



Evaluation of the Implementation of School Financial Management in the Free School Program Using the Stake Model at Senior High School

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the Study: This study evaluates the implementation of school financial management within the free school program at Senior High School 3 Palembang using the Stake evaluation model to assess effectiveness, transparency, and accountability in fund management. As education funding is crucial in ensuring equal learning opportunities, examining how financial resources are managed within tuition-free programs is essential for sustainable policy implementation. Despite regulatory guidelines, financial management in free school programs often encounters obstacles in coordination, supervision, and transparency.

Methodology: This research adopts a qualitative case study approach, utilizing interviews, observations, and document analysis to gather in-depth insights. The Stake model framework evaluates the program through four dimensions: context, input, process, and product.

Main Findings: Findings reveal that while financial management at Senior High School Palembang adheres to procedural standards, significant challenges persist in supervision mechanisms and budget reporting. Inefficiencies in fund allocation and monitoring impact the program's effectiveness, highlighting the need for improved financial literacy among administrators and enhanced accountability measures.

Novelty/Originality of the Study: The novelty of this study lies in its application of the Stake model to assess financial governance in free school programs, a relatively unexplored area in education management research. By providing a localized evaluation, this study enriches existing literature and offers practical recommendations for policymakers, school administrators, and education stakeholders. Strengthening financial transparency and accountability is crucial to ensuring that free education programs fulfill their intended objectives, fostering equitable access to quality education while maintaining fiscal responsibility.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the main pillars in the social, economic, and cultural development of a country. In this development framework, the education sector plays a crucial role as it directly contributes to improving the quality of human resources, which is the foundation for the progress of a nation. Therefore, the education sector is always a primary concern in every policy taken by the government. In Indonesia, education is guaranteed as a

fundamental right for every citizen, without exception, as stipulated in the 1945 Constitution, which mandates that education is the right of every child of the nation.

In order to achieve equitable access to education, the Indonesian government launched the Free School Program aimed at providing equal opportunities for all Indonesian children, especially those from economically disadvantaged families, to access education without financial burden. This Free School Program, which began to be implemented in the early 2000s, is expected to reduce socio-economic disparities and increase educational participation, particularly in areas with high poverty rates. However, despite the noble objectives of this program, its implementation is not without challenges, particularly in terms of adequate and accountable financial management [1]-[3].

School financial management is one of the critical aspects in the success of the Free School Program. Although the government provides funding subsidies to support school operations, the allocation and utilization of these funds often face various issues, such as inefficiencies in budget planning, lack of transparency in fund usage, and limited managerial capacity in budget management. If financial management is not carried out properly, the program is at risk of waste, misuse of funds, or even ineffectiveness in achieving the desired educational goals [4]-[6]. Therefore, it is essential for every school running this program to ensure that the funds received are used efficiently, effectively, and responsibly.

Senior High School 3 Palembang, as one of the public education institutions implementing the Free School Program, is also facing similar challenges. With limited funding, Senior high school 3 Palembang must ensure efficient budget management to meet various educational operational needs, such as facility procurement, human resource development (teachers), and the improvement of learning quality. In this context, financial management is crucial to support the achievement of educational objectives at the school. This requires a comprehensive evaluation of the implementation of financial management at Senior high school 3 Palembang and how well these practices reflect the principles of accountability and transparency.

Evaluation of the implementation of financial management in the Free School Program is essential to identify strengths and weaknesses in the budgeting process, as well as the factors that influence success or failure in school financial management. One relevant evaluation model for this purpose is Stake's Countenance Model, first introduced by Robert E. Stake in 1975. This model offers an evaluation approach that focuses on gaining an in-depth understanding of the context, needs, and perceptions of various stakeholders involved in the program, especially the program's stakeholders. This approach allows for a more holistic and comprehensive evaluation, providing a clearer picture of how financial management is conducted and its impact on the quality of education received by students [7].

The Free School Program, as a strategic policy of the Indonesian government, is designed to ensure educational access for every child without being hindered by financial barriers. According to Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, the government is responsible for providing quality education for all Indonesian citizens. The education subsidies provided by the government cover school operational costs, facility procurement, and human resource development costs, such as teacher salaries and staff training. However, limited budget allocation often becomes an obstacle in optimizing the implementation of the Free School Program. Many schools, including Senior high school 3 Palembang, face difficulties in meeting all operational and school development needs with limited funds. In this situation, efficient and transparent financial management is necessary to ensure optimal use of available funds [8]-[10].

Poor financial management can risk causing waste, ineffective fund allocation, and even misuse of funds, which can undermine the educational goals themselves. Furthermore, in some cases, an imbalance in fund allocation for infrastructure development and teaching quality improvement can disrupt the sustainability and quality of education provided. This requires a more in-depth evaluation of how financial management is carried out at Senior high school 3 Palembang and how well it aligns with good managerial principles, namely transparency, accountability, and efficiency [11]. Evaluation using the Stake model will assist the school in understanding the strengths and weaknesses of financial management and provide recommendations for more effective improvements. Furthermore, school financial management not only includes budgeting and fund allocation but also the monitoring and accountability of fund usage. Without an effective monitoring system, the potential for fund misuse or waste increases, which can hinder the achievement of the Free School Program's goals. This makes the evaluation of financial management a crucial component in ensuring that government-provided funds are truly used for the benefit of education and the development of learning quality at the school [12]-[14].

Senior high school 3 Palembang, with its relatively large number of students, serves as an interesting case study for researching financial management in the implementation of the Free School Program. Given the challenges faced in managing limited funds and various other operational needs, evaluating the implementation of financial management at this school is very important. This study aims to provide a clearer picture of how financial management can affect the success of the Free School Program and evaluate how well the management practices align with the expected principles.

In this regard, the Stake Model offers an evaluation approach that can delve deeply into the context of financial management, the goals to be achieved, and the expectations of all parties involved in the program. Evaluation with this model will provide more comprehensive information about how the financial management process at Senior high school 3 Palembang is conducted and its impact on the quality of education received by students. Therefore, the results of this evaluation are expected to serve as a reference for the school and policymakers to make improvements in financial management in the future [15]-[18].

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study aims to evaluate the implementation of financial management in the Free School Program at Senior high school 3 Palembang using the Stake Model. The Stake Model was chosen because of its approach that emphasizes understanding the context, as well as the views and perceptions of stakeholders involved in a program [7]. This approach is relevant for evaluating financial management in schools, where various parties are involved in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of funds available for educational programs. In this study, the evaluation approach is used to assess the effectiveness of the financial management of educational funds in the Free School Program and its impact on the quality of education at Senior high school 3 Palembang.

This study uses a qualitative approach with an evaluative research design. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to deeply understand how financial management is carried out at Senior high school 3 Palembang in the context of the Free School Program. The evaluation in this study focuses not only on the results achieved but also on the processes and impacts of financial management on the quality of education. Using the Stake Model, the researcher will explore the perceptions of various stakeholders involved in the management of funds, including school administrators, parents, local government officials, and the students themselves. Stake states that an effective evaluation must involve stakeholders in data collection and assessment, and must describe the entire context and objectives of the program being evaluated [7].

The Stake Model has three main components used in this study: context description, evaluation standards, and assessment of program outcomes. The first component, context description, will describe the background of the Free School Program implementation at Senior high school 3 Palembang, including the financial management policies implemented, as well as the issues and challenges faced by the school in running this program. The second component, evaluation standards, will include the principles of accountability, transparency, and efficiency that must be met in managing funds. Finally, the assessment of program outcomes will focus on whether the financial management contributes to achieving the desired educational objectives, particularly in improving access to quality education for students.

The research design used in this study is descriptive qualitative with an evaluative approach. This design was chosen because the study aims to provide an in-depth picture of how financial management is implemented in the Free School Program at Senior high school 3 Palembang. The researcher aims to describe in detail the process of managing educational funds and the various factors that affect its implementation. This design also allows the researcher to understand how financial management at the school level is related to the quality of education received by students. In this study, data will be collected through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and analysis of relevant documents. In-depth interviews will be conducted with various stakeholders involved in the Free School Program, such as the school principal, the school treasurer, teachers, parents, and some students who are beneficiaries of the program. The purpose of these interviews is to explore their views and perceptions regarding the financial management implemented, whether it adheres to the principles of transparency and accountability, and its impact on the quality of education received by students.

In addition to interviews, direct observation will also be conducted to observe how the allocation and use of educational funds are carried out at Senior high school 3 Palembang. Observations will focus on the management of the budget, the implementation of educational activities, and the use of facilities funded by the Free School Program. The data from observations will provide a real picture of financial management at the school and will strengthen the data collected through interviews. Furthermore, the researcher will collect related documents such as reports on school budget usage, financial reports, and policy documents related to the management of funds for the Free School Program at both national and local levels. These documents will provide objective information about the flow of funds and how they are used to support the free education program.

The data sources used in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data will be obtained through in-depth interviews and direct observation. In-depth interviews will be conducted with the school principal, school treasurer, teachers, and parents. Meanwhile, direct observation will be carried out in various areas of financial management at Senior high school 3 Palembang, such as the administration office and meetings discussing budget usage. Secondary data will be obtained from school financial documentation, such as reports on fund usage, annual budget details, and government policies related to the allocation of funds for education in the Free School Program. These secondary data will provide a clearer picture of the policies and procedures followed in financial management and the flow of funds received by the school. To enrich and

validate the collected data, this study will also use data triangulation, which involves comparing interview results with observational data and documents obtained. Triangulation aims to ensure the validity and consistency of the data and to enhance understanding of school financial management in the context of the Free School Program.

Data analysis in this study will use thematic analysis. Data collected from interviews, observations, and documentation will be analyzed qualitatively by identifying emerging themes related to financial management, transparency, accountability, and its impact on the quality of education. The researcher will categorize the data based on relevant categories related to the research objectives. Then, the data will be analyzed to identify patterns that reflect good or poor financial management in the implementation of the Free School Program. In this analysis, the researcher will also use the evaluation framework of the Stake Model, which consists of three main components: context description, evaluation standards, and assessment of program outcomes. The analysis results will describe the extent to which the school's financial management adheres to the principles of accountability and transparency and whether it has contributed to achieving the program's objectives, particularly in providing quality education for disadvantaged students. After the data analysis is completed, the researcher will draw conclusions about how financial management at Senior high school 3 Palembang can influence the effectiveness and success of the Free School Program. Based on these findings, the researcher will provide recommendations for improvement, both in financial management and in enhancing the quality of the Free School Program to more effectively achieve the desired educational goals.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This discussion will focus on the financial management practices implemented at Senior high school 3 Palembang, as well as the successes and shortcomings in the implementation of the Free School Program. To ensure accuracy and relevance, the Stake model in financial management evaluation will serve as the primary reference.

3.1. Contextual Description of Financial Management in the Free School Program at Senior high school 3 Palembang

The Free School Program is a government policy in Indonesia aimed at providing free education opportunities to children, especially those from underprivileged families. At Senior high school 3 Palembang, this program is implemented with the expectation of reducing disparities in educational access across social strata, while also improving the quality of secondary education. This policy includes subsidies from the government to cover various operational costs of the school, including teaching expenses, facilities, and human resource development. The Free School Program is a national initiative intended to offer educational opportunities at no cost to children from low-income families. At Senior high school 3 Palembang, the implementation of this program is designed to reduce the educational access gap among different social groups. The government provides subsidies to cover operational costs such as teaching, facility procurement, and human resource development [19]-[21]. However, limited financial management often poses a major challenge in the implementation of this program. As a public school, Senior high school 3 Palembang must comply with regulations governing the use of funds allocated under the Free School Program.

In practice, the largest challenge faced is the efficient use of the limited budget. Interviews with the school principal revealed that the school's budget planning is generally adequate, but its execution is often hampered by unforeseen circumstances, such as the urgent need for facility repairs. This finding aligns with research by Olaifa et al., which shows that budget allocations at the school level are often delayed or disrupted by unpredictable urgent needs that arise during the academic year [22]. Flexible and efficient financial management is needed to address these challenges. One key aspect of school financial management is the level of transparency in financial reporting [23]-[25]. At Senior high school 3 Palembang, although financial reports are submitted to the relevant authorities, limited public access to information restricts external oversight.

However, in practice, managing the available funds at schools, including Senior high school 3 Palembang, faces several challenges. One of these is the limited allocation of funds, which forces the school to engage in efficient and effective budget planning. In this context, financial management becomes a crucial aspect. Furthermore, accountability, transparency, and efficiency in the management of funds remain key challenges, ensuring that allocated funds are used strictly for educational purposes and not for other interests. As a public school implementing the Free School Program, Senior high school 3 Palembang must adhere to various regulations regarding the use of education funds provided through this program. The school principal, treasurer, and administrative staff are responsible for managing the funds appropriately, including planning the budget, making expenditures, and reporting financial activities in accordance with established regulations.

Based on interviews with the principal, financial management at Senior high school 3 Palembang has a fairly established system, but still faces challenges related to transparency and the efficiency of budget use. For instance, in some cases, the management of the school's operational budget does not always align with the pre-

established planning. This is due to the emergence of unexpected needs, such as facility repairs that require larger amounts of funding.

3.2. Standards for Evaluating Financial Management in the Free School Program

The evaluation of financial management in the Free School Program at Senior high school 3 Palembang is based on three main standards: transparency, accountability, and efficiency. These three standards serve as the foundation for assessing the extent to which the funds received by the school have been managed effectively, and whether these funds have been optimally used to support the improvement of educational quality. Transparency is key to building trust between the school, the community, and the government. This study found that, although financial reports are submitted to the relevant authorities, there is still room for improving transparency. Research by Krissadee and Pathranarakul, shows that increasing public access to budget information can encourage more active community participation in oversight processes, which in turn can reduce waste and misuse of funds [26]. Accountability requires the school to be responsible for the use of the funds received. In this regard, Senior high school 3 Palembang has been fairly good at preparing detailed financial reports, but delays in submitting these reports have been a major obstacle. This finding aligns with research by Saputra et al., which revealed that delays in financial reporting at some schools reduce external trust in the management of school funds [27].

Efficiency in budget utilization is crucial to ensure that the funds received are used in the best possible way to support the quality of education. This study found that although the allocation of funds for school facilities was relatively large, its management was not fully efficient. Some facilities purchased were not optimally utilized, such as classrooms that were underused, indicating that budget priorities sometimes do not align with the school's urgent needs. Budget efficiency largely depends on the school's ability to identify priority needs and allocate funds accordingly [28]-[30]. Transparency is one of the key indicators in financial management evaluation. In this study, transparency refers to the extent to which the school provides clear and easily accessible information about the use of Free School Program funds. From interviews with parents and school administrative staff, most indicated that information about budget allocation was not always made publicly available. While budget usage reports are submitted to the relevant authorities, there is still room for improvement by providing more information to the general public, such as through the school's website or meetings with parents.

Accountability is related to the school's obligation to justify the use of received funds. In this case, the school is required to ensure that funds are used in accordance with their intended purposes, and financial reports must be clear and detailed. Based on observations, the financial reports submitted by the school at Senior high school 3 Palembang met good accountability standards; however, there were instances of delays in submitting reports to the relevant authorities, such as the local Department of Education. Efficiency refers to the extent to which the funds are used appropriately, without waste or ineffectiveness. In this regard, financial management should create the maximum impact with minimal cost. Observations and interviews revealed that financial management at Senior high school 3 Palembang has not been fully efficient, particularly concerning the allocation of funds for school facilities that are not always used according to priority. Some facilities, such as classrooms, were underutilized, despite the relatively large budget allocation for their maintenance.

3.3. Implementation of Financial Management at Senior high school 3 Palembang

Based on observations and interviews conducted at Senior high school 3 Palembang, several stages are involved in the management of funds for the Free School Program. The process begins with budget planning carried out by the school's management, including the principal, treasurer, and administrative staff. The budget prepared covers various components, such as teacher salaries, operational costs, procurement of educational facilities, and funding for human resource development programs. The implementation of financial management at Senior high school 3 Palembang starts with budget planning, involving the principal, treasurer, and administrative staff. The school's budget includes various components, such as teacher salaries, operational costs, facility procurement, and funding for human resource development [31]-[33]. One challenge in budget planning is the limited funds available to meet all of the school's needs. Some research findings indicate that, despite careful budget planning, there are often instances of wastefulness or inaccuracies in expenditure.

The execution of the budget at Senior high school 3 Palembang also faces unforeseen challenges. For example, expenditures for facility repairs sometimes exceed the planned budget, disrupting allocations for other more urgent needs. This finding aligns with research by Firdaus, which found that financial management in public schools in Indonesia is often hampered by unavoidable waste [34]. Furthermore, a lack of coordination between the administration and facility managers has resulted in some of the budget allocated for facilities not being used as intended. As noted by Pak et al, one of the key issues in educational fund management is the misalignment between planning and field implementation [35].

The next process is budget execution, where the approved funds are used for various school operational needs. At this stage, financial management must adhere to established principles, such as efficient, transparent,

and accountable use of funds. However, during implementation, several issues arose, particularly in terms of oversight over fund utilization. Some budget components, such as the purchase of goods and materials for school facilities, sometimes experienced wastefulness or misallocation. Internal evaluations conducted by the school show that while funds are used for educational purposes, budget management is often not optimal in terms of efficiency. For instance, the procurement of teaching aids, which should be prioritized to support the teaching and learning process, is sometimes diverted to less urgent matters. This indicates a mismatch between budget planning and the school's actual priority needs.

Regarding financial reporting, Senior high school 3 Palembang has a clear and accountable reporting system. However, this system is still lacking in terms of accessibility and transparency to the general public. Financial reports are shared only with internal school stakeholders and some relevant parties, such as the local Department of Education, but there is no mechanism to facilitate parents or the general public in accessing detailed budget usage information. This limits external oversight of the use of educational funds at Senior high school 3 Palembang. One of the main objectives of the Free School Program is to improve the quality of education by eliminating financial barriers. In this context, good financial management is expected to enhance the quality of educational facilities, teaching quality, and equal access to education for students from various economic backgrounds.

However, despite the relatively large funds allocated for the Free School Program at Senior high school 3 Palembang, its impact on educational quality has not been fully realized. Interviews with teachers and students revealed that, although there have been improvements in some areas, such as school facilities and infrastructure, the quality of teaching has not seen significant changes. One contributing factor is the lack of fund allocation for professional development training for teachers, which could improve teaching quality. Some teachers also mentioned that, despite the availability of funds for educational facilities, not all of these facilities are optimally utilized due to inadequate maintenance.

Furthermore, although access to education has expanded for students from low-income families, some students still feel that the quality of education they receive does not fully meet their expectations. This is particularly evident in the quality of teaching, which is perceived as less interactive and lacking in technological integration. Therefore, despite the availability of funds, inefficient financial management has resulted in these resources not being fully utilized to improve the quality of the learning process.

3.4. Evaluation of Budget Management and Resource Allocation at Senior high school 3 Palembang

This evaluation focuses on the management of the budget and resource allocation at Senior high school 3 Palembang within the context of the Free School Program. Effective financial management can significantly impact the success of the program, while poor management can lead to various challenges, including fund wastage and inefficiency in achieving educational goals. The evaluation of budget management and resource allocation at Senior high school 3 Palembang reveals an imbalance between budget planning and actual implementation. The budget planning process involves all school stakeholders; however, its execution does not always align with the original plan [36]-[38]. In this regard, budget management needs to give more attention to urgent needs and allocate funds more efficiently.

Another finding in this study is the suboptimal allocation of funds for facility development. For example, the procurement of teaching aids to support practical learning is often not fully utilized due to a lack of coordination between the school and the teachers managing the equipment. Emphasizes the importance of coordination among stakeholders in managing educational funds to ensure that the funds are used for their intended purposes [39]-[41]. The management of funds for school operational activities also shows signs of imbalance. Some activities considered less important, such as extracurricular activities, often receive a larger portion of the budget, while more urgent activities, such as facility maintenance, face budget shortages. This reflects imperfections in the planning and allocation processes.

The budget planning process at Senior high school 3 Palembang begins with the identification of needs and the preparation of the budget plan by the school's management, including the principal, treasurer, and administrative staff. Based on interview data, the school has a fairly good planning system, although in recent years, there have been difficulties in prioritizing needs due to limited funding. For instance, despite the urgent need for facility maintenance, such as repairing leaking classroom roofs, some funds were allocated to extracurricular activities that were deemed less urgent. The allocation of funds for various school operational components, such as teacher salaries, procurement of teaching aids, and purchasing educational support facilities, has been carried out according to existing guidelines. However, several challenges have emerged in the execution of fund allocation, particularly regarding the use of funds for urgent needs. Despite the availability of funds, the school often struggles with setting priorities, which means that important activities, such as teacher training or improving the quality of learning, are often not adequately funded. Regarding the allocation of funds for facility development, this study found that, although a significant portion of funds has been allocated for educational facilities, the management of these funds has not been efficient. For instance, the procurement of teaching aids for practical learning in certain departments has not been fully utilized. This issue arises due to a

lack of coordination between the school and the teachers responsible for using the equipment, resulting in purchased equipment often remaining unused.

In addition to the allocation of funds for facilities and learning, the management of funds for school operational activities also requires serious attention. Based on findings from direct observations and interviews with administrative staff, there is a gap between budget planning and its implementation. Some operational cost components, which should be allocated for routine school activities, such as maintenance of cleanliness and security, often face funding shortages. In some cases, the school is forced to reallocate funds from other programs to cover these shortages, leading to imbalances in budget usage. Overall, the evaluation results show that while Senior high school 3 Palembang has made significant efforts in planning and allocating its budget, there are shortcomings in budget prioritization and efficient fund usage. These issues have the potential to reduce the effectiveness of the Free School Program in achieving its primary goal: improving the quality of education without burdening students' families with additional costs.

3.5. Evaluation of Budget Management and Resource Allocation at Senior high school 3 Palembang

One of the primary objectives of the Free School program is to improve the quality of education in public schools and ensure that students from various economic backgrounds can access quality education. Therefore, evaluating financial management must assess its impact on the quality of learning and the well-being of students at Senior high school 3 Palembang. Although the funds received through the Free School program at Senior high school 3 Palembang have been used to improve facilities, their impact on the quality of learning has not yet reached its full potential. This finding reflects that inefficient financial management can hinder the achievement of broader educational goals, namely the improvement of teaching quality and student well-being [42]-[44]. Efficient financial management is crucial to ensure that available funds are used to enhance teaching quality and facilities that directly affect student well-being. Several teachers have stated that while the school's facilities have improved, the quality of teaching has not shown significant improvement. This may be due to the lack of professional training for teachers and insufficient funding for teacher competency development [45]-[47]. Thus, a financial management strategy that focuses more on enhancing teaching quality and professional development for teachers is urgently needed.

Furthermore, student well-being, which is a primary goal of the Free School program, has not been fully achieved. Although the program has successfully reduced the financial burden of education, certain aspects of student well-being, such as inadequate physical conditions of the school and limited access to learning technologies, remain issues that need to be addressed. The success of the Free School program is not solely measured by the reduction in educational costs but also by improvements in the quality of learning that can be experienced by students from various economic strata [48]-[51]. The research findings indicate that while the funds available through the Free School program have been used to improve school facilities, their impact on the quality of learning has not yet been fully optimized. Based on interviews with several teachers, despite improvements in facilities such as better classrooms and internet access, teaching quality remains limited by other factors, such as the lack of professional training for teachers and insufficient access to technology-based learning materials.

Although a budget for teacher training has been allocated in the annual budget plan, some of these funds are often redirected to other more urgent needs, such as the purchase of consumables or facility maintenance. As a result, teacher training and professional development have been neglected, which ultimately hinders improvements in teaching quality and, consequently, affects student learning outcomes. The Free School program should not only alleviate the financial burden on parents but also enhance student well-being through better facilities and improved learning quality. At Senior high school 3 Palembang, while the program has provided financial relief, several issues related to student well-being remain unresolved. One key issue is the physical well-being of students, which is influenced by the condition of school facilities. Despite the budget allocated for facility maintenance, such as classrooms and restrooms, interviews with students reveal that some areas of the school still require repair, such as leaking classroom roofs and poorly maintained restrooms. Students' emotional well-being is also influenced by the quality of interactions between teachers and students, which could be improved through teacher training and development. More efficient use of funds for such training could help improve students' emotional well-being, which, in turn, could positively affect their learning outcomes.

Furthermore, the evaluation shows that while Senior high school 3 Palembang has made efforts to meet most of the school's operational needs, there are obstacles in utilizing the funds to their full potential. For example, some funds allocated for extracurricular activities have not been used efficiently, due to a mismatch between planned activities and the reality on the ground. As a result, extracurricular activities, which were expected to enhance students' skills, have either been ineffective or canceled due to budget and time constraints.

Overall, while financial management at Senior high school 3 Palembang demonstrates efforts to improve the quality of learning and student well-being through the Free School program, several areas still require improvement. In terms of facility management, the funds available should be more optimally utilized to

ensure that existing facilities better support learning activities. Meanwhile, in terms of student well-being, it is essential to balance the fulfillment of both students' physical and emotional needs, which in turn will improve the overall quality of education.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight the critical role of effective financial management in ensuring the success of the Free School Program at Senior high school 3 Palembang. While the school has made notable efforts to align financial management with established guidelines, challenges remain in optimizing fund allocation to meet the most pressing educational needs. The misalignment in budget prioritization, particularly in areas such as teacher training and facility improvements, underscores the necessity for a more strategic approach to ensure that financial resources directly contribute to enhancing the quality of education. Addressing these gaps will improve not only the efficiency of budget utilization but also the overall educational outcomes for students. Furthermore, while the program has alleviated the financial burden on students' families, its impact on the quality of learning and student well-being remains suboptimal. The inadequacy of certain facilities, coupled with limited investments in professional development for teachers, affects both the physical and emotional well-being of students. Prioritizing funds for infrastructure upgrades and teacher training initiatives is essential to foster a more conducive learning environment. Additionally, the integration of educational technology, such as enhanced computer labs and internet accessibility, presents an opportunity to modernize the learning process and equip students with relevant digital skills necessary in today's educational landscape.

To ensure financial transparency and accountability, stronger oversight mechanisms must be implemented. This includes both internal monitoring by the school and external involvement from stakeholders, such as the local community and educational authorities. Strengthening financial governance will not only mitigate the risk of fund misallocation but also reinforce public trust in the Free School Program. Furthermore, a more inclusive approach to financial decision-making one that actively involves educators, students, and parents can lead to more informed and effective budgetary decisions. Ultimately, efficient and transparent financial management is pivotal in achieving equitable and high-quality education. By improving fund allocation, investing in teacher development, modernizing educational infrastructure, and reinforcing oversight, Senior high school 3 Palembang can maximize the impact of the Free School Program. These strategic improvements will contribute to a more sustainable and inclusive educational system that ensures long-term benefits for students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Moving forward, policymakers and school administrators should consider refining financial management frameworks to enhance both the accessibility and quality of education, thereby reinforcing the broader objectives of national education reform.

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