



**Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport**

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*Article*

## **Lessons Learned and Best Practices of the Implementation of School-Based Management (SBM) in Cambodia**

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### **Abstract**

The application of school-based management (SBM) is considered a core activity of school reform in order to improve performance and effective education service delivery. SBM is a new mechanism that school becomes property of the local community, and it will be a new journey in bolstering Ministry of Education Youth and Sports or MoEYS' efforts to strengthen the ability in human resources management and results-based planning, budgeting, and execution under the direct supervision of community participation at school level. Enhancing autonomy and transferring responsibility to the school level through encouraging responsiveness to local needs has become a new policy priority for improving schools, and teacher capacities, and family involvement. The study uses a quantitative approach, and the school samples are randomly selected from eight provinces for data collection. The current status of the SBM's implementation has been examined, including: school leadership and management, budget management, curriculum and instruction, resources management, staff management. According to the data, the current implementation of SBM in schools is basically on the right track because school directors, teachers, and members of the school management committee closely work together to develop the school capacities and foster education outcomes. It is a positive sign of growth to continue to expand and strengthen the SBM platform in Cambodia's education system. The results of this study on SBM can inform current practices and also contribute to future SBM policy interventions and their application in practice.

**Keywords:** School-based management, school management committee, autonomy, decentralization, community participation

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## 1. Introduction

School-based management (SBM) reform is seen as a promising strategy to improve education quality by empowering decision-making closer to local communities and strengthening accountability between the schools and the parents and children. SBM reform empowers school directors and teachers and augments their professional motivation, thereby enhancing their sense of ownership of the school; SBM is used to decentralize authority from the central government to the school level (Caldwell, 2005). The principles of the school-based management framework include ‘decentralization’, ‘participatory school leadership and management’, ‘staff capacity development’, ‘self-management, and ‘monitoring and evaluation’ (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2011; Cheong & Mo, 2007). Through SBM, decision-making is decentralized to districts and schools to develop inclusive policymaking and participatory administration. SBM is a logical process where teachers are able to take part in decisionmaking, restructuring, and site-based management (Goldman et al. 1993).

Globally, the application of SBM has been widely implemented as a means of decentralization for school reform (Ai Shoraku, 2016); the system helps leaders manage their school more transparently and less corrupt, as well as provides opportunities to parents and stakeholders to increase the scope and quality of their involvement. The effective organization of training in shared decision-making, interpersonal skills, and management skills for school council members make them more capable through participating in the SBM process and, at the same time, benefit the community as a whole (Briggs & Wohlstetter, 1999). For example, a study report in the Philippines found that there is a better improvement of learning performance after school undertakes school-based management. As a result, students who participated in SBM-applied schools had a higher mark than those in non-SBM schools (Nidhi Khattri et al., 2012). A formation of the school management committee comprising of

directors, teachers, parents, and local authorities has provided solid support to manage their local schools in line with national policies and fulfill the right needs of its local context.

To increase the participation and impact of all stakeholders (such as school management committee members, teachers, and school board) in prioritizing effective program monitoring and evaluation in the school, since 2001, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) has introduced the concept of decentralization in its strategic education plan (2001-2005). SBM was a part of the decentralization process by which MoEYS has allowed for autonomy of leadership and management, and decision-making regarding school development and student learning achievements, at the grassroots level (districts, community, and schools) [MoEYS, 2018]. SBM is an enabling mechanism for improved use of local resources through restructuring school governance grounded on the stronger engagement of the communities. It is, therefore, important that SBM is designed with the goal of systematic education reform (Blank, 2004, Conley, 1993).

More recently, MoEYS has carried out a comprehensive educational reform aiming to increase the number of youth and adults with strong literacy, numeracy, and soft skills integrated with technical and vocational skills, to reach the goal of increasing employment and entrepreneurship. The in-depth educational reform has primarily set out four primary components for school-based management (SBM): administration and general management, teaching-learning management, financial management, and personnel management (Hang Chuon, 2017). School principals in schools that are implementing SBM should have a good knowledge of financial management in order to use it effectively for operational programs. It is envisioned that when SBM is applied to schools, the mechanism of budget transfer for operations be transformed, as stated by the minister of education, “Financing reform may also include a transfer of budgetary resources directly from the National Treasury to schools or to improve financial procedures and governance to require better learning outcomes,” (Hang-Chuon, 2016).

MoEYS has decided to pilot the current SBM program in a more comprehensive way than the previous SBM initiatives at secondary schools under the Secondary Education Improving Project (SEIP). The previous school-based programs are not obsolete but co-exist with the new piloting program. One hundred lower secondary high schools have been selected to implement the SBM program with technical and financial support from World Bank and the central MoEYS assistance teams, and it is expected that the program will expand from 100 to 500 schools across all levels by 2023. The “School-based management” system was officially approved to introduced to the school leadership and management by MoEYS on 12 September

2018. The object of this study is to examine the current implementation status of SBM activities in schools (participation, and transparency, capacity, and support provided by the relevant agents for the implementation of SBM). The results serve to inform preliminary policy strategies to optimize implementation of SBM.

## **2. Research methodology**

In order to ensure an informed and comprehensive understanding of the current SBM implementation status in Cambodia at the school level, the researchers used a qualitative method. To ensure the current practices of SBM school and future direction of SBM, the questionnaires are designed into two main parts: the current practice and the perspectives of SBM at school base in the future by rating the scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The research instruments designed were structured questionnaires separated into three sample categories. The first category was targeted to school director, the second was targeted to teachers, and the last one was targeted to the school management committee. After completing the questionnaire, the research team has requested the school directors and colleagues to provide time for an interview in order to find increase the scope of information collected to better support data analysis and interpretation. The research mainly investigated the SBM practice at school from year 2018 to 2019, meanwhile, it overviewed the practice of other countries in latest literature reviews.

For the sample, 235 secondary schools (school director, teacher, and school management committee) including SBM and its network schools in twelve provinces were randomly selected by lucky draw from the list of target provinces: Battambang, Kampong Speu, Kampong Cham, Koh Kong, Mondul Kiri, Kampong Chhnang, Steung Treng, Prey Veng, Kampong Speu, Pailin, Preah Vihear, and Takeo.

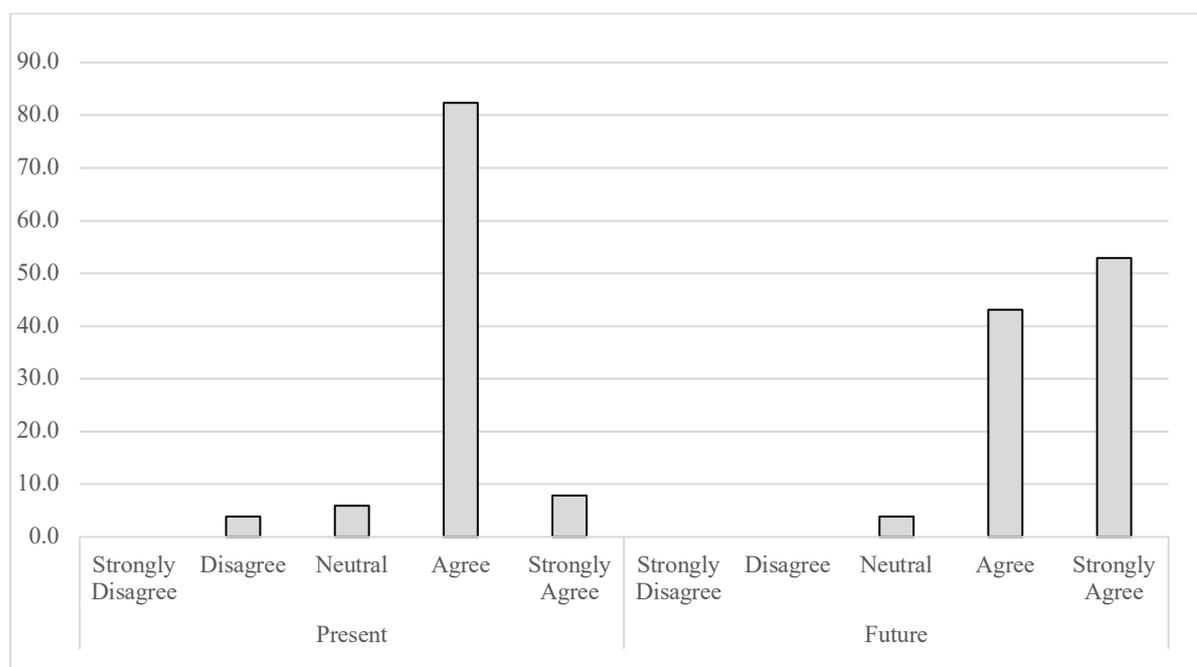
## **3. Results and discussions**

### **3.1. School leadership and management**

According to the interviews, an overwhelming number of school directors agreed that one of the prominent strategies to currently execute SBM was through a professional training and degree upgrading mechanism for school principals and teachers. All SBM schools have required teachers at least have a bachelor's degree. To evaluate the level of SBM in context of individual schools, several parameters have been generated to assess practices in schools, including sufficient autonomy in leadership, collaboration in the working environment, the

capacity for monitoring and evaluation, authority in the decision-making of staff recruitment, an ability to build a community network.

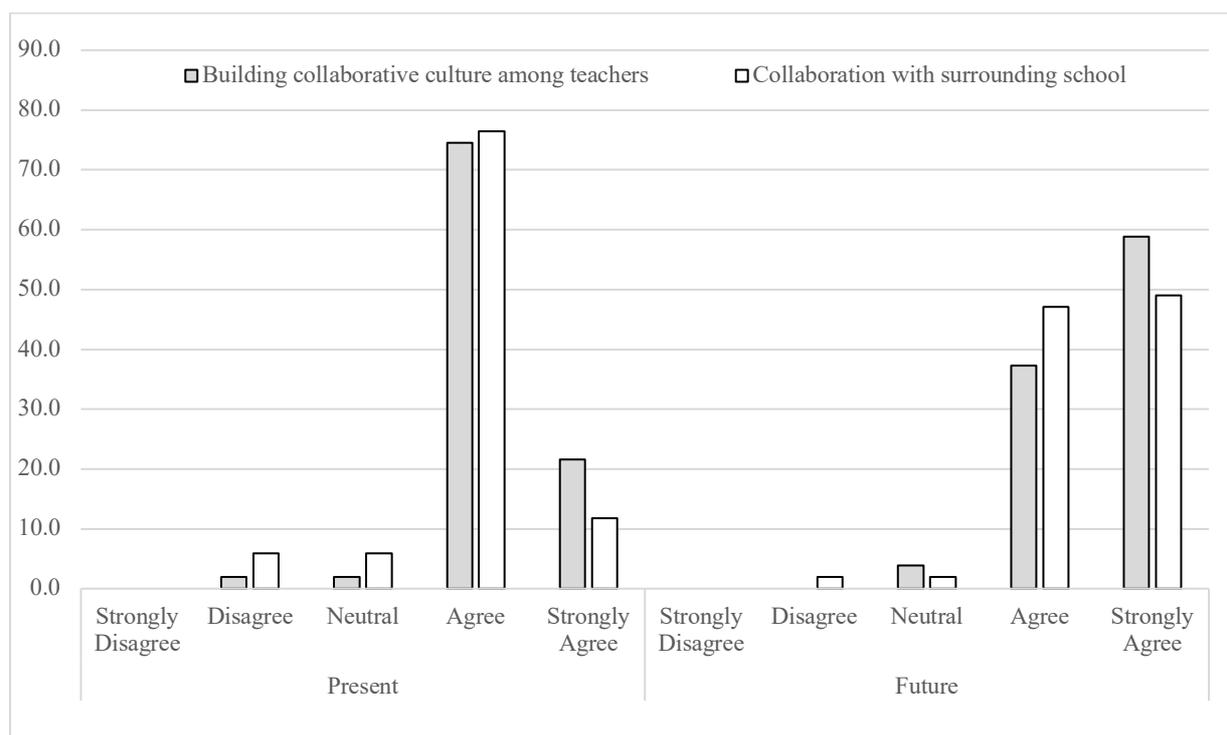
The **Figure 1** showed that a majority of school principals, corresponding to 82.4%, agree that they have sufficient autonomy to lead the practices to improve the school, implying that schools in the present context are autonomous in self-management and leadership in their school. Notably, the number of respondents who expect increased autonomy in the future went up from 7.8% to 52.9%. The increasing number was also inferred that there are some remaining barriers that they still cannot enforce their full rights and authority in self-governance. Based on the respondents, it could be concluded that although school principals have adequate autonomy in the present, they strongly expect to gain more autonomy in the future.



**Figure 1:** Majority of school directors have sufficient autonomy to lead the practices most likely to improve student learning at present and wish to gain more autonomy in their role in the future

The research showed that, although there are some differing opinions, the majority of school directors are encouraged and supported in building a collaborative environment for teachers and the surrounding community (**Figure 2**). These indicate views consistent with SBM guidelines encouraging school directors to build a good network with both internal and external stakeholders. In this sense, most of the school principals understand the importance of stakeholders and their positive impact on school development and shared responsibility. As shown in **Figure 2**, that at present a small number do not perceive that they have access to the

support needed for building collaborative cultures. However, they do desire that it is be more available in the future. Additionally, they strongly agree on the importance of building collaborative cultures among teachers and stakeholders in school, as the number of respondents indicating agreement or strong agreement is about 25% (for the present) while it is approximately 55% (for the future). All in all, most of the school principals perceive they have support and encouragement for building collaboration and networking with the community.



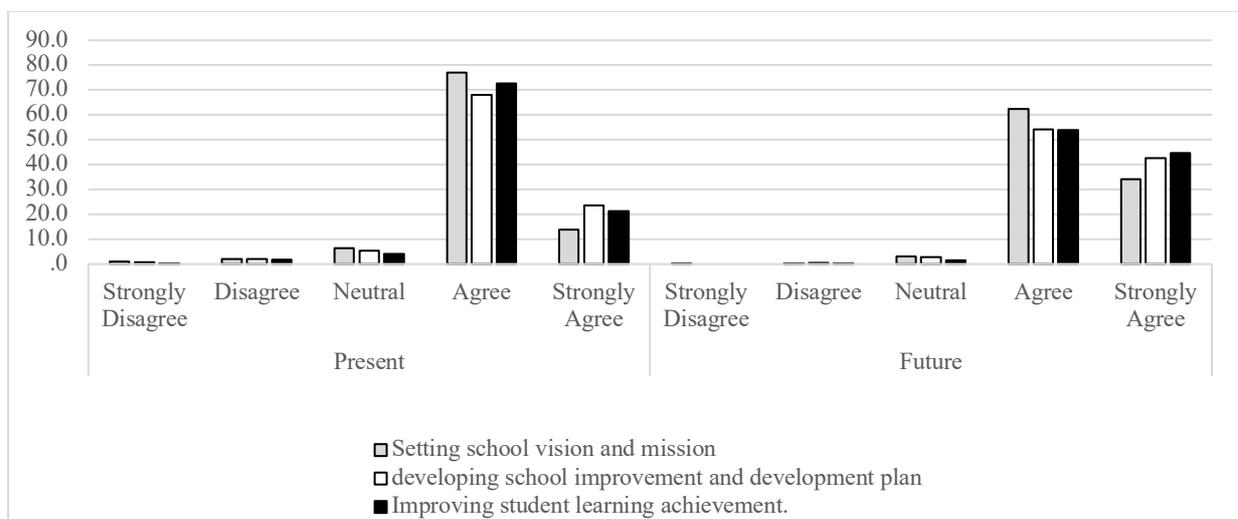
**Figure 2:** School directors are encouraged and supported in building collaborative cultures among teachers and to collaborate with surrounding schools.

Similarly, teachers were observed to perceive that they are actively involved in shared responsibility with school principals for setting school vision and mission, developing school improvement plans, and for improving student learning achievements. As indicated by the data, around 90% of the total numbers of teachers agree and strongly agree that at present they hold shared responsibility, implying that in practice the effective leadership of the school is not the sole responsibility of school directors, and both teachers and community members are also share a part of the responsibility as well. Moreover, teachers and school management committee (SMC) members expect to be more involved in these responsibilities in the future, with those in strong agreement or agreement regarding shared responsibility in the future increased from approximately 20% to 40%, and 22% to 50%, respectively (Figure 3A).

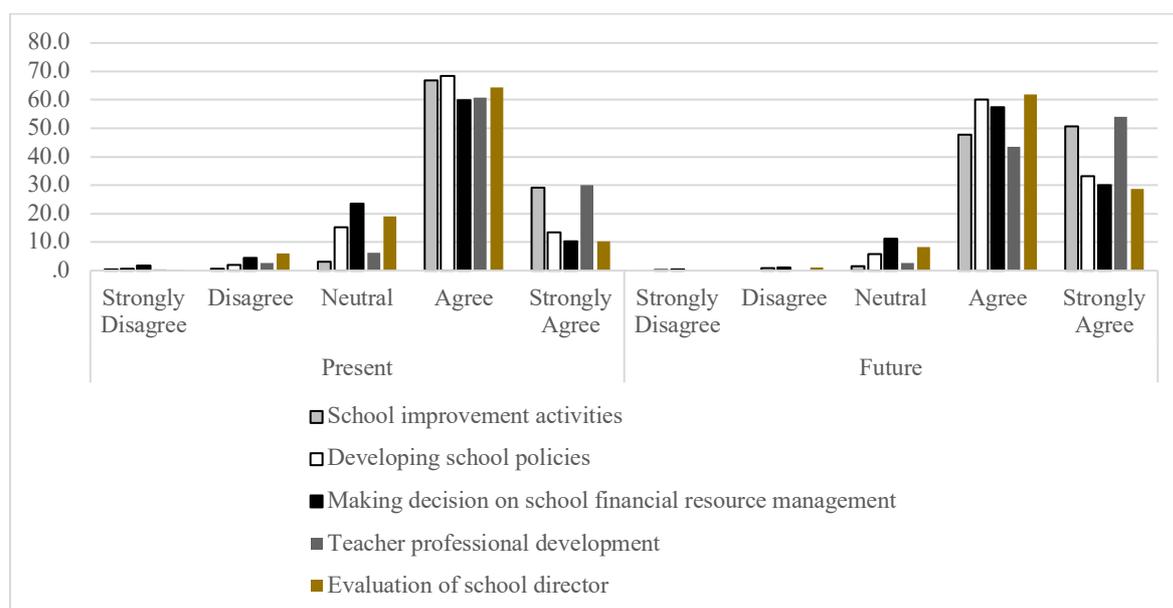
The high number of school principals have participated in setting the school vision for learning outcomes and in drafting school plans, indicates that school principals see that active participation in indispensable for plotting the course forthe school educational program activities and school development plans. However, a certain number of respondents still point out that they had not been involved in setting out school mission and plans. Meanwhile, there are some respondents that indicated that they were not certain whether they should participate. In spite of the small number of these case, it could become a bottleneck in SBM implementation in the future if the relevant parties are not included in this matter. Actually, they are willing to participate if a desirable mechanism is established. As noted, the data indicates that an increasing number of school principals desire to be participated in setting vision and planning (Figure 3A).

Additionally, as Figure 3B shows, a majority of respondents have been involved in school improvement activities, in developing school policies, in the decision-making process on school financial resource management, in teacher professional development, in the evaluation of school director performance at present. Moreover, their enthusiasm for participation is evident on the basis of the increase in the number of strongly agreed respondents was double from the present, proving that they see the importance role of participation in these programs. Unfortunately, a small number of teachers were not able to participate or were unsure whether or not they were allowed to take part such activities, while at the same time did not indicate a willingness to be involved in the future (Figure 3B). As such, in those schools there is a substantialchallenge to implementing school-based management, since it requires teachers get involved in school related program activities.

(A)



(B)

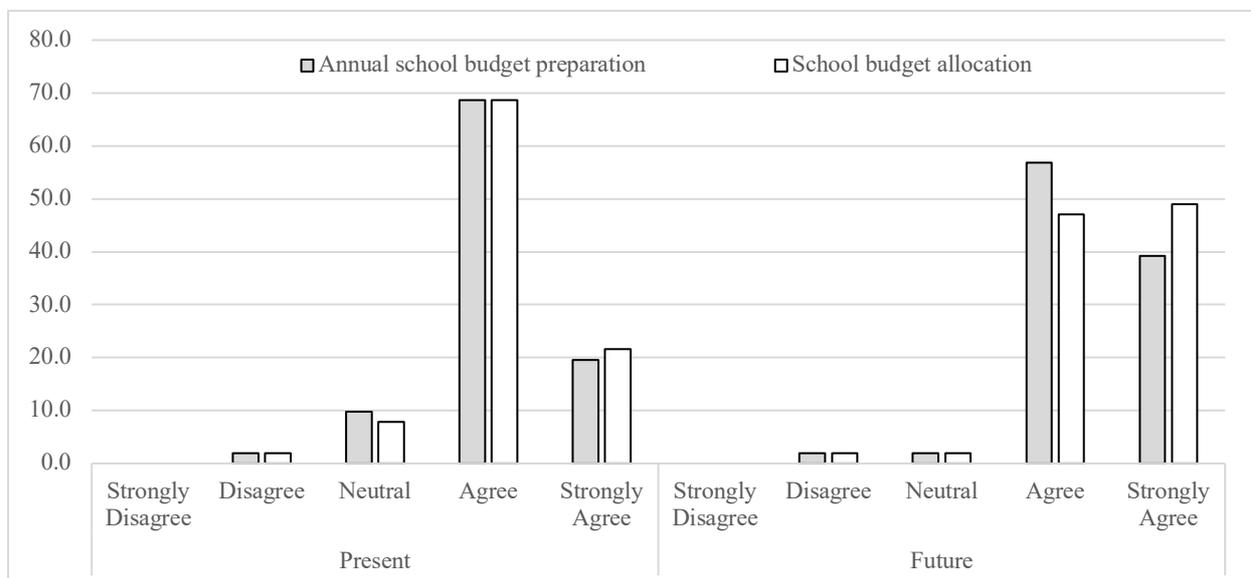


**Figure 3:** (A) Teacher shares responsibility with the school director in setting school vision and missions, designing school improvement and development plans as well, and in setting goals for student learning outcome, (B) Teacher is involved in school improvement activities, in developing school policies, in decision-making processes related to management of school financial resources, in teacher professional development, and in the evaluation of school director's performance.

### 3.2. Budget management

Financial management is one of the main components of education reform. In this view, school principals who have knowledge in the financial sector would be beneficial to SBM. Moreover, principals with insufficient knowledge would need to improve this financial management skills in order to accord with the SBM program standards and best practices. According to the interview, the school principals mentioned that their school lacked human resources in this skill and had made a request to recruit the contract staff whose skills are matched with the local school needs. As indicated in **Figure 4**, most of the school principals are involved in preparing the annual school budget and allocating resources based on the needs of the school, while only a few of them do not participate in preparation and allocation. The data confirmed that they are willing to be more involved in the preparation and allocation of budget in the future as the number of respondents who strongly agree on the perception of future involvement was double the figure for those who perceived to be involved in the present.

Based on this point of view, the conditions for the operation and effectiveness of SBM in Cambodia is most likely attainable given that an overwhelming number of principals are willing to play a key role in budget preparation and allocation, despite the small number of respondents who do not show a desire to get involved in this matter in the future.

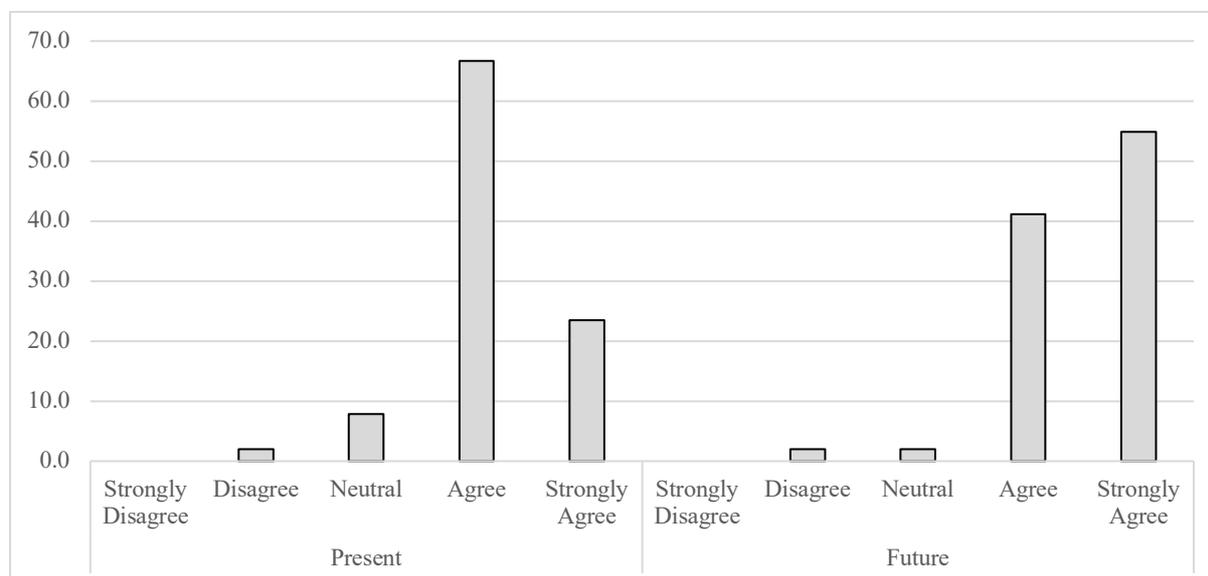


**Figure 4:** School director prepares the annual school budget and allocates school budget resources based on the needs of the school.

Moreover, there is a range of various responses regarding procurement in the present school context. As indicated, the degree of school principals that strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree is around 12%, 50%, 25%, 10%, 3%, respectively. This shows that over half numbers of the schools surveyed have conducted a procurement. Meanwhile, a moderate number of schools are not clear whether they are authorized to do so. In turn, around 10% of the total schools have never carried out a procurement at their school. The number of respondents that strongly agree that budget prep and allocation occur stands at nearly four times the figure for the present, confirming that the principals strongly expect to conduct the procurement a the requisite autonomy is maintained.

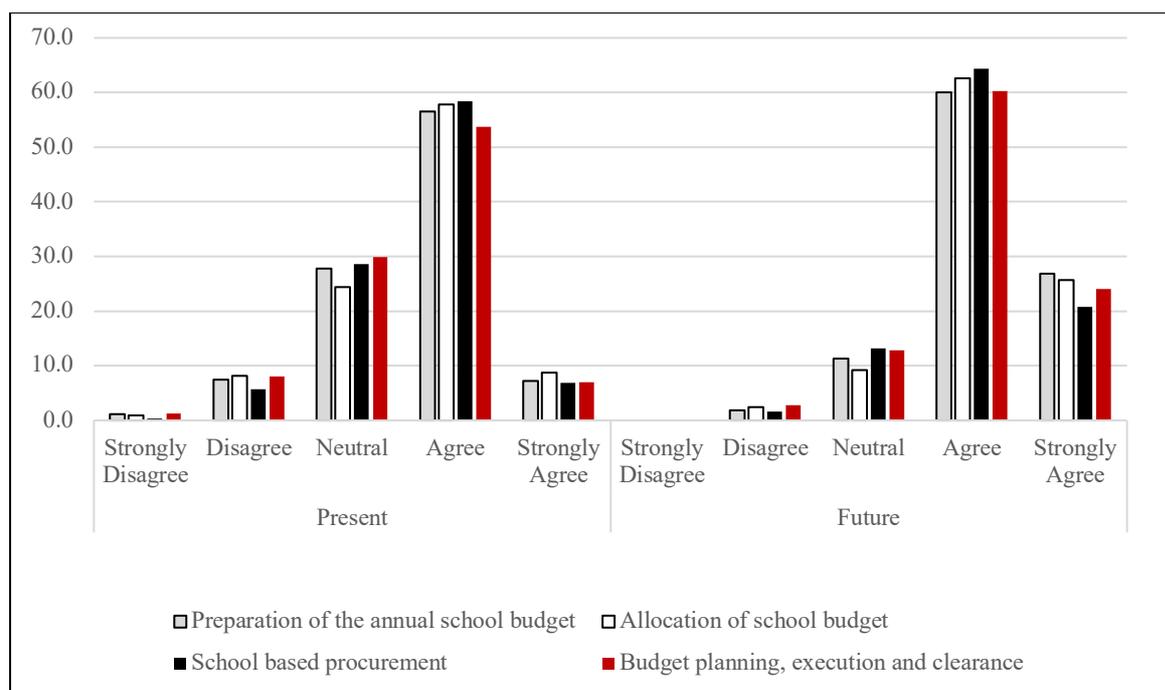
Based on the statistical data (**Figure 5**), plenty of respondents agree and strongly agree with the idea of the participation of teachers and school management committees in budget planning, execution, and clearance. The research confirmed that a lot of schools have already established a framework with three pillars (school director, teacher, and school management committee) for decisionmaking for budget planning, execution, and clearance. The involvement of school principals, teachers, and school management committee in school budgeting will create a more transparent and accountable environment in schools, which is consistent with the activities and

outcomes of SBM programming. Interestingly, an increasing number of principals strongly agree on the idea of the necessity of involvement of these three types of actors in school budget management in the future.



**Figure 5:** School director has involved teachers and the school management committee in budget planning, execution, and clearance

Regarding school budget management, around 60 percent of respondents agree that teachers should be involved in the preparation of the annual school budget, in the allocation of school budget resources based on the prioritized needs, in school-based procurement, in budget clearance. At the same time around 10 percent of the respondents have not been involved and nearly 30 percent are uncertain whether or not they are permitted to be involved in budget management (**Figure 6**). The results also correspond with **Figure 5**, which illustrates the extent that school directors have involved teachers in school budget management. Moreover, increasing the number of respondents that are willing to get involved in school budget management in the future is greater. This tendency is good for school-based management implementation. For the school management committees, around 60 percent of respondents saying that they have been involved in school budget management, including drafting the annual school budget, allocating school budget resources based on the actual needs, using school budget resources efficiently, and doing budget clearance. They are willing to get more involved in the future as the number of respondents indicating agreement reached about 85%. Therefore, if the school provides them more spaces to participate in budget program budget, they will respond enthusiastically



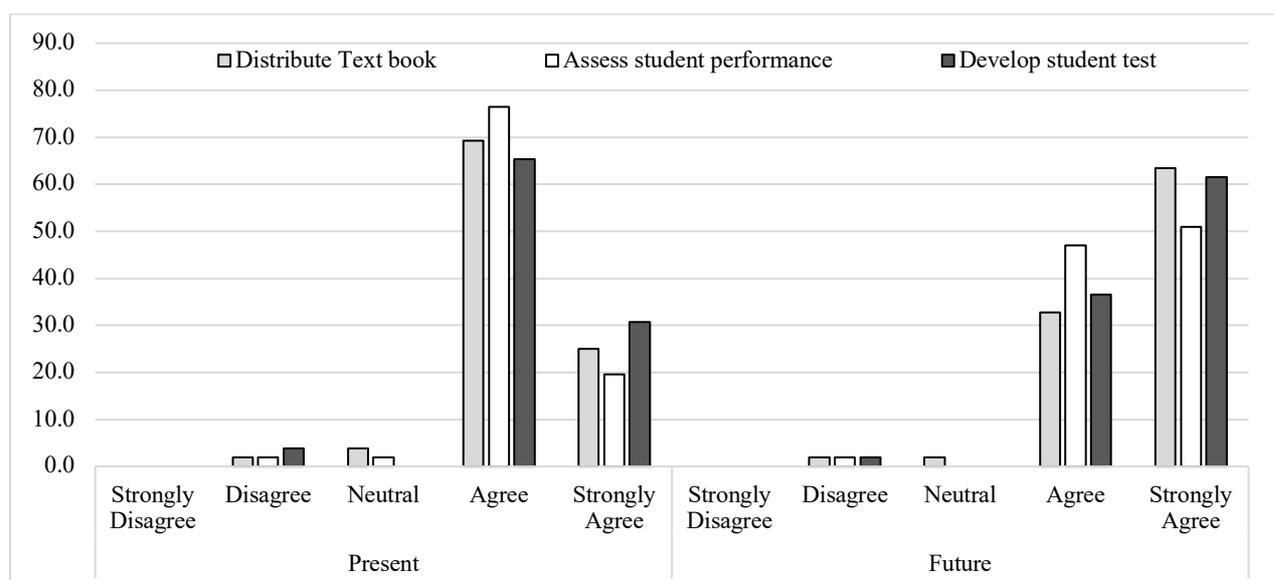
**Figure 6:** Teacher is involved in the preparation of the annual school budget, in the allocation of school budget resources based on the needs of the school, in school-based procurement, and in budget planning clearance

### 3.3. Curriculum and Instruction

Curriculum reform was also one of the key elements of proposed systematic educational reform. A curriculum is a tool that is designed to educate students with a purpose in mind of what the country wants them to be for national services in the future, and instruction is a means of knowledge delivery from teachers to students as part of a designed curriculum. Therefore, curriculum and instruction are closely and symbiotically correlated and the quality of education will never reach the goals of the nation if these two functions are broken apart. The two should be strengthened simultaneously and sheltered under the same umbrella. To assess the implementation of curriculum and instruction in target schools, it is necessary to identify the degree of working unity and collaboration amongst involved personnel, such as school principals, teachers, and school management committee. Their coordination should be evaluated in terms of setting the school vision on learning outcomes and drafting school plans, setting instruction times for academic subjects, the school calendar and course syllabi, distributing textbooks, assessing student performance, and developing student tests.

As seen in **Figure 7**, a majority of respondents agree that they are involved in textbook distribution, student assessment, and test development. In this sense, most of the school principals have paid significant attention to involvement in student assessment and test

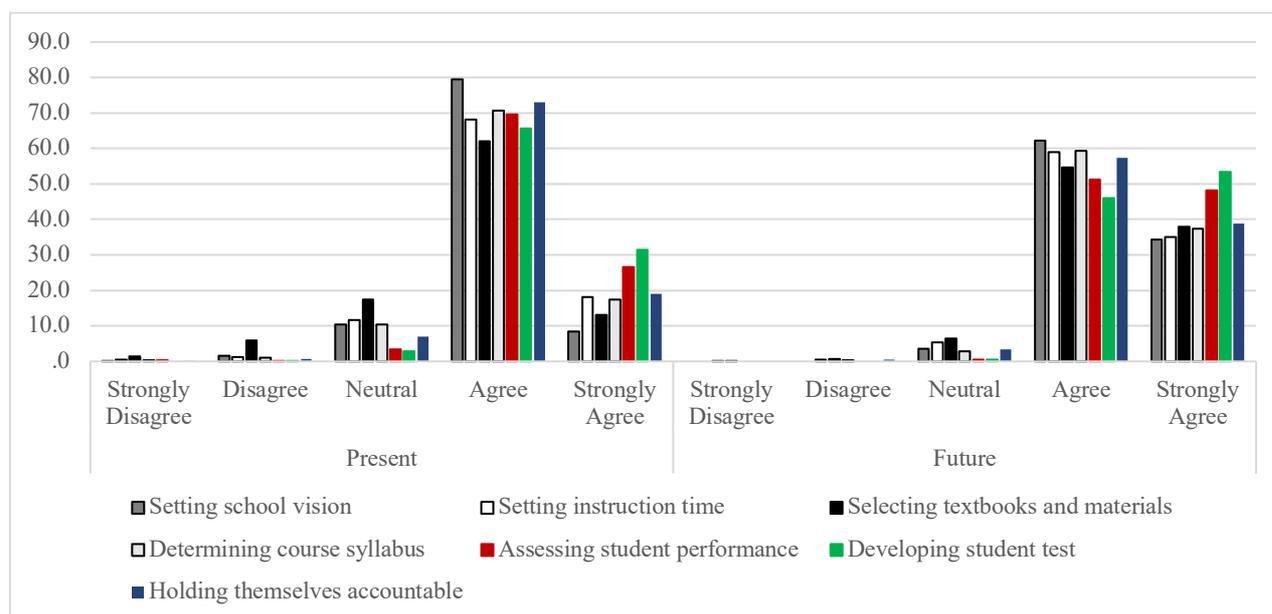
development for learning progress. It is likely they comprehend the importance of their participation is as a number of respondents (double the number that indicated participation at present) expected to get more involved in the future. Meanwhile, some school principals are not involved in textbook distribution, student assessment, and test development at the present and do no plan do do so in the future.



**Figure 7:** School directors distribute textbooks, assess student performance, and develop student tests

According to the data collected (see **Figure 8**), teachers are sufficiently autonomous in their field of teaching given that most of the respondents agree and strongly agree that they are involved in the teaching and learning activities of students. For example, over 90 percent of teachers have been involved in assessing student performance and developing student tests, proving that all current practices of teachers are in line with school-based management. In addition, it was noted that teachers have held themselves accountable for the learning outcome of students. To the degree that there is performance accountability, teachers are working hard and daring to accept the result of their students. As observed, the teachers expect to obtain more autonomy in their field in the future as the number of strongly agreed respondents is double the number showing agreement regarding the situation in the present. This supports the view that, if they are provided more spaces of autonomy, they would enthusiastically fulfill their duties. School management committee, they showed less involved in curriculum and instruction development given that numerous members of the committee, accounting for over 70%, admit that they lack the ability and technical skill for instruction of the students and teachers. However, they can do monitoring and evaluation of the processes of teaching and

learning, given that 68 percent of respondents said they have been involved in those activities. Also, the rate of those that predict to be involved in those activities in the future increases to around 90%.



**Figure 8:** Teacher is involved in setting the school vision for learning outcomes and develops student tests.

### 3.4. Resource management

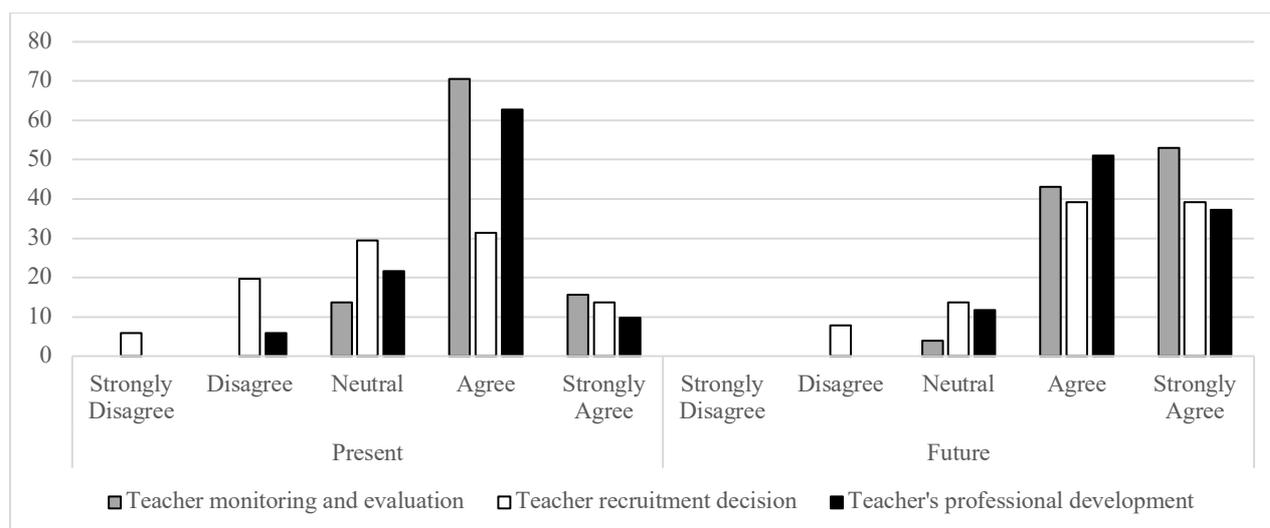
With respect to the current situation, a number of school directors and school management committee, corresponding to 94% and 55%, respectively, agree that they have an autonomy in terms of: resources management; including mobilizing and using resources from various sources; making a purchase orders; involving teacher, parents and school management committee in SBM; and, doing fundraising at the local level. At the same time, a moderate number of teachers mentioned that, they did not want to involve in resources management and fundraising activities in addition to teaching. Also, 80% of teachers agreed that they do get involved in developing school physical resources and facility planning. As noted, a larger number of the involved parties (school director, teacher, and school management committee) wish to participate in all varieties of school activities in the future.

### 3.5. Staff management

A majority of school principals responded that they are capable of monitoring and evaluating the internal staff. Also, most principals indicated that they have involved the teachers and the school committee in the preparation of needs-based staff recruitment, in the

decision-making of staff recruitment, and in preparation of teacher professional development plans. However, some of them remain uncertain regarding their capacities (see **Figure 9**). Importantly, they strongly agree on the necessity of monitoring and evaluation for effective school leadership and expect in the future to enhance their professional capacities to conduct these activities. The number of respondents indicating agreement increases from 15% with regard to the present to 55% with regard to the future. The results suggest that professional improvement and development should be readily accessible as part of an ongoing process of continuous education in order to improve their capacities for monitoring and evaluation of the staff more effectively. The data presented in **Figure 9** also illustrates school principals have the authority to make teacher recruitment decisions and have a vital role in the professional development of teachers. Regarding the topic of teacher recruitment, the data obtained show a varied range of responses. Some school principals responded that they have no authority to make decisions on teacher recruitment and termination and expressed uncertainty regarding their authority, while others agree that they have authority to make a decision by submitting a proposal letter for recruitment or termination to the District Office of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport. The response received reflects different understanding of roles, procedures, and authority despite the fact that respondents belong to a single system. Results indicate that some schools are able to recruit and terminate the contract staff (teachers, office workers, and security officers), while others are either not able or unsure about their authority to recruit and contract staff. A larger number of school directors would like to get more authority in the future to manage the staff independently, including recruitment and termination.

Lawfully, the principals are not allowed to recruit state teachers, in turn, they can recruit contract staff. Drawing from the result, it is obvious that some principals are still uncertain in the role; therefore, it is needed to create a clear guideline and more widely disseminate to the school staff regarding the policies and procedures of staff recruitment in order to ensure consistency in principals' practice and conformity across schools. It was noted that numerous principals strongly agree they expect to be granted more autonomy to recruit staff on their own volition in the future. Similarly, on the practice of teacher professional development, about 70 percent of principals agreed that they have an active role at present and 90 percent expect to have such a role in the future. This demonstrates reflecting that numerous principals see the value of capacity-building for teacher as positively contributing to student learning outcomes. However, about 20 percent remain unsure about this role, and about 5 percent do not have an active role (**Figure 9**).



**Figure 9:** School directors have the capacity to carry out teacher monitoring and evaluation, have the authority to make teacher recruitment decisions, and take an active role in the professional development of teachers

#### 4. Conclusion

School-based management has been emphasized in education reform at the school level. It is expected to have a direct impact on improving student learning achievements, retention rates, completion rates, and promoting the value of education and community participation. However, it might be a challenging issue and a cause of concern in the education system as a whole if it is not properly handled. In SBM schools, school board directors, teachers, and the local community are key drivers in determining the destiny of students. A number of main areas in SBM schools, have been addressed in the current study, including school leadership and management, budget management, curriculum and instruction, resources management, and staff management.. The results showed that the current implementation of SBM in schools is fundamentally on the right track because of the involvement and cooperation of school directors, teachers, and members of the school management committee. It is an initial positive sign of growth to carry on the SBM platform in Cambodia's future education. However, to better achieve outcomes, consistent and solid support must be provided to those involved at the school level, given that a substantial number of them do not fully understand the SBM concept, guidelines, and practical implementation. Hence, they are still reluctant to deliver their services according to the individual roles and duties. These findings can inform current practices and also contribute to future SBM policy interventions and their application in practice.

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