



SCHOOL BASED MANAGEMENT (SBM) AND CHANGING RESPONSIBILITIES OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN SRI LANKA: CASE STUDY IN COLOMBO DISTRICT

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Abstract

School Based Management (SBM) programme is being implemented since 2006 in the Sri Lankan government schools, and it is titled as the Programme of School Improvement (PSI) in Sri Lanka. This study planned to investigate the changing responsibilities of the principals following the implementation of the Programme of School improvement in the government schools. This study used qualitative inquiry, and a case study approach and survey method also were employed to study the research problem. Data gathered from the Principals, Deputy Principals and Teachers in the schools situated in the Colombo district. Participants were selected using purposive sampling technique. Data gathered using semi structured interviews, questionnaires and document surveys. Data was analysed using thematic analysis and descriptive statistics. The main research questions were: what changes have occurred in the principal's role with respect to management and administration after the implementation of PSI, and what challenges faced by the principal in the school with respect to management and administration after the implementation of PSI. The findings suggest that there are considerable changes occurred in relation to the responsibilities of the principals of the PSI implemented schools. With the implementation of the PSI several key changes can be identified as: participatory decision making, strategic planning and participation of stakeholders in school management. It seems that sufficient power for making decisions on the above matters has not been delegated to the PSI implemented schools by the higher authority. Principal has a collective and shared responsibility for the decisions made by the SDC. However, most decisions of the SDC are influenced by the principal. The decision making process in the PSI implemented schools is dominated by the principal. Moreover, selection of members for the school development committees is influenced by the principals. It is recommended that to establish a particular supervisory body for monitoring the schools where the PSI is being implemented, and the Principals and the SDC members should be given better training on the Sri Lankan PSI system.

Keywords: Decision Making; Principal's Responsibility; Programme of School Improvement; School Management

1. Background of the Study

Many researchers show that, recently the school reforms in the countries focused on to decentralisation, devolution and distribution the decision making power to school level or local level, and make school more autonomous place. Those reforms indicate some similar characteristics of SBM. It seems that the different countries have been implementing the concept of the SBM in their school, and but use different titles. De Grauwe (2005) says that; "School-based management, school based governance, school self management and school site management: different terms with somewhat different meanings, but all referring to a similar and increasingly popular trend, which consists of allowing schools more autonomy in decisions about their management" (De Grauwe, 2005, p. 1). The Sri Lankan version of School Based Management was introduced for the government schools in 2006, and it is titled as the Programme of School Improvement (PSI).

Supporting the implementation of PSI, 2005/24 and 2008/35 circulars has been issued by the Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka. Under this programme, five main outcomes have been set out. They are: to provide quality education to students, to be sensitive to the aspirations of the school community, to increase transparency of school activities through creation of opportunities, to be improved flexibility of internal activities of the school, to optimum use of available resources. The School Development Committee (SDC) and the School Management Team (SMT) are the main decision making bodies in these PSI implemented schools. Stakeholders involve in preparing school development plan and participate in school decisions. Very close relationship should be maintained with the community under this programme. Other very important feature of this programme is school based teacher development programmes. SDC has authority to organize and conduct such programmes to empower teachers.

2. Significance of the Study

Principal is the chair person in the new decision making structure (SDC,SMT) in the PSI implemented schools, and he/ she has new responsibilities to be fulfilled. In order to get maximum benefits of the PSI management system, principal has to lead school efficiently and effectively. Principal and SDC members can be identified as key decision makers in the PSI implemented schools. Wohlstetter (1995) acknowledged that the schools where the SBM worked the principals who played a key role in dispersing power, in promoting a school wide commitment to learning, in expecting all teachers to participate in the work of the school, in collecting information about student learning, and in distributing rewards. (p.24). According to the above statement provided by the Wohlstetter, it is understood that the principal is performing a key multi role in the SBM/PSI schools. Spilman (1996) adds as: "The key role change in the SBM is the principal's shift from top- down manager to a supporter and facilitator who maintains his or her leadership responsibilities" (p.36). The PSI system has been implemented in Sri Lankan schools for more than five years. The PSI was not a new management concept for most of the government schools in Sri Lanka, and therefore the staff members have much experience of the principal's role of those schools. However, there is a dearth of either published qualitative research studies on the PSI in Sri Lanka, or in-depth investigations of the role of the principals in the PSI implemented schools. Therefore, it was very imperative to investigate the principal role in the PSI implemented schools in Sri Lanka. Thus, this study carried out to get better understanding about role of the principal in the PSI implemented schools in the Colombo district.

3. Literature Review

SBM has a number of definitions, which reflects how different countries apply it in their own education systems. There are, however, common characteristics. According to Banicky (2000), several terms commonly used to describe this localized governance model include “decentralization, restructuring, site-based management, participatory decision-making, shared decision making, and school-based decision making” (p. 3). De Grauwe (2005) suggested that SBM basically means to “the transfer of decision-making power on management issues to the school level” (p. 1). Further Caldwell (2005) described SBM as the “systematic and consistent decentralization to the school level of authority and responsibility to make decisions on significant matters related to school operations within a centrally determined framework of goals, policies, curriculum, standards and accountabilities” (p. 3). It seems that SBM is a systematic decentralization process in the school education sector. It is included delegation of power, authority and responsibility to the local schools by the central education authority. In addition SBM schools are given autonomy to make their decisions in democratic and participatory manner at school level.

Raihani (2007), Briggs & Wohlstetter (2003) and Cheng (1993) list some common characteristics of SBM in schools, such as: a shared mission, school based staff development activities, participation of the principal, teachers, and parents in decision making, shared school leadership among administrators and teachers, participatory and democratic decision-making in the school, and power distributed throughout the school. These are new to the PSI schools in Sri Lanka as they had not practiced participatory decision making, distribution of power, authority and responsibility among staff before.

International literature provides evidences and researchers which identifies a range of challenges that are faced by staff and stakeholders in SBM schools. These challenges include: lack of resources; poor coordination among school decision makers and staff; and lack of professional development opportunities for staff, including school leaders (Cranston, 2001). De Guzman (2006) added challenges associated with role conflicts, lack of school governance experience of those on school boards, lack of commitment from the community, interference from political and education officers, and the resistance of staff to change. It seems that most SBM schools in the various countries face difficulties in implementing SBM strategies due to insufficient funds and resources. Most of those schools do not take efforts to generate funds at school level for its development. Poor social environmental factors and poor relationship among staff, and decision makers affects smooth functioning of the SBM schools discouragingly. Therefore it is evident that SBM schools in various countries face challenges and difficulties in implementing SBM schedules.

4. Research Design and Methods

The main research questions of this study are: what changes have occurred in the principal's role with respect to management and administration following the implementation of the PSI, and what challenges faced by the principal in the school with respect to management and administration subsequent to the implementation of the PSI. The objectives of this study were to identify changes in selected administrative functions (participatory management, decision making, human resource management, and financial management) of the principalship in the PSI implemented schools. As final objective, it was intended to identify the challenges faced by the principals in which is being implemented the PSI.

4.1 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research uses a variety of interpretive research methodologies that seek to investigate the quality of relationships and experiences (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2001). In general, qualitative research focuses on the inner experience of people, as they interact with others. "A primary purpose of qualitative research is to describe and clarify experience as it is lived and constituted in awareness. Human experience is a difficult area to study. It is multilayered and complex, it is ongoing flow" (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 138) Therefore, the qualitative research approach was most appropriate in this study, because this research also aimed to investigate the experiences of the members of the staff on principal's role in the PSI implemented schools in relation to the implementation of the programme of school improvement in Sri Lanka.

4.2 Case Study

The case study research approach has been used by qualitative and interpretive researchers for a long time in disciplines (Burns, 2000) because it has a number of advantages. This approach can be used to investigate actual contemporary life settings and life cycles of people, and it allows researchers to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events of people (Yin, 2009) and it provides the researcher with a holistic understanding of a problem, issue, or phenomenon with its social context (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Since this study intended to explore deeply the experiences of staff members on the role of the principals in their schools case study research approach was more appropriate.

4.2.1 Interviewing

Qualitative researchers use various methods for data collection: "observation (participant and non participant), interviewing, and document analysis" (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002, p. 430). However the interview appears to be the most popular data collection instrument in the qualitative research. Interviews allow the researcher to gather direct information from the participants, and the researcher has an opportunity to get more clarifications about the information provided by them. Therefore, it seemed that interview is more appropriate method of accessing people's insights, sense, and definitions of situations and constructions of reality. It is also one of the most significant ways we have of understanding others (Punch, 2009). As this study planned to explore the experiences of principals, deputy principals and teachers of the PSI implemented schools on the role of the principal interviewing was more appropriate for data collection. The interview schedule was included only open ended questions in order to collect richest information from the participants. Before gathering information from research sample, interview schedule was pilot tested, and made necessary alterations.

4.2.2 Documentation

According to Hodder (2000, p. 704) documents are important in qualitative research because "access can be easy and low cost, ... the information provided may differ from and may not available in spoken form, and ... texts endure and thus give historical insight". Documents were important because in the nature of the PSI has more paper work, and documents provided the formal frameworks of PSI. The documents in this research were minutes of the SDC, SMT meetings, school plans, policy statements, and PSI guidelines. It was carefully surveyed the above documents in this study, and those data was more useful to triangulate the data gathered through other instruments.

4.2.3 Questionnaire

In order to gather rich data, a questionnaire survey was used in this study. An advantage of the questionnaire is that: it was used to gather data in a relatively short period of time. Questionnaire is an effective tool to gather straightforward and factual information from the participants (Anderson, 1998). The data gathered through questionnaire was used to triangulate the data in this study. Teachers were involved in the questionnaire survey. Researcher personally administered the questionnaire, and therefore the response rate was more satisfactory. It was included more open ended questions and also included few questions to gather personnel information of the participants in to the questioner. After the pilot test, questioner was amended.

4.3 Selection of the Participants

The participants in this study were the principals, the deputy principals and the teaching staff on the SDC who have experiences of the implementation of the PSI in Sri Lanka. Participants in this study were selected using a purposive sampling method. Best & Kahn (2006) suggest, purposive sampling permits the researcher to choose the participants who provide the richest information.

Table 1: Research Participants

Schools	Principals	Deputy Principals	Teachers
National	2	2	4
1AB	2	2	4
1C	1	1	2
Total	5	5	10

Source-Research Data

5. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analyzing strategy that starts in the data, and pursues identifiable themes and patterns (Aronson, 1994). Thus, thematic analysis can be understood as the process of recovering the theme or themes that are embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work. Therefore thematic analysis was used in this study to analysis the data gathered through interviews and questionnaires from the participants. In the process of analysis data in this study, the themes were emerged within the transcribed data gathered through interviews. Then the themes was organized, described and interpreted. In addition, percentages were used to analyse the data.

6. Findings

The participants in this study, principals, deputy principals and teachers of the PSI implemented schools presented their experiences as their real life stories, and those stories were the research data in this study. This study had qualitative data in the interview transcriptions, observations and documents. In the process of analysing the data from the transcriptions, observations and documents, it was identified themes, then coding and identifying patterns was completed in order to find out the similarities between the cases in this study. The analysed data was really facilitated the researcher to accomplish the expected outcomes and the objectives of the study.

Background of the participants

Table 2: Highest Education Levels of the Participants

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage
Tertiary	02	10
Degree	11	55
Postgraduate Degree	04	20
Master degree	03	15
Total	20	100

Source-Research Data

Table 2 shows the education level of participants in this study. According to the information indicated in the table, majority of respondents are degree holders, and 35% of responders are having postgraduate degree.

Table 3: Age Distribution of the Research Participants

Age Group (Years)	Principal	%	Deputy Principals	%	Teachers	%	Total	%
18-30	00	00	01	20	04	40	05	25
31-40	01	20	03	60	02	20	06	30
41-50	04	80	00	00	01	10	05	25
51-60	00	00	01	20	03	30	04	20
Total	05	100	05	100	10	100	20	100

Source-Research Data

According to the information in the table 3, majority of respondents represent 31-40 age group, and majority of deputy principals are also in that age group. While 80% of principals represent 41-50 age group 40% of teachers are in the 18-30 age group. This information shows that the principals in the sample are matured. However majority of teachers' and deputy principals' age is blow 40 years.

School Based Teacher Development

Majority of the principals' (80%) perception is that the lack of funds provided by the higher authority is not sufficient for the teacher training and development. Moreover the principals' perceptions about school based teacher development is as: "teachers do not like to participate for the teacher development programmes if those programmes conduct in weekends, and it is harmful for the students if the teacher development programmes conduct in week days. However, my duty is in the PSI to organize such activities in the school site". It is evident that as the PSI policy, school based teacher development programmes should be organized by the school leaders. It was identified that most principals do not attend and desire to allocate sufficient funds and resources for school based teacher development programmes. They always tend to pass the responsibility to higher authority, or blame them for inadequate money provided by the higher authority for school based teacher development.

Human Resource Management

According to the PSI regulations more power has not yet decentralised to the schools for human resource management. However, school management boards have more responsibility to direct the human resources to achieve new targets of the schools under the PSI initiatives. Although the PSI expected to initiate participatory management in the schools, principals still play a key role as a human recourse manager. Most

of the human resource activities are still looked after by the principal and not by the School Development Committee (SDC). Majority of teachers (60%) said that as: “the principal do not like to delegate human recourse management decision making power to the SDC, and even most of the members of the SDC have been appointed by the principal. However the principal’s decisions are not very reasonable and not oriented toward our development” One principal commented that as: “I do not have power to make more decisions on the teachers’ matters, but I make lot of efforts to direct them for the development of the school, unfortunately, some teachers can’t be changed”. It seems that, although the principal has not adequate power on human resources management in the school, he/she has to direct, guide, influence them to achieve the PSI targets. However, most of the teachers are not happy about the principal’s leadership and decisions on human resource management in the school.

Decision Making, School Governing Boards and Participation

Main school decisions are made by the SDC. It is represented the principal, deputy principals, teachers, parents and past pupils etc. However the mechanism of selection of members for the SDCs and School Management team (SMT)s is not so democratic in most of the PSI implemented schools. According to the responses of the majority of teachers (80%) of SDCs; principals influence to select members for the SDCs. Thus, it seems that there is no democratic and genuine participatory decision making process in most PSI implemented schools. Moreover, the decision making in the SDC meetings is also not much participative. One teacher indicates that as: *“the community involvement in the school SDC meetings are only a formality for the purpose of legitimacy. Everything is already prepared by the principal and what is needed from the members of the SDC is their agreement and signatures”*. It is also worthwhile to note that this teacher perceived the role taken by the principal as too dominant in the SDC meetings. One principal argued that as: “the SDC is a very important management body, and that is a common stage for the stakeholders to present their ideas for the development of the school”. However, as the chairperson of the SDC, principal has to perform very democratic and effective role for the school development in the PSI implemented schools. It seems that the SDCs of majority of the PSI implemented schools are not functioned independently since the principals do not make effort to make them more democratic. According to the information provided by the participants, it is evident that the principals of the PSI implemented schools do not encourage outside community members to participate in school decisions.

Financial Management

Stakeholders do not provide financial support autonomously. However, principal and the SDC members make efforts to generate funds for school development since the government does not provide adequate financial and physical resources. Therefore, principal has to play a huge role in financial management in the school. One of the deputy principal states that as: *“We make use of SDC meetings to make decisions to get financial support from the stakeholders, and most of the time principal has a financial plan, and at the meeting he gets the consent of the SDC members for that”*. It is evident that principals have a new role in the PSI implemented schools to find additional funds for school development. According to the attitudes and skills of the person who hold the principal position directly affect the successfulness of the fund raising activities.

Challenges Faced by Principals in the PSI Implemented Schools

According to the responses made by the majority of principals (60%), deputy principals (100%) and teachers (60%), schools face challenges finding resources for school development since sufficient amount of resources are not provided by the government. Therefore the principals face many difficulties in finding

financial and physical resources for the school development. The principal holds the ultimate responsibility of each and every activity in the school. Therefore, most principals in the PSI implemented schools are working under pressure.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

Since the principals have not been provided more decision making power by the PSI policy, they face difficulties in human resource management in the PSI implemented schools. However, SDCs and the principals make much effort to finding financial resources for school development. Yet, community participation is not very much supportive in the PSI implemented schools in the Colombo district. Awareness of stakeholders on the concept of PSI or SBM is not adequate. Therefore the community members should be made aware on the PSI and SBM, and the disadvantaged PSI schools must be given additional support by the government for some years until they get stable. In addition, the stakeholders of the PSI implemented schools and the principals are needed to be empowered to implement the PSI policy effectively. Since the PSI implementation is facing many challenges, it is urgent to paid attention by the responsible authorities to establish a supervisory body or monitoring process to supervise and guide the implementation mechanism of the Programme of School Improvement (PSI) in Sri Lanka.

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