



Performance of Educational System of Iran in Implementation of BOM Program in the Middle Secondary Schools: Lessons for Developing Countries

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 28 May 2023 Revised: 15 August 2023 Accepted: 03 September 2023 Online: 29 February 2024	The purpose of the study was to investigate performance of educational system of Iran in the implementation of BOM program in the middle secondary schools to provide experience to the developing countries. In this qualitative study, data was collected and analyzed through a phenomenological approach and a semi -structural interview. The seventeen school principals of middle secondary schools in Shiraz were selected using a snowball sampling method. Also, structural and internal validity was provided through the theoretical saturation and external validity through the multiple reviews of the analysis. The research findings include three basic lessons for third -world educational policymakers and planners when implementing reform programs: First, voluntary implementation of reform programs does not necessarily lead to the active collaboration and cooperation of school principals and teachers; Second, the presentation of innovative programs and plans unchanged in the traditional structure of the educational system mainly leads to failure, and Third, without training of school principals and teachers, implementing reforms programs and plans will not be successful.
KEYWORDS	
Curriculum BOM program Educational Reforms Teachers' Participation	

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1. Introduction

Educational systems are influenced by two organizational streams of centralization and de-centralization and focus on one of the two. While decentralized educational systems have attempted to handle school affairs more authority to parents, students, teachers, school administrators and local authorities, we are witnessing an increase authority in government and the Ministry of Education in the centralized educational systems. Thus, over the last two decades, finding a balance between centralization and decentralization has become one of the major challenges of educational system policymakers. It is clear that the tendency to focus on centralization or decentralization largely depends on the social contexts - historical, political, cultural, economic - and the characteristics of the educational system.

More than a century ago and for the first time, in the process of establishing the formal general education system of Iran, the French education system was modeled. At that time, Iran's social conditions confirmed following the centralized French model. Despite the many developments in the Iran society, the educational system is still managed in a centralized way, in such a way that the political system, upstream government institutions and the Ministry of Education play the main role in determining the curriculum, writing books, hiring teachers, appointing managers, and providing financial resources, responsibility for determining the main and extracurricular activities of schools. The research literature shows that the tendency towards centralization or de-centralization in all the educational systems of the countries of the world has become a common global challenge. For example, Dzhurylo (2019) concludes that the education management system in the most EU-countries is decentralized or gradually being decentralized and de-concentrated on the basis of the subsidiarity principle. The results of our research give the possibility to affirm that the successful implementation of the decentralization reform requires the following two conditions: political support for proposed changes and the ability of those charged with carrying out the reform. This finding is consistent with the findings of Androniceanu, and Ristea (2014); Burns, Köster, and Fuster (2016); Herbst, and Wojciuk(2014); Radó(2010); Urbanovič, and Patapas (2012) and Zajda(2012) in other advanced western countries which have tried to assign a greater role to teachers in managing school affairs. Lo (2010: 1) indicated that in four Southeast Asian countries different orientations of governments to reduce their role in such a way that it sees political democratic transitions in Korea and Taiwan as important local factors affecting the developments of educational decentralization in the two societies, while reforms in Hong Kong and Singapore seem to be more consequences of managerial and market values. It sees political democratic transitions in Korea and Taiwan as important local factors affecting the

developments of educational decentralization in the two societies, while reforms in Hong Kong and Singapore seem to be more consequences of managerial and market values. In the third world countries, research show agreement or opposition to centralization or de-centralization in the educational system. Ziba (1: 2011) showed in Burkina Faso curriculum is a state-protected category; policymakers at different levels of decentralization have almost the same comprehension of curriculum decentralization, even if policymakers at sub-national levels wish to play a greater role in decision-taking about the curriculum; that certain categories in the curriculum such as national values, curriculum contents and the determination of teaching methods greatly influence the reason why curriculum is a state protected category. In Turkey, Korkmaza, Toramanb, & Duranc (2019: 1) concluded that decentralization in education, which is an approach based on learner effectiveness independent of a certain institutional and bureaucratic authority, has become a current issue again due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

During the last one century, Iran witnessed the establishment of two political regimes, the monarchy (1925) and the Islamic Republic (1979). Despite the fundamental differences between these two political systems, the centralized educational system can be considered one of their common features (Irvani, 2013). The dominance of the political system during the last four decades (1980-2020) compared to previous decades, has had an upward trend. At the same time, during the last four decades, evidence has shown an increase in social demand to reduce the role of the government in the education process. The findings of Iranian researchers also support this demand (Ali pour, Shokohi Fard & Ali pour, 2023; Karimi, Hoveida, & Siadat, 2023). For this reason, we have witnessed the implementation of programs and projects that try to reduce the degree of centralization in the education system and increase the role of students, parents, teachers and administrators. One of the programs of the Ministry of Education, which has been implemented in some primary and secondary schools in the last 5 years, is the special program of the "BOM". BOM in Farsi language means home and its surroundings. BOM is a program that trusts the competence and ability of the school and assigns to them the license for curriculum planning, and implementation & evaluation of a certain amount of formal education time (Organization for Educational Research & Planning, 2018).

Since the main goal of Iran's educational system policymakers is to increase the role and participation of students, parents, teachers and especially the local community, so far few researches have been conducted regarding the realization of the goals of the BOM program. For example, Bagheri; Jafari, Khwarazmi & Ghorbani Geisi (2018) found that the majority of those involved in the implementation of this project at the district level are in favor of its implementation

and believe that from the very beginning of entering school, the necessary platforms for teaching real and practical skills should be provided. Mojreyan Golugahi (2018) found that in order to implement the BOM program, a fundamental change must be made in the beliefs and attitudes of officials and those involved in its implementation. Moradi Rizi (2021) by examining the effectiveness of BOM program on the creativity of female students of secondary schools in ZarinShahr District found that the level of creativity in students participating in BOM program is significantly higher than other students. Sayadi Shahraki (2021) highlighted that it is not possible to implement of BOM project without the presence of skilled and capable teachers. The director of Educational Research & Planning Organization, Latifi (2022) announced that due to the compactness of the formal curriculum, the implementation of the BOM program in many schools has faced problems. Shabestan News Agency (2023) in an interview with the principals of several schools in Tehran found that some teachers - such as math teachers who want to use all the class time for teaching - show resistance to the implementation of this program. The findings of the previous research were mainly prepared through interviews with students and teachers. In this research, it is tried to examine the opinions of school principals who have the main responsibility in implementing the BOM program in the school. Based on this, the general purpose of the research is to investigate the performance of Iran's educational system in implementing the BOM program in the middle secondary schools in order to provide this experience to developing countries. According to this goal, the sub-goals of the research are:

- Identifying the current state of the BOM program
- Identifying the main obstacles to the implementation of the BOM program
- Identifying ways to improve the implementation of the BOM program

2. Research Method

The present qualitative research with a phenomenological approach examines the performance of Iran's educational system in the implementation of BOM program through the study of the experiences of principals of the middle secondary schools. The research population included all the principals of these schools in Shiraz using the snowball sampling method (8 female and 9 male principals). In this study, data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Structural and internal validity was provided through theoretical saturation and external validity through multiple reviews of analyses. To determine the reliability, the comments of the external observer were used. The seven-step Colaizzi method (1978) and the "thematic analysis" technique were used to analyze the data.

3. Findings

A: Description of the Special School Program (BOM)

The ever-increasing growth of the student population and the increasing demand for education require providing a suitable environment with the participation of all school members. The management of school should be based on collective decision-making, independency, flexibility, and decentralized methods in order to make the school environment dynamic and active and to develop and manifest the capabilities and creativity of managers, teachers and students. During the last decade, the strategic policies of the Ministry of Education of Iran have been based on decentralization, school-centeredness and development of all-round participation in order to achieve the goals of education by delegating more powers and participation of students. In the meantime, the upstream documents of the Islamic Republic of Iran system such as the "Fundamental Reform Document of Education (FRDE)" emphasizes decentralization through the development of the role of local communities (Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution, 2013). One of the main methods for decentralization of education system is the use of "school-based management" strategy (Farhadi Rad, Shahi, & Tahmasebi, 2019; Hemmatyar, Bahadori, & Ashrafi, 2020). In decentralization policies, the application of this strategy means utilizing a wide range of plans and programs that have a common feature- namely decentralization of powers from the central government and transfer of affairs to the people- (Abdel-Moneim, 2020). One of these reforms programs that has been implemented to decentralize Iran's education system is the "Special School Program" with the abbreviation "BOM", which was first suggested by the current Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Education of Iran, Mahmoud Amani Tehrani (2019). According to Organization for Educational Research & Planning, (2018) qualitative goals of this program are to respond to individual, regional & local needs; diversification of the learning environment and improvement of the school's position in the public mind. The BOM program was approved by the Ministry of Education after a trial implementation stage in more than 20 schools - during a period of two years - and then it was announced to all primary and secondary schools from 2017.

According to this program, administrators, school councils and teachers are allowed and can devote part of the school's formal time to the production, implementation and evaluation of their chosen educational materials (Ministry of Education, 2018). During the weekly hours of the school's formal education, BOM sessions are planned and implemented for 2 hours per week (at different times). Considering the variety of applicable programs and the difference in time required for each program, the school principal can combine the hours of several weeks together and offer one place. Also, schools are required to devote about 60 hours of formal education to the BOM program during one academic year.

Educational materials and programs are based on the suggestions of teachers, students, parents, local authorities or the school principal, considering social context, environmental characteristics, and local community needs & facilities. An example of materials and classes of the Boom program are:

- Learning to buy with a credit card or bank card
- Special training for volleyball
- Pottery and jar making
- Training of reading Quran
- Attending the city council by providing recycling training
- Craft training
- Production of story books
- Origami training
- Teaching sequin embroidery and knitting
- Cooking training
- Cleaning forest areas & keeping nature clean
- Answers to religious doubts
- Study skills
- PowerPoint training
- Showing and criticizing the movie
- Tree planting
- Cultivation of edible mushrooms

B) Current state of the BOM program

The analysis of the data from the interview shows that not all schools are currently implementing the BOM program. In fact, the directive of the Ministry of Education has not required school administrators to implement this program. For this reason, the implementation of the BOM program depends to a large extent on the decision of the principal, the cooperation of teachers and facilities of school and local community. It also seems that the time allocated to this program is very little. While more than 1,000 hours are devoted to formal training during one academic year (9 months), only 60 hours - that is, less than a tenth of the time of formal education - are allocated to the BOM program in the middle secondary school.

In addition to this, the data analysis shows that, in terms of subject matter, the content of BOM program can be divided into three types: First, programs that present a suitable and attractive educational topic. For example, teaching a local sport. Second, programs that creates skills in learning. For example, occupational, sports or academic skills (life skills, study skills, and report writing skills) and thirdly, field programs such as cleaning up environmental pollution, helping to solve a social problem, and visiting museums. Another point emphasized by the interviewees is that there is no specific guide or instruction for the introduction of BOM programs in each geographical region, and no special budget has been considered for the implementation of these programs by the Ministry of Education. For this reason, the

selection, introduction, preparation, implementation and evaluation of each program is entirely entrusted to the principal and teachers of the schools.

Table 1: Matrix of themes extracted from the interview text with the participants

Main Theme	Central Theme	Basic Themes	Frequency
Implementation of BOM program	Independence of action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to act in curriculum design • Non-interference of superiors in determining plans • Teachers have independence and freedom of action • Power to choose educational resources by the manager, teacher and student • Providing programs based on the personal, professional and social needs of students 	14 10 15 13 11 Total: 53
	Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Acceptance of responsibility by the manager and other employees <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers' awareness of their role about quality and quantity of students' learning <input type="checkbox"/> Active and reciprocal relationship between teacher & students <input type="checkbox"/> Relation between educational content with daily life <input type="checkbox"/> Professional empowerment of manager, staff and teachers 	9 8 15 13 10 Total: 53
	Flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of program according to conditions, facilities & needs of the native-local community • Forecasting programs & activities based on students' wishes and expectations • Two-way communication and constructive interaction with native-local environment 	13 11 9 Total: 33
	Obstacles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Reducing the BOM program as a dry organizational task without creativity <input type="checkbox"/> Confusion in choosing programs <input type="checkbox"/> Habit of managers and teachers to take orders from superiors <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of organic connection between school and local community <input type="checkbox"/> Many pages of textbooks and lack of time to teach the whole book <input type="checkbox"/> Compression of formal school programs <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of teachers' time <input type="checkbox"/> School managers' concern about stopping the BOM program due to 	10 15 17 13 17 16 15 8

		the change of superiors	Total: 111
Solutions	<input type="checkbox"/>	Emphasis on professional commitment of the principal & teachers to prepare, compile, implement and evaluate BOM programs	15
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Emphasis on documenting programs to preserve lived experiences and use them in future programs	17
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Emphasis on the preparation & formulation of programs according to the real capabilities of teachers & school facilities	16
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Preparing students, teachers and parents for active cooperation in the implementation of programs	13
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Effective leadership of the manager to achieve the goals of each program	11
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Diligence in teaching students the skills expected in each program	10
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Efforts to attract the cooperation of local stakeholders for better implementation of BOM program	17

Through the analysis of the interviews, five central themes were identified. In the meantime, the central theme of obstacles has been assigned the most frequency, which can indicate its importance in the process of preparation, formulation, and implementation of BOM programs.

C) Main obstacles to the implementation of the BOM program

Data analysis indicates obstacles that threaten the BOM program. One of the serious obstacles is reducing the BOM as a dry and uncreative organizational task and performing it formally only to submit a report to the senior authorities of the district, city and provincial education departments by the principal and teachers. The designer of BOM program and also the senior managers of the Ministry of Education have tried to put the implementation of BOM as a reform program entirely on the headmaster and teachers so that they can prepare each program and plan according to school facilities, teachers' capabilities, students' interests and local facilities & needs. For this reason, the second obstacle to the effective implementation of the BOM program is the long-standing habit of managers and teachers to take orders from superiors. The analysis of interviews reveals that many managers and teachers are confused in choosing programs. The third obstacle is the lack of organic connection between school and local community. Principals and teachers should be fully familiar with local facilities, opportunities and

restrictions. Also, taking advantage of local facilities requires the school principal and teacher to have a strong social capital so that they can establish active relationships with influential people and social groups. To put it better, the effective implementation of the BOM program requires that the school finds a strong, organized exchange with the surrounding community, and that this relationship is systematic and continuous, not based on an individual. The fourth obstacle is the large volume of textbooks, the compactness of formal school programs and the lack of time for teachers. The analysis of the interviews shows that the main concern of teachers is the teaching of textbooks and they are hardly willing to close their classes in favor of the reforms programs such as BOM. The last threat comes back to the organizational climate governing the Ministry of Education of Iran. Empirical evidence shows that many transformation plans and programs change with the shift of the Minister of Education and senior managers. To put it better, with the change of senior managers and program designers in the Ministry of Education, transformation plans and programs implementation at the school level is also stopped or changed or gradually forgotten.

D) Solutions to improve the implementation of BOM program

The desire of the program designer and the policy makers of the Ministry of Education of Iran is to change the dry and formal atmosphere of schools by giving more authority to administrators and teachers in designing and implementing the curriculum. Despite this ideal and while educational science experts, learning psychologists and educational policy makers have been calling for decentralization in the education process for years, many reform plans are not successful in practice. Not much time has passed since the BOM program was implemented, and it is not easy to judge its success or failure. Nevertheless, the analysis of the interview data indicates that the successful implementation of the BOM program requires compliance with the following:

- ❖ Emphasis on the professional commitment of manager and teachers on the preparation, formulation, implementation and evaluation of programs
- ❖ Emphasis on documenting programs to preserve lived experiences and apply them in future programs
- ❖ Emphasis on the preparation and compilation of programs according to the real capabilities of teachers and schools
- ❖ Preparing students and parents to actively cooperate in the implementation of programs
- ❖ Effective leadership of the manager to achieve the goals of each program
- ❖ Diligence in teaching the expected skills to the learners
- ❖ Trying to get the cooperation of local stakeholders for better implementation of Bom program
- ❖ Taking advantage of native and local experiences, knowledge and arts

4. Conclusion

Iran's educational system has been suffering from the disease of centralization and dominance of the State for many decades. The findings of Iranian researchers over more than eight decades are based on the common point that the educational system should provide more space for students, parents, teachers & school administrators and local people. During the last four decades that the Islamic Republic has been established in Iran, we have simultaneously witnessed the coming and going of different States that have been moving like a pendulum between centralization and decentralization. In recent years, the social demand to increase the decentralization process has gained momentum. Also, States have realized that it is better to refer to non-governmental sources to solve some educational, social, financial and human problems. BOM program has been proposed and implemented based on this thought that it is a school-specific program and does not belong to the wishes of politicians or the organizational demands of the Ministry of Education. The word "special" which is mentioned in the title of the project "special school program" was chosen in order to show that the principal and teachers of each school have full authority in all stages of preparation, formulation, implementation and evaluation of programs and activities. The findings showed that this program actually creates a new space in the general formal education system that did not exist before. In this program, not only this permission has been given to the school, but the school has been asked to prepare educational programs.

Also, the findings of the research can contain lessons for educational policymakers in third world countries - who, like Iran, want to establish transformational plans and programs in their educational system. The first lesson is that, despite the general positive view of school principals about the BOM program, there is a clear agreement that the Ministry of Education should make its implementation optional so that principals and teachers find the necessary motivation to actively participate in it. Of course, at the same time, there is a risk of centralization again. To put it better, despite the demands that seem to easily flow from the speech of school administrators and teachers regarding decentralization, educational policymakers should know that in the practical stage, many people do not want to change the traditional procedures governing the teaching-learning process. This finding is in line with Bagheri et al (2018), Mojreyan Golugahi (2018), Moradi Rizi (2021), Sayadi Shahraki (2021) and Latifi (2022) whom showed that the common thought among administrators and teachers is that the BOM program is a type of "extra" activity which is not equal to the formal school program. The second lesson for policymakers and educational planners of the developing countries is that providing innovative programs and plans without changing the current structure of the educational system will mostly lead to failure. It is not possible to implement the BOM program without allocating enough time in the formal school schedule. In fact, the volume of textbooks has not changed and there is no opportunity for the teacher to make additional plans to participate in the Bom program. It is necessary to reduce the size and contents of the textbook so that

the teacher's hands are free to create time for BOM program. When the teacher is anxious to finish the textbook, she/he naturally cannot spare time for other remedial programs. The third lesson is the training of human resources. Without the training of managers and teachers, it is not possible to implement transformative programs and projects in traditional educational systems. In many interviews, the participants have admitted that teachers - especially those who do not have much experience in the educational system - are often not familiar with the process of preparing and compiling activities of the BOM program, and naturally their cooperation is at a minimal level.

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