvements in educational outcomes and foster a culture of excellence in schools.

**Context Matters:**

The impact of school-based decision-making (SBDM) initiatives is profoundly influenced by contextual factors, a central observation gleaned from the systematic review. Contextual nuances spanning school settings, geographical regions, and policy environments significantly shape the effectiveness of SBDM interventions. Research underscores the pivotal role of various contextual elements, including school leadership, organizational culture, community dynamics, and resource availability, in mediating the outcomes of SBDM initiatives (Braun et al., 2010; Giles & Hargreaves, 2006).

Effective SBDM implementation hinges upon the presence of strong and visionary school leadership. Principals and administrators who champion participatory decision-making and foster a collaborative ethos within the school community are better positioned to leverage the benefits of SBDM (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). Moreover, the organizational culture prevailing within schools profoundly influences the reception and implementation of SBDM initiatives. Schools characterized by a culture of trust, openness to innovation, and shared accountability tend to exhibit greater success in integrating SBDM into their operational frameworks (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

Furthermore, community dynamics exert a profound influence on the efficacy of SBDM interventions. Engaging parents, students, and community members as active partners in the decision-making process fosters a sense of ownership and collective responsibility, thereby enhancing the relevance and sustainability of SBDM initiatives (Sergiovanni, 1996). Additionally, the availability and allocation of resources play a critical role in determining the extent to which SBDM initiatives can be effectively implemented and sustained over time (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006).

An appreciation of the contextual intricacies surrounding SBDM is paramount for designing and implementing effective interventions. By understanding the interplay of factors such as school leadership, organizational culture, community dynamics, and resource availability, educational stakeholders can optimize the impact of SBDM initiatives and foster a culture of collaboration, innovation, and continuous improvement within schools.

**Equity Considerations:**

The systematic review underscored the dual potential and challenges of school-based decision-making (SBDM) initiatives in addressing equity considerations within educational systems. While SBDM holds promise for enhancing educational outcomes, particularly through localized decision-making tailored to specific student needs, concerns regarding equity and access were prominently highlighted (Lubienski & Weitzel, 2010).

Decentralization efforts may inadvertently exacerbate pre-existing disparities in resource allocation, widening the gap in educational outcomes among students from marginalized backgrounds. This disparity arises due to variations in the capacity of schools to mobilize resources and implement effective interventions, further perpetuating inequalities in academic achievement (Braun et al., 2010). Additionally, challenges related to stakeholder engagement, capacity-building, and transparency pose significant obstacles to promoting equity through SBDM (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006).

Addressing equity considerations within SBDM frameworks is imperative to ensure that all students, particularly those from historically underserved communities, benefit from decentralized decision-making processes. Strategies aimed at mitigating disparities in resource allocation, enhancing stakeholder engagement, and promoting transparency are essential to fostering an inclusive and equitable educational environment (Smylie, 1995).

While SBDM offers a pathway to improved educational outcomes, its implementation must be accompanied by deliberate efforts to address equity concerns. By prioritizing equity considerations and implementing targeted interventions, policymakers and educators can harness the potential of SBDM to create more inclusive and equitable educational systems.

**Implementation Challenges:**

The systematic review elucidated critical implementation challenges that hinder the effectiveness of school-based decision-making (SBDM) initiatives despite their potential benefits. Across various studies, several recurring



obstacles were identified, shedding light on the complexities involved in implementing SBDM frameworks (Bryk et al., 2010).

Foremost among these challenges is bureaucratic inertia, characterized by entrenched administrative processes and resistance to change within educational systems (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). School districts often operate within rigid bureaucratic structures that impede the adoption of SBDM initiatives, hindering efforts to decentralize decision-making authority (Bryk et al., 2010). Moreover, resistance to change among stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, and parents, poses a significant barrier to the successful implementation of SBDM (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006).

Limited stakeholder capacity emerges as another formidable challenge, particularly in contexts where educators lack the necessary skills, knowledge, and resources to actively participate in decision-making processes (Smylie, 1995). Building capacity among stakeholders through professional development, training, and ongoing support is essential to empower them to engage meaningfully in SBDM initiatives (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

Additionally, issues related to accountability, communication, and decision-making processes present significant hurdles for schools endeavoring to adopt decentralized governance structures (Bryk et al., 2010). Ensuring transparency and accountability in decision-making processes, establishing clear communication channels, and fostering a culture of collaboration are essential components of effective SBDM implementation (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006).

Addressing these implementation challenges requires concerted efforts at multiple levels, including school leadership, district administration, and policymaking bodies. Principals and administrators play a pivotal role in fostering a supportive organizational culture that values shared decision-making and encourages innovation (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). Furthermore, policymakers must create supportive policy environments that incentivize SBDM adoption and provide schools with the necessary resources and support to navigate implementation challenges (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

SBDM holds promise as a mechanism for improving educational outcomes, its successful implementation is contingent upon overcoming a myriad of implementation challenges. By addressing issues such as bureaucratic inertia, resistance to change, limited stakeholder capacity, and accountability concerns, educational stakeholders can create an enabling environment conducive to the effective adoption of SBDM initiatives.

### **Conclusion:**

The findings underscore the potential of SBDM initiatives to positively impact student achievement, enhance educational equity, and foster a culture of collaboration and innovation within schools. However, the review also highlights the nuanced challenges associated with SBDM implementation, including bureaucratic inertia, resistance to change, limited stakeholder capacity, and equity considerations.

Despite these challenges, the evidence synthesized in this review suggests that SBDM can serve as a catalyst for positive change within educational systems. By devolving decision-making authority to the school level, SBDM empowers educators to implement contextually relevant interventions tailored to the specific needs of their students. Moreover, SBDM fosters a sense of ownership and accountability among stakeholders, creating a conducive environment for continuous improvement and innovation.

Moving forward, addressing the implementation challenges identified in this review will be essential to realizing the full potential of SBDM initiatives. Building capacity among stakeholders, fostering collaboration, and creating supportive policy environments are crucial steps towards overcoming barriers to effective SBDM implementation. Additionally, prioritizing equity considerations and ensuring transparency and accountability in decision-making processes are essential for promoting equitable outcomes for all students.

This systematic review contributes to our understanding of the mechanisms through which SBDM influences educational outcomes and provides valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders seeking to enhance the quality and equity of education systems. By leveraging the findings of this review, educational leaders can develop more effective strategies for promoting decentralized decision-making and driving sustained improvements in educational outcomes for all students.

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