

Principals and Teachers' perceptions of School-Based Management

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Abstract

The study aims to examine the perceptions of a sample of Hong Kong principals and teachers of the extent to which school-based management (SBM) has been effectively implemented in primary schools. More specifically, the purpose of this study is to investigate the following research questions, as perceived by principals and teachers: (1) Which features of SBM are being implemented in Hong Kong primary schools; (2) To what extent are they being implemented? (3) What is the difference between the perceptions of teachers and principals towards SBM? The features of school-based management implemented in Hong Kong primary schools include (1) leadership competence and work relationships, (2) staff coordination and effectiveness, (3) financial planning and control, and (4) resources and accommodation. A quantitative, survey questionnaire was adopted in this study. A total of 322 respondents (83 principals and 239 teachers) out of 83 primary schools responded to the questionnaire. The means, standard deviation and t-test were used to analyze the results. The finding shows that all four features of school-based management are perceived as being implemented in Hong Kong primary schools, but the degree of their implementation is not the same. The most adopted elements of school-based management are 'financial planning and control' and 'leadership competence and work relationships'. The moderate adopted element is 'resources and accommodation'. The least adopted element is 'staff coordination and effectiveness'. In addition, there are significant differences between the perceptions of principals and teachers towards the areas of SBM.

Keywords: School Management Initiative (SMI), School-based Management (SBM)

1. Introduction

In the 1980s, the system of relatively uniform centralised budget resource allocation to schools was judged by many to have impaired the achievement of equality, efficiency, liberty and choice. Thus, school-based management was suggested, with lump sum budgets allocated to schools, together with a high degree of community involvement in school decision making and the fostering of diversity within schools to ensure choice (Caldwell & Spinks, 1988). School-based management (SBM) was intended to encourage positive participation from teacher and parent representatives on the school

board committee. SBM also promises greater freedom and authority for principals to exercise their leadership (McInerney, 2003). This attracted groups of people with different interests to participate in school policy decision-making. Schools also allowed professional teachers to express their opinions and take up greater responsibility for decision-making. Teachers became more like partners rather than employees. This was intended to help the employees develop the school and strengthen their sense of belonging to the school.

In Hong Kong, in the 1970s and 1980s, student performance was judged to be far from adequate. Wong (1995a) argued that this was partly due to the tightening of administrative and financial controls over the schools caused by the proliferation of Education Department's policies over the years. The Education Department published the School Management Initiatives in 1991 and suggested that all schools should implement school-based management by 2000: thus schools would change from the external control model to that of decentralised authority. Afterwards, the Incorporated Management Committee (IMC) was set up to monitor the subsidized school before July 1, 2009 (Pang, 2008).

Different features of SBM are being implemented in Hong Kong schools to assure quality. However, experience suggests that the policy of *School Management Initiative* has created many implementation problems resulting in negative perceptions of SBM. It appears that time is inadequate for principal preparation and teacher training programmes to prepare a body of professionals to cope with the changes required, and the Education Department does not sufficiently promote school management effectiveness in schools. School community members have insufficient incentive for schools to take or accept responsibility for achieving school management effectiveness. Schools appear to feel discouraged by the inflexible funding and funding levels unrelated to performance. Hong Kong's primary school system has been configured in a unique way because the Education Department is the central bureaucracy. Unlike the private, profit-making schools and those government schools controlled by the Education Department, most aided schools are publicly funded as they operate under a Code of Aid and a Letter of Agreement between the Director of Education and the schools' sponsoring body. SBM appears to conflict with the previous practices in local primary schools and school reformers, principals and teachers have to confront several tensions in restructuring. The three main such tensions are: changes in the way of teaching and learning in schools; changes in the occupational situation of educators, like decision-making processes and conditions of teachers' work in schools; and changes in the school governance and the distribution of power between schools and their clients. It is, therefore, worthwhile to investigate what features of SBM are actually being adopted in the local primary schools. Moreover, as the principals are the highest rank and the direct manager of the schools, their perceptions of SBM are also important.

Under these circumstances, the purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of a sample of Hong Kong principals and teachers of the extent to which SBM has been effectively implemented in primary schools. More specifically, this study aims to investigate the following research questions, as perceived by principals and teachers:

2. Theory Background

School-based management (SBM) is a worldwide education reform strategy (Bandur, 2012). School-based management has no clear cut definitions, but has various names, such as local management of schools, site-based management, self-managing school, school-site autonomy, school-based budgeting, school-based curriculum development, shared decision-making, restructuring and decentralised management. The differences in names are less important than the shifts in authority implicit in the process (Herman & Herman, 1993).

School-based management can be defined as a system where there is a significant and consistent decentralisation to the school level of authority to make decisions related to the allocation of

resources, with resources defined broadly to include knowledge, technology, power, material, people, time and money and to work as the collaborative school management cycle which integrates goal-setting, need identification, policy-making, planning, budgeting, implementing, and evaluating systematically. The school remains accountable to a central authority for the manner in which resources are used (Caldwell & Spinks, 1988; 1992). Later on, the SBM is defined as the shifting of decision-making authority from the district office to individual schools (Anderson, 2006). It is also affirmed that the movement toward SBM is often assumed as the approach to serve students better by improving the school practices in meeting the diverse expectations of the stakeholders in a changing environment toward increasing student performance and achievements (Anderson, 2006; Bandur & Gamage, 2009; Blank, 2004; Caldwell, 2005; Cheng & Mok, 2007; Gamage & Sooksomchitra, 2004; Gamage & Zajda, 2005; Muijs, Harris, Chapman, Stoll, & Russ, 2004; Sheldon & Van Voorhis, 2004).

In Hong Kong, the government focused its education policy on improving the quality of education and proposed a comprehensive change of public sector school reform in financial and management strategies and procedures of the administration in 1989. In 1991, the Education and Manpower Branch and the Education Department published the policy document named *The School Management Initiative (SMI): Setting the Framework for Quality in Hong Kong Schools* (Education and Manpower Branch and the Education Department [EMB&ED], 1991) for setting out the reform of the school system. The SMI document supports Hong Kong's school restructuring with a school effectiveness model, that is, to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the school management and to achieve better quality of education in all the systems. The Hong Kong's SMI is equivalent to the United Kingdom's local management of schools, school-based management in the United States and the self-managing school in Australia.

In 1991, SMI was introduced in Hong Kong as a voluntary scheme opting in by schools to increase membership by persuasion rather than by legislative coercion. The first cohort of 21 schools (aided secondary) joined the scheme in 1991. In 1992, 13 secondary schools (10 government and 3 aided) joined it. The participating schools increased sharply to 93 (70 primary and 23 secondary) in 1993 by the influx of schools from the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals and Po Leung Kuk. In 1994, more than 100 schools participated out of a total of approximately 1250 schools. By 1997, only a minority of schools (under one-quarter) had chosen formal membership, an outcome regarded as somewhat disappointing. It is worth recognising that though many schools had chosen not to become formal members of the SMI scheme, they were, in fact, implementing policies consistent with the SMI strategy. Yet, Wong (1995b) noted that the tightening of administrative and financial controls over the schools had been the Education Department's own doing caused by the proliferation of its policies over the years. The net outcome was the stretching of its own resources and the stifling of school initiatives.

According to the policy documents - *The School Management Initiative (SMI): Setting the Framework for Quality in Hong Kong Schools* (EMB&ED, 1991) and *Quality Assurance in School Education – Performance Indicators for Primary School* (Education Department, 1998), four components of SBM have been distinguished in this study: (1) leadership competence and work relationships; (2) staff coordination and effectiveness; (3) financial planning and control; and (4) resources and accommodation.

The features of SBM in Hong Kong are analysed, for this study, in the dimensions of (1) leadership competence and work relationship, (2) staff coordination and effectiveness, (3) financial planning and control, and (4) resources and accommodation in the following.

2.1 Leadership Competence and Work Relationships

There is a critical need for effective school-based leaders in the schools (Sergiovanni, 2007; Darling-Hammond, & Orphanos, 2007). As for leadership competence and work relationship in Hong Kong, SMI's Recommendations 5 to 8 focus on clearer definitions of the roles and clear responsibility

for School Management Committee (SMC), sponsors, supervisors and principals for the delivery of quality education in effective school management (EMB&ED, 1991). The role and legal contractual position of the sponsor regarding school management as well as the roles and duties of the supervisor and the principal in relation to the SMC, principal and the school should also be clarified and set out in a principals' manual. Thus, leaders should provide the link between the school and the SMC. Moreover, every SMC should produce a constitution setting out the procedures and practices of its management. Principals are required to demonstrate more diversified management and leadership skills and capacities, and subjected to greater accountability (Lam, 2006). Furthermore, principals should change from an authoritarian to a collaborative decision-making leadership style. Some principals with dictatorial power are insufficiently accountable for their action because of the lack of effective educational and managerial leadership in schools while leaders strongly for school-based management use collaborative decision-making leadership style within a framework of school objectives (EMB&ED, 1991). A survey on SMI found that more systematic planning, however, was evident to be illusory, since involvement appeared to be confined to the senior levels of staff, and even monopolised by the principal (Education Department [ED], 1994). The roles and responsibilities of the principal in a restructuring school have changed to acquire and practise certain types of leadership and managerial behaviours in order to implement the restructuring process successfully (Caldwell & Spinks, 1992; Briggs & Wohlstetter, 2003). The leadership and work relationship related to school management effectiveness. Thus, leadership is a critical factor for organisational performance by shaping organisational process and structures, patterns of social interactions, and members' beliefs, attitudes and job behaviours. The principals should always be open to encourage parents and teachers to express their opinions when making decision. The stronger is the leadership, the higher will be the teachers' morale. However, it is poor leaderships that hampers the achievement of school management effectiveness and the greatest barrier to effective schooling can be found in administrators themselves. Thus, principals should concentrate on developing their leadership roles in structural, human, political, symbolic and educational dimensions, and work in collaborative and collegial relationships with teachers for school management effectiveness (Cheng, 1994). Also, as suggested by Sergiovanni (1991), effective leadership embraces the following five qualities – structural, human, political, symbolic and educational. The principals should have overall preparedness for the position, effectiveness of job performance, longevity, transference of skills gained to professional staff development within the school site, and student achievement within their districts (Marcos, Witmer, Foland, Vouga, & Wise, 2011). Besides, the principals were considered to be high competent in the area of vision for the organization because of their knowledge of the tasks, the materials to be learned, and their strategies for learning to influence academic success (Cisse & Okato, 2009).

2.2 Staff Coordination and Effectiveness

Staff coordination and effectiveness of SMI, as stated in Recommendation 10, promotes team participation in decision making of the school-level management by all concerned parties, including all teaching staff, the principal, the SMC, parents and former students (EMB&ED, 1991). Once a school experienced success, keeping the staff enjoyed team working in the school and worked cooperatively together with fellow teachers was essential to maintain and promote further success (Leung, 1993). Participation or empowerment of teachers in the management of schools is recommended with an implicit assumption that empowerment of teachers is related to better quality of school outcomes (Cheng, 1996). Hong Kong's SMI restructuring policy provides each school with greater flexibility and responsibility for managing its own affairs in return for rendering greater accountability for its performance to the central bureaucracy and to newly empowered SMC with representatives from the school community (Cheng, 1996). Hoy and Miskel (1996) mentioned that the rational decision making and administrative efficiency can be maximized, bureaucracy being an ideal structure for an organisation is characterised by as follows: (1) Division of labour and specialisation: each person's job is broken into simple, routine, and well-defined tasks. (2)

Impersonal orientation: sanctions are applied uniformly and impersonally to avoid involvement with individual personalities and personal preferences of members. (3) Hierarchy of authority: each lower office is under the supervision and control of a higher one. (4) Rules and regulations: to ensure uniformity and to regulate the behaviour of jobholders. (5) Career orientation: members are expected to pursue a promotion or a permanent career for this career commitment in the organisation. The schools should be effective if they establish an adequate school structure to facilitate the development of the educational processes, to lubricate and fuel the dynamics of interaction within the effective functioning of the whole school system (Purkey & Smith, 1983), and to create effective conditions and efforts for uniting all sub-units in the school (Levine & Lezotte, 1990; Scheerens, 1993). Past study shows that the most popular staff development programmes are taking higher education and training, in-service courses and participating in workshops, seminars and conferences among others. During such programmes, teachers learn school management skills, evaluation techniques, academic achievement correlates and master wider content areas of their subjects (Ngala & Odebero, 2010). The principals should give formal training to teachers to enhance the effectiveness (Cisse & Okato, 2009).

2.3 Financial Planning and Control

Good financial planning program in schools is essential to students' learning (Goetz, Durband, Halley & Davis, 2011). As for financial planning and control of SMI, Recommendations 11 to 15 (EMB&ED, 1991) relate to financial management, each school receiving a block grant to cover all non-salary expenditures and to allow with greater flexibility to decide its own spending pattern. Schools were to be given the discretion to use savings from up to 5 per cent of a teacher's salary for any staff or non-staff spending and, in the long term, more flexibly in school finance to merge salary and non-salary grants for the benefit of the schools. In SMI giving transfer of budgetary authority, schools were allowed for devolution of authority and for financial management with the use of multiple measures of control and accountability in allocating its budget planning in terms of priorities of school direction on progress and school improvement (O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1998). The second survey on SMI progress found that most member schools were successfully managing their decentralised block grants (ED, 1994).

2.4 Resources and Accommodation

Under SMI, the school physical environment and facilities were to be up-graded or enhanced and learning resources diversified (Briggs & Wohlstetter, 2003). Facilities like classrooms, school halls, the library, staff rooms, computer-assisted learning room and computer rooms air-conditioned are essential. A local area network with computer hardware and notebooks, suitable technical support, properly trained staff and a computer coordinator with basic audio-visual teaching aids like overhead projectors with screen, black out curtains and magnetic white boards for all classrooms could be provided to Hong Kong primary schools. Education should make use of resources from the community facilities such as public libraries and community centres to increase computers and Internet access to support learning beyond the confines of the classroom (Education Commission [EC], 2000). Personal attention to students was one of the strong predictors of effective school management (Stedman, 1987), thus, effective school management should lower the ratio of students to teachers so as to increase the interaction between teachers and students (Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, Lewis, & Ecob, 1989). The class size is largely determined by administrative factors such as the availability of teachers and classroom space (Stern, 1992). In addition, the schools should have certain resources to ensure the quality teaching (De Grauwe, 2005).

To reduce their workloads, more teachers should be provided to meet the needs for individualised attention to pupils, interactions with parents, lesson preparation and assessment arising from better teaching skills and new initiatives with school-based curriculum, time needed to interact and work with colleagues and attend professional development activities. Besides parental human and financial support, teaching assistants and teacher librarians, a clerical officer to assist teaching-related clerical

duties and an additional clerical assistant for 24 classes, or the clerical and janitor support in the form of an administration grant should be provided. Other findings on SMI progress found that first, respondents indicated an increase in workload, with especially heavy demands falling on middle managers. Second, there was evidence that the reform had not penetrated to any great extent the work of teachers at the classroom level. Third, some evidence suggested that school personnel felt a lack of support from system level. Finally, some complained about time constraints (Cheng, 1992). These latter findings confirm that reactions and responses to restructuring are experienced by participants in other school systems (Dimmock, 1995).

2.5 Principal and Teacher's Involvement in SBM

Principals indicated a higher degree of implementation than teachers, which could suggest that principals are merely purporting the SBM implementation at higher degrees because they are aware of the consequences that could come from not claiming to be a site-based campus. Another possibility is that teachers were reporting what actually takes place or does not take place at their campuses, regardless of consequences that may come from admitting limited degrees of SBM (Rodriguez & Slate, 2001). Since teachers did not want to be, nor practically could they be involved in all decision making in their schools, they had to trust that the principal handled teacher concerns, dealt with problems and made decisions based on their input and their shared understandings of issues in key decisions based on their input and their shared understandings of issues in key decision arenas (Bredeson, 1992). In addition, teachers reported feeling deprived of the opportunity to participate in decision-making. Teachers had greater desire to be involved in instructional decisions than in curricular domain and managerial decisions. Teachers felt that they were insufficiently involved in school based curriculum decision and managerial decisions that involved human resource, finance and strategic management (Cheng, 2008).

3. Research Method

To investigate the three research questions, a quantitative, survey questionnaire was adopted. This research used the survey questionnaire (Appendix) to investigate the perceptions of the principals and teachers towards the school's use of a SBM approach. These items came from *Quality Assurance in School Education – Performance Indicators for Primary School* (Education Department [ED], 1998). The items of SBM were divided into 4 areas: leadership competence and work relationships (Q1 to Q5), staff coordination and effectiveness (Q6, Q7), financial planning and control (Q8 to Q14), and resources and accommodation (Q15 to Q17). Five-point Likert-type scales were assigned to all items. These items were anchored at (5) strongly agree; (4) agree; (3) no idea; (2) disagree and (1) strongly disagree. For the survey, the random sampling method was first used to select different schools from a list of all Hong Kong primary schools and then a purposive sampling for heterogeneity within the group sampled. Before distribution of the questionnaires, letters were sent to the respective primary schools' principals for their permission. Thus, 322 respondents (83 principals and 239 teachers) were collected from a total of 460 which had been distributed to 83 primary schools. This research mainly used mean and standard deviation in the analyses of data. Before the data was analysed, the Cronbach alpha values of these four features were measured using SPSS version 15. The Cronbach alpha values of 'leadership competence and work relationship', 'staff coordination and effectiveness', 'financial planning and control' and 'resources and accommodation' were 0.9075, 0.8005, 0.8781 and 0.8567 respectively. Normally, the alpha value should be greater than 0.7 for well established measures (Nunnally, 1978). As no alpha value in this survey study was less than 0.7, the results were considered to be consistent and reliable. The factor analysis was then used to conduct for 5 items of 'leadership competence and work relationship', 2 items of 'staff coordination and effectiveness', 7 items of 'financial planning and control' and 3 items of 'resource and accommodation' separately. We found that all factor loadings were above 0.3 and the eigenvalue of

each measure was greater than one. Since factor loadings less than 0.3 were omitted as it is accepted that only factor loadings on the attributes greater than 0.3 were suitable for interpretation (Comrey, 1973), all items in these four school-based management areas were retained.

4. Findings

4.1 Quantitative Respondents' Personal Demographic Characteristics

Table 1. Profile of quantitative respondents' personal demographic characteristics

| Personal Characteristics | Categories | Respondent No. (N=322) | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------------------|---|------------------------|----------------|
| Sex | Male | 72 | 22.4 |
| | Female | 250 | 77.6 |
| Age | Under 25 | 39 | 12.1 |
| | 26-30 | 55 | 17.1 |
| | 31-35 | 43 | 13.4 |
| | 36-40 | 26 | 8.1 |
| | 41-45 | 45 | 14.0 |
| | 46-50 | 49 | 15.2 |
| | Over 51 | 65 | 20.2 |
| Educational Qualification | Certificate | 121 | 37.6 |
| | Diploma | 31 | 9.6 |
| | Bachelor Degree | 152 | 47.3 |
| | Master Degree | 15 | 4.6 |
| | Doctor Degree | 3 | 0.9 |
| Professional Qualification | Teacher certificate | 180 | 55.9 |
| | Bachelor of Education | 119 | 37.0 |
| | Postgraduate Certificate/Diploma in Education | 11 | 3.4 |
| | Master of Education | 10 | 3.1 |
| | Doctor of Education | 2 | 0.6 |
| Position | Certificate Mistress/ Master | 184 | 57.1 |
| | Assistant Primary School Mistress/ Master | 20 | 6.2 |
| | Assistant Mistress/ Master | 35 | 10.9 |
| | Principal/ Primary School Mistress/ Master | 83 | 25.8 |
| Year of Service | Under 5 | 66 | 20.5 |
| | 6-10 | 55 | 17.1 |
| | 11-15 | 37 | 11.5 |
| | 16-20 | 33 | 10.2 |
| | 21-25 | 37 | 11.5 |
| | 26-30 | 47 | 14.6 |
| | Over 30 | 47 | 14.6 |
| Year of Serving in Present School | Under 5 | 113 | 35.1 |
| | 6-10 | 98 | 30.4 |
| | 11-15 | 44 | 13.7 |
| | 16-20 | 26 | 8.1 |
| | 21-25 | 15 | 4.7 |
| | 26-30 | 13 | 4.0 |
| | Over 30 | 13 | 4.0 |

As shown in Table 1, 77.6% of the respondents were female staff, a large proportion in the educational field as compared with the whole population. Over one-third (35.4%) of them aged over 46 served for more than 10 years (62.4%) and majority served for more than 10 years (65.5%) at the present school located in Hong Kong, Kowloon and the New Territories. Over half of the respondents were holders of Bachelor’s Degree or above (52.8%) and 44.1% had Bachelor of Education or above ranked at Assistant Primary School Mistress/Master or above (42.9%).

Below are shown the perceived features of SBM in terms of their means and level.

4.2 Means of School-based Management

The means of SBM, including leadership competence and work relationship, staff coordination and effectiveness, financial planning and control, and resources and accommodation are described below as shown in Table 2.

Among the areas of school-based management perceived by the respondents, 6 out of 9 areas were given a mean score of above 3.5. The results showed that ‘leadership competence and work relationship’ (mean = 3.61, standard deviation = 0.51) topped the most agreed areas of school-based management. While the least agreed area rated with a mean score of below 3.5 was ‘staff coordination and effectiveness’ (mean = 3.22, standard deviation = 0.93).

Table 2. Means of school-based management

| Areas of School-based Management | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Standard Deviation (Std. D.) |
|---|---------|---------|------|------------------------------|
| Leadership competence & Work relationship (LCWR) | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.61 | 0.507 |
| Staff coordination & effectiveness (SCE) | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.22 | 0.934 |
| Financial planning & control (FPC) | 1.17 | 5.00 | 3.60 | 0.787 |
| Resources & accommodation (RA) | 1.67 | 5.00 | 3.50 | 0.662 |

Level of School-Based Management. The level of SBM, including high, moderate and low, representing the most, moderate and the least implemented areas respectively, are described below as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Level of school-based management

| Area of SBM | Low Level of SBM | | | | Moderate Level of SBM | | | | High Level of SBM | | | |
|-------------|------------------|------|------|---------|-----------------------|------|------|---------|-------------------|------|------|---------|
| | Min. | Max. | Mean | Std. D. | Min. | Max. | Mean | Std. D. | Min. | Max. | Mean | Std. D. |
| LCWR | 1.00 | 4.00 | 2.66 | 0.957 | 2.80 | 4.40 | 3.66 | 0.336 | 3.20 | 5.00 | 4.21 | 0.406 |
| SCE | 1.00 | 3.50 | 2.27 | 0.820 | 2.50 | 4.00 | 3.44 | 0.461 | 3.00 | 5.00 | 3.95 | 0.497 |
| FPC | 1.67 | 4.46 | 2.84 | 0.771 | 2.71 | 4.63 | 3.69 | 0.422 | 3.25 | 5.00 | 4.21 | 0.441 |
| RA | 1.67 | 4.33 | 3.14 | 0.653 | 2.67 | 4.33 | 3.65 | 0.395 | 3.33 | 5.00 | 4.16 | 0.467 |

Most Implemented Areas in SBM. Among the areas perceived to be in the high level of SBM, 2 areas out of 4 were given a mean score of above 4.20. The results showed that ‘financial planning and control’ (mean = 4.21, Std. D. = 0.44) and ‘leadership competence and work relationship’ (mean = 4.21, Std. D. = 0.41) topped the most agreed upon and implemented areas by the respondents. Most

schools responded very favourably to the request to implement SBM, especially in the areas of 'financial planning and control' and 'leadership competence and work relationship'.

Least Implemented Areas in SBM. While in the low level of SBM, 1 area out of 4 was given a mean score of below 2.5. The results showed that 'staff coordination and effectiveness' (mean = 2.27, Std. D. = 0.82) topped the least agreed upon and implemented area as perceived by the respondents. Most schools agreed least favorably to implement 'staff coordination and effectiveness' of SBM.

4.3 Perception of Principals and Teachers towards SBM

It was found (Table 4) that there were significant differences between the perceptions of principals and teachers towards the areas of SBM. Among the areas of SBM, 'leadership competence and work relationship' ($t = 5.90, p < 0.001$) and 'financial planning and control' ($t = 5.85, p < 0.001$) topped the most different perception between principals and teachers. The areas of least different perception between principals and teachers were 'decentralisation' ($t = 2.79, p < 0.01$) and 'self-evaluation' ($t = 3.28, p < 0.01$). Thus, principals holding a senior position have more positive attitudes towards SBM than teachers having a junior position.

Table 4. Perception of principals and teachers towards school-based management

| Area of SBM | Mean (Standard Deviation) | | Mean Difference | t | df | Sig. |
|---|---------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------|-----|-------|
| | Principal (N=83) | Teacher (N=239) | | | | |
| LCW | 3.957 (0.479) | 3.350 (0.763) | 0.61 | 5.90*** | 320 | 0.000 |
| Dec | 3.703 (0.528) | 3.466 (0.611) | 0.24 | 2.79** | 320 | 0.006 |
| FPC | 3.808 (0.623) | 3.276 (0.640) | 0.53 | 5.85*** | 320 | 0.000 |
| SEV | 3.561 (0.682) | 3.244 (0.674) | 0.32 | 3.28** | 320 | 0.001 |
| t-test is significant at * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$ Sig. (2-tailed) | | | | | | |

5. Discussion

Since the publication of the School Management Initiatives by the Hong Kong Education Department in 1991 and School Quality Education in 1997, schools in Hong Kong have gradually changed from external control management to school-based management to improve educational quality and school effectiveness. Teachers and principals have also supposedly changed from the role of employees to partners in the schools. They bear the responsibility for participating positively in the decision making of school policy and implementing the school plan to maintain QM in school.

5.1 Establishing School Structures

As found by the present study, 'staff coordination and effectiveness' of SBM is the least adopted elements perceived by principals and teachers. Most of the schools have a large number of duty lists, committees, teams, subjects and groups headed by senior teachers or vice-principals who are directly responsible to the principal. Almost all organisations are still characterised by bureaucracy. To maximise rational decision making and administrative efficiency, bureaucracy being an ideal structure for an organisation is characterised by as follows: (1) Division of labour and specialisation: each person's job is broken into simple, routine, and well-defined tasks. (2) Impersonal orientation: sanctions are applied uniformly and impersonally to avoid involvement with individual personalities and personal preferences of members. (3) Hierarchy of authority: each lower office is under the supervision and control of a higher one. (4) Rules and regulations: to ensure uniformity and to

regulate the behaviour of jobholders. (5) Career orientation: members are expected to pursue a promotion or a permanent career for this career commitment in the organisation (Hoy & Miskel, 1996, p.104). It must avoid reliance on bureaucratic processes that stress forms and checklists, as well as mandated components rigidly applied in schools and classrooms. The success of a school depends on a judicious mixture of autonomy for staff participating in decision-making of various subjects with groups and less control from the central office for a direct autonomy.

As suggested by several scholars that the schools should be effective if they establish an adequate school structure to facilitate the development of the educational processes, to lubricate and fuel the dynamics of interaction within the effective functioning of the whole school system (Purkey & Smith, 1983), and to create effective conditions and efforts for uniting all sub-units in the school (Levine & Lezotte, 1990; Scheerens, 1993). Creemers (1993) also emphasises that the managerial, structural and cultural conditions should be conducive to effective schools. Schools should seek out and consider using materials and approaches that have been successful so that staffs are empowered and schools should be given greater autonomy and authority with more flexibility and responsibility for the delegation of financial planning to work out activities to meet pupil needs and to improve pupil academic achievements. Also, more gatherings and more communication channels can be used for teachers to express their opinions and complaints to solve their problems leading to effective management.

5.2 Developing Effective Leadership with Collaborative and Collegial Relationships

The 'leadership competence and work relationship' of SBM is the other dominant perceived factor and one of the most adopted elements as supported by the findings. Cheng (1994) stated the leadership and work relationship related to school management effectiveness. Thus, leadership is a critical factor for organisational performance by shaping organisational process and structures, patterns of social interactions, and members' beliefs, attitudes and job behaviours. The principals should always be open to encourage parents and teachers to express their opinions when making decision. The stronger is the leadership, the higher will be the teachers' morale. However, it is poor leaderships that hampers the achievement of school management effectiveness and the greatest barrier to effective schooling can be found in administrators themselves. Thus, principals should concentrate on developing their leadership roles in structural, human, political, symbolic and educational dimensions, and work in collaborative and collegial relationships with teachers for school management effectiveness. Also, as suggested by Sergiovanni (1991), effective leadership embraces the following five qualities – structural, human, political, symbolic and educational.

- (1) The structural leadership regards structures, rules and regulations as means to higher ends by achieving the school mission in participatory structures for teachers, parents, and students as limited to plan in a communal act; and by developing an accountability system with not quite clear goals and policies as direction towards achievements.
- (2) The human leadership refers to the extent of supporting staff, promoting feeling of unity, staff cohesion and commonality among the staff, communication, collaborative with participatory planning and collegial relationships between teachers and administrators. Principals should listen to suggestions of not only senior staff but also teachers and parents.
- (3) The political leadership refers to the extent of persuasive and affective abilities at building alliances and support, and resolving conflict. Most principals are quite successful on supporting the school process like acquiring extra resources for adding classrooms and improving the classroom arrangement. However, most principals seldom attend any committees or subject meetings, or resolve any complaints, such as too few teachers being assigned too many tasks.
- (4) The symbolic leadership refers to the extent of inspirational and charismatic power. As

described by teachers, most principals have maintained their visibility by standing in front of the students in the daily assemblies every morning and making announcements on activities in the public address system. It is doubtful if this could give students and teachers an inspirational and charismatic impression of the principals.

- (5) The educational leadership refers to the extent of emphasising and encouraging professional development and teaching improvement. Most principals have provided teachers with the staff development day and SMI day and have encouraged them to take training courses for effective teaching. Yet, teachers have heavy workloads and need to make special timetable arrangement, causing them to be unwilling to have professional training.

5.3 Promoting Teaching Effectiveness - Lowering Ratio of Teacher and Student for Personal Attention to Students.

Findings show that 'financial planning and control' and 'resources and accommodation' of SBM are perceived to be the most implemented areas. Financial control to resources making large class size of at least 40 students in each class will hinder the teachers' attention to the students. As found by Stedman (1987), personal attention to students was one of the strong predictors of effective school management, thus, effective school management should lower the ratio of students to teachers so as to increase the interaction between teachers and students (Mortimore *et al.*, 1989). Stern (1992) stated that the class size is largely determined by administrative factors such as the availability of teachers and classroom space. Older, more able and experienced learners are seen as needing less personal help and being capable, therefore, of working more independently in larger groups, while younger, slower, or less experienced learners will need more help in smaller classes (Marton, 1988). The optimal class size of five to ten learners in a group can work best for organising pair or group work activities for learning (Stern, 1992; Brown, 1994). However, when group work is applied to a very large class of over thirty learners, the teacher has practically no control over what the learners are doing in group work and has no opportunity to provide expansions. Brown (1994) found that the educational process is best conducted in small learner groups of ideally between 25 and 30 and small classes have few non-academic procedural arrangements, more student-teacher interaction and higher student achievement. Large classes, to Brown (1994), have more problems as (1) ability across students varies widely; (2) individual teacher-student attention is minimised; (3) student opportunities to speak are lessened; and (4) teachers' feedback on students' work is limited. The fact that the large class size of over 30 pupils is also a constraint to effective teaching. It is then suggested to split the class or to limit the class size to below 30 so that more attention can be provided to all students. This can also help effective school management programs designed to insure academic success and to head off academic problems.

5.4 Perception of Principals and Teachers towards Quality Management

First, it was found that principals have more positive perceptions towards SBM than teachers. This is probably due to the fact that the higher professionally educated principals who are more involved in school administration adopt a more positive attitude towards the change than teachers being less experienced and less involved in administrative work (Rodriguez & Slate, 2001; Bredeson, 1992; Cheng, 2008). Second, teachers would slow down decision making when practicing participation. School cultures were traditionally more individualist than collaborative and leaders were often reluctant to collaborate as they fear a loss of personal power and control in situations where they are ultimately held accountable (Education Commission [EC], 1997). In addition, teachers were reluctant to be assessed by appraisal systems which set up by schools.

In summary, to achieve the successful implementation of SBM as perceived by principals and teachers, it is recommended to have the following improvements: (1) setting annual goals and targets for the school, teachers and students; (2) establishing school structures; (3) developing effective

leadership with collaborative and collegial relationships; (4) promoting teaching effectiveness by: (i) easing non-teaching workloads, (ii) lowering ratio of teacher and student for personal attention to students, and (iii) creating collaborative school cultures. Moreover, the schools should regularly review their capacity for future change and have a systematic audit of current strengths and weaknesses carried out with an evaluation of progress used formatively to support adopting the new school plan.

6. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

There are some limitations of the study. First, and most important, it should be remembered that the findings are based on the respondents' perceptions. Second, with the exploratory nature, the findings from the small sample size of only 83 schools with 322 respondents may not be representative enough and cannot be generalised to all schools involved in the SMI scheme in Hong Kong and may affect the generalisation of the results.

To improve the validity and reliability of this academic inquiry for future researchers, some recommendations are suggested as follows. First, a larger sampling scale with larger size and more types of schools widely located in the place studied should be recommended because the larger is the scale of the project, the data obtained will be more valid, reliable, representative and generalised of the whole population. Second, a larger sample size selected in the pilot study can help to improve the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. Hopefully, findings of this study can make a contribution to future research and effective implementation of SBM in Hong Kong and other places of the world.

7. Conclusions

It can be concluded that the features of school-based management implemented in Hong Kong primary schools include (1) leadership competence and work relationships, (2) staff coordination and effectiveness, (3) financial planning and control, and (4) resources and accommodation. In addition, the finding shows that all four features of school-based management are perceived as being implemented in Hong Kong primary schools, but the degree of their implementation is not the same. The most adopted elements of school-based management are 'financial planning and control' and 'leadership competence and work relationships'. The moderate adopted element is 'resources and accommodation'. The least adopted element is 'staff coordination and effectiveness'. Moreover, there are significant differences between the perceptions of principals and teachers towards the areas of SBM.

Since the Education Department's publications of SMI in 1991, primary schools in Hong Kong have changed from the model of external control management to SBM in order to improve school management. From this study, school-based management is rather active in a culture with the teacher's participation in democratic school management. Thus, principals, teachers and parents have to change their traditional roles to fit the decentralised school management. The teachers have to change from the role of employees to partners to the school, and they have to take up the same responsibility as the principals and parents in participating in the decision of school policy and financial planning and control. They have to plan the work of school development in the future. As teachers are the frontline workers, their opinions are important to the student needs and the school plans for the future. The chances for teachers' participation in the decision of school policy thus help them have a greater sense of belonging to the school and promote their job satisfaction and school management effectiveness. Finally, this study finds some factors affecting school-based management, which in turn affect school effectiveness.

Yet, other factors including school and student backgrounds, school tradition, school climate and

culture, community expectation of the school, still affect school-based management. Thus, the leadership of principals, teachers and parents in the present complicated and knowledge-changing society should continuously pursue life-long learning for professional development in order to make appropriate decision on school policy and financial planning and control in order to enhance school management effectiveness. All these factors have to be taken into account and it is hoped that future researchers will consider them in further studies of SBM.

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Appendix

Items in the questionnaire

| Question no. | Description |
|--------------|--|
| 1 | The school head and senior staff are very effective in taking the lead to set goals, policies, priorities, plans and budgets. |
| 2 | The school head maintains the link between the school and the School Management Committee very well. |
| 3 | Staff are given great opportunities to express their views. |
| 4 | The school head and senior staff often invite staff to give comments and make suggestions on school matters. |
| 5 | The school head and senior staff often consult and involve staff in major decisions and issues. |
| 6 | There are very clear grievance procedures. |
| 7 | Deployment of duties to team members is very fair and very appropriate. Their qualifications, experiences and skills have been greatly taken into account. |
| 8 | The school very clearly identifies available resources and plan to make full use of them. |
| 9 | The apportionment of resources is fairly made according to the established priorities for implementing programme plans. |
| 10 | The approved school budget matches fairly the school policy and priorities. |
| 11 | Staff are very often involved and consulted in the preparation of budgets. |
| 12 | There is great flexibility in funding arrangement and the funding arrangement is very flexible. |
| 13 | Income and expenditure are very well monitored at both subject panel and school levels. |
| 14 | Resources and space are very fully utilized. |
| 15 | Relevant information of school, teachers and pupils is very well maintained. |
| 16 | Access control over information resources is very well exercised. |
| 17 | There are guidelines and procedures for allocation of resources and space. |

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