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School Based Management and the Nature of Educational Development of Students: Practical Experiences of Public Schools in Sri Lanka

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Abstract:

The main aim of this study is to investigate the experiences of School Development Committee members on education development of students in the government schools in Sri Lanka. According to School Based Management (SBM) policy regulations, the rapid development of education and best quality education are emphasized. This study is a qualitative inquiry, and multiple case study approach was used to study this research problem. The majority of teachers are not directly involved in decision-making. The parents do not have high-level expectations in educating their children. The teachers face many difficulties in improving the performance of the students. The majority of schools display poor results at the national examinations. The schools, where there are good examination results, have a big demand. The students face difficulties in participating extracurricular activities since schools do not have sufficient facilities.

Keywords: School based management, education development, performance of the students, programme for school improvement, empowerment of students

1. Introduction

The main responsibility of education in Sri Lanka was held by monastics of Buddhist temples before the Colonial era. The administrators of traditional educational organizations had had a substantial degree of decision-making power and authority with regard to the functions of their institutions before the colonial period in Sri Lanka. Also, they had a civil power in their society since the majority of them were priests in the Buddhist temples. During that era, there had been a good relationship between the traditional educational institutions and the community members in Sri Lanka (Ruberu, 1962). However, in order to accomplish the requirements of colonial rulers, a different school education system was introduced in the Portuguese colonial period, and it was continued by every colonial agent. However, after independence, many changes have been made in the school education system, which was introduced by Colonial agents in Sri Lanka (Ruberu, 1974). Particularly, the introduction of free education from kindergarten to the university level is a considerable revolution in the Sri Lankan education (Silva, 1981; Premasiri, 1999; Sedere, 2005). Afterward, all the rulers who came to power and the governments ruled Sri Lanka have been maintaining the free education system which was introduced in the Kannangara's era. Subsequently, a central school system was also introduced during the Kannangara's period. The majority of private schools which were actively functioned in Sri Lanka were taken over by its government in 1961. Since then, the majority of schools have been administered by the central and the provincial governments in Sri Lanka.

In 1981, a significant school management reform, the 'School Cluster System' was introduced in the government school sector in Sri Lanka. Several objectives were anticipated to attain through this programme by the MoESL. However, a few years later, the school cluster system was abandoned due to various reasons (Perera, 2006; Samaranayake, 1985, p. 26). With the 13th amendment to the Constitution in Sri Lanka made in 1987, many significant changes were taken place in school education. This is a very important milestone with regard to decentralization of decision-making authority of school education to the local level. It has been taken several steps in decentralizing decision-making authority on school education, from the central level to the provincial level despite evolution of authority to local school level, through the amendment of the Constitution in Sri Lanka in 1987. Silva et al. (1993) identified several problems, which arose in relation to educational administration with the establishment of provincial councils across the 13th amendment of the Constitution. Thus, policy makers have made several steps to solve those issues, and as an alternative, the 'School Development Board' (SDB) system was introduced in the public schools throughout the country. With the establishment of the school development boards in 1993, the decentralization of school education was more consultative and participatory. The Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka (MoESL) anticipated transforming schools as autonomous organizations through the SDB concept. However, due to many reasons, the SDB system was also abolished in 1995. Although many efforts have been made by several governments to decentralize decision-making power on education management to the school level, the effectiveness of it is still questionable in Sri Lanka. However, as one of the key recommendations of the World Bank on school administration, School Based Management (SBM)

system was introduced in the government schools in Sri Lanka in 2006. However, the MoESL has decided the title of the SBM in Sri Lanka as the 'Programme for School Improvement' (PSI).

As per the report published by the National Education Commission in Sri Lanka (NECSL) in 1997, it was emphasized the importance and the way of devolution of authority and autonomy to local government schools. Moreover, the NECSL pointed out that, SBM as an effective tool in managing schools (NECSL, 1997:25). According to the recommendations made by the NECSL, the MoESL and the National Institute of Education in Sri Lanka (NIESL) furnished actions to prepare plans to implement SBM in Sri Lanka with the support of the World Bank. There was a plan to implement SBM in Sri Lanka before 2006, naming as 'School Based Management' (Kasturiarachchi, 2004; Perera, 2011). However, it was not successful, as expected by the MoESL. Thereafter, Education Sector Development Framework and Programme (ESDFP) was commenced as a major development programme for primary and secondary education by the government of Sri Lanka. The sector-wide approach has been associated with the ESDFP. The ESDFP has several objectives, PSI is one of the central elements of the ESDFP. The ESDFP II: 2012 - 2016 also concerned about the implementation of the PSI. Under the theme three of ESDFP: 2013- 2017, it has been anticipated strengthening of good governance and service delivery of education.

Initially, in 2006, the SBM was introduced as a pilot project. However, under a different title in which the 'Programme for School Improvement' (PSI). Currently, it is mandatory to implement this management system in every government school throughout the country. Education development is one of the prime objectives of this system. However, according to anecdotal evidence and personal experiences of the researcher, the performance of the students and education development of them have been disputed in various schools. However, there is a dearth of in-depth research studies in this regard. Thus, this study was carried out to investigate the existing situation on education development of the selected schools in the Colombo district, and it happened during the period from 2015 to 2016. Accordingly, the main aim of this study was to explore the real state of education development and the ways of empowerment of students at the government schools in Sri Lanka.

2. Methodology

Since this study intended to investigate the experiences of the School Development Committee (SDC) members of the government schools on education development of students of their schools, the main research question was, "how is the education development of government schools in the Colombo district? In order to address this research question, the main research aim was developed in order to investigate the experiences of SDC members on education development of their schools.

This study is qualitative nature. 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 multi-layered and complex, it is ongoing flow" (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 138). Therefore, the qualitative research approach was selected since it was most appropriate in this study because this research intended to explore life experiences of stakeholders of schools on education development of their schools.

Multiple case study approach was used in this study as the main research approach. The case study research approach has been used by qualitative and interpretive researchers for a long time in disciplines (Burns, 2000) since 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). Simons (2009) provides a definition for a case study as "an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in a real-life context" (Simons, 2009 in Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Since this study was planned to explore deeply the experiences of stakeholders in selected schools in Sri Lanka on the education development in their schools, it seemed that the Simons' definition highlights very significant features which are relevant to this study.

Questionnaires, document surveys, and interviews were employed to gather information in this study. The interview was the main data collection strategy administered to gather information from the principals, deputy principals, teaching staff and parents of schools. As this study was planned to gather in-depth information from the participants, and this was also a qualitative case study research, those instruments were more appropriate to collect data to study this research problem.

Qualitative researchers use various types of methods for data collection: "observation (participant and non-participant), interviewing, and document analysis" (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002, p. 430). The interview appears to be the most popular data collection instrument in 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 seems that interview is more appropriate in accessing people's insights, sense, and definitions of situations and constructions of reality. As this study intended to explore the experiences of the staff and the stakeholders on the SDC of schools, interviewing seemed as a suitable method for data collection because it was seeking particular experiences of stakeholders of schools on the phenomenon. The nature of interview protocol was semi structured in this study, and the information was gathered from every participant in administering said interview schedule.

Atkinson and Coffey (2004, p. 59) state that "documentary materials should be regarded as data in their own right. In this case study research, public documents were one of the data sources used. Documents were important because in the nature of the PSI has more paper work, and documents provide the formal frameworks of the PSI. The documents in this research were minutes of the SDC and SMT meetings, school plans, policy statements and documents, and PSI guidelines etc.

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. The questionnaire is an effective tool to gather straightforward and factual information

from the participants (Anderson, 1998). The information gathered from the questionnaire was used to triangulate the data in this study. Therefore, the data gathered from the questionnaire was much useful to get a better understanding of the role of the SDC in the schools where the PSI is implemented. Two kinds of participants involved in the questionnaire survey: teachers and parents. Researcher personally administered the questionnaire and collected information from the participants, and thus the response rate was high.

In this study principals, deputy principals, teaching staff and parents on the governing boards provided information on the SDC role in the schools in the Colombo district in Sri Lanka where the PSI is implemented. Participants in this study were selected purposively. Best & Kahn (2006) suggest purposive sampling permits the researcher to choose the participants who provide the richest information. The sample has comprised of the principals from five selected schools, five deputy principals, fifteen teachers and fifteen parents from the government schools in the Colombo district. Altogether 8 participants represented each school in this study. Accordingly, a total number of 40 participants participated in this research. The principals, deputy principals, teachers and parents in school governing boards had a role in implementing the SBM system in schools since 2006. They had valuable experiences as they have been implementing SBM system in their schools for more than six years.

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) suggest that “qualitative researchers analyze and make meaning from the data, starting with specific data and ending with categories and patterns” (p. 367). Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analyzing strategy that starts with the data and pursues identifiable themes and patterns (Aronson, 1994). Themes emerged within the transcribed data gathered through interviews, questionnaire, and documents survey. Those themes were organized, described and interpreted (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Radnor, 2002). Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) suggest that going over transcriptions of interview data, questionnaire data, and documents data many times, and eventually, meaningful categories will emerge and then group the data to a few key ideas. In summary, the participants in this study, principals, deputy principals, teachers and parents of the schools presented their experiences as their real-life stories, and those stories were the research data in this study. Thematic analysis is one of the most common approaches to qualitative data analysis (Bryman, 2001; Mutch, 2005), and it was the most appropriate method for analyzing qualitative data, and as this study also had qualitative data in the interview transcriptions, questionnaires, and documents. In the process of analyzing the data gathered through the interview transcriptions, questionnaires, and documents, it was able to identify various themes, and then coded them and consequently identified patterns in order to find out the similarities and differences between the cases in this study.

3. Findings and Discussion

It was revealed that the majority of parents and external community members of schools in this study do not much concern about the educational development of their children, students of the schools in this study, and also the education background of the majority of community members is also poor. Although there are parents who keen to educate their children, the majority of them are economically not much strong, however, they tend to provide their support to the schools of their children, and sometimes they participate in some events of schools where their children are studying. The background of the past pupils and the parents of students in the majority of schools obstructs effectiveness of participation in school activities. It seemed that their social background and economic background are not contributing school development. It was observed that most of them are not professionally qualified, the majority of them are not graduates and thus, they have average educational qualifications. Most of them are self-employed or engaged in primary level occupations. Therefore, a high-quality participation and a maximum contribution to the development of school cannot be expected from them. It was recognized that the management knowledge and understanding of SDC members pertaining to the PSI or SBM is not sufficient to make a big contribution to school development. Similarly, Cavanagh & Dellar (1995) had revealed that the expected outcomes of their structuring of the education system in Western Australia had not been grasped, and as a result of that, the school changes hadn't been fully occurred owing to the lack of awareness of stakeholders on SBM policies. It seemed that the participation of parents at school meetings is also not satisfactory in these schools, and they still do not have a sense of ownership of their school.

Guzman (2003) and Gertler et al. (2007) have identified that the SBM system in the Philippines has intended to share educational responsibilities with relevant stakeholders such as local government units, parent-teacher associations, and communities in schools. They have an aim to build local level capacity and to create accountability mechanisms for site-based agents and to improve the transparency of decisions by decentralizing authority.

One of the tendencies which were noticed in this study is that the parents of then on-Sinhala speaking community are enthusiastic to admit their children to Sinhala medium schools. The parents of those students do not have high-level expectations on the education of their children. It was discovered that some parents of schools in this study employ their children in their businesses as their helpers after school time. However, as West-Burnham (2003) points out, the learning also takes place through informal social and cultural interactions with the parents and community. This study revealed that teachers and schools face many difficulties in improving the performance of students. It was observed that the majority of schools display poor results at the national examinations for many years.

As the majority of participants mentioned, teachers face difficulties in improving the performance of their students. The principal of school A (PA) explained the challenges that they face in enhancing education development in his school as: “*we face problems in increasing performance and examination results of students at the national examinations. Last year, we demonstrated the poorest results at the G.C.E (O/L) examination. The main reason is that the majority of students in this school are from non-Sinhala speaking families, and they study in Sinhala medium, their Sinhala language skills are very poor. Hence, they cannot perform very well at examinations*”(PA).

The findings of Bandur (2012) on SBM system in Indonesia do not support the findings of this study, where the SBM in Indonesia is significantly effective in improving student achievements. In contrast, the findings of Khattri, Ling, and Jha (2012) are not similar

when compared with the findings of this study. As they found, the SBM programme in the Philippines schools shows that the average student performance in the national tests has been improved, and the level of improvement was higher in schools which had involved in SBM programme, compared with the schools that had not been received the intervention or received it later.

It was revealed that every school in this study has started educational development programmes to increase, mainly, the performance of students in the national examinations. Required funds and financial assistance, for those activities, are provided by parents of students, well-wishers and additionally, they use quality inputs money received from the government fund allocations. It was observed that most school generally conduct extra classes for the students, and some of the schools provide supplementary educational materials to their students. It seemed that the intention and enthusiasm of parents of students of the majority of schools on the education of their children are not adequate. Although schools conduct programmes in order to make aware the parents of students on the importance of education and their role in educating their children, the participation appears to have been very poor. Since these schools do not have a rich crowd of parents and past pupils, the contribution of them in generating funds for education development is relatively poor. It appears that the education development of schools in this study is diverse from school to school. Some schools make several efforts to develop education level of their students, and consequently, it was observed that they have achieved some of their expected targets on education development of students.

It was revealed that, usually, schools generate funds for conducting education development activities, and community members and well-wishers also provide their support for these activities. The schools where the examination results of students are satisfied to have a big demand from the students. Similarly, the findings of Thida and Joy (2012) demonstrated that there is a positive relationship between SBM and the access to education, environment and infrastructure and instructional materials among SBM participating schools in Cambodia. Moreover, access to education has been significantly expanded since the implementation of SBM in Cambodia. The enrolment rate in the SBM participation schools of Cambodia has considerably progressed slightly over ninety per cent.

Another important finding is that the students in the schools of this study face difficulties in participating outdoor sports activities since they do not have playgrounds, instructors, and required essential facilities. There are students who have skills to perform in co-curricular activities, but no instructors for guiding them. The study of Fakaia (2005) found that the limited resources had a negative effect on the extracurricular activities and it was seen as contributing to the lack of preparation of students for lives.

The findings in this study reveal that, in order to enhance the results of the students, various activities have been implemented by schools. It appeared that most of the parents endeavour to admit their children to some of these schools, because of the good examination results of the students. It was found that most of the stakeholders do not have a better scientific understanding of school education. This is almost similar to Jatta's (2009) findings that, learning in developing countries is predominantly about memorizing facts and figures from an overloaded curriculum with outdated content.

The findings indicated that the domestic environment of most students does not encourage them for the development of their education. That is a big issue for schools to increase students' performance. Teachers are supposed to teach students well and to prepare them to face national level examinations. It was observed that well-prepared students obtain good results at the examinations. Similarly, Bender and Heystek (2003, p. 150) have revealed that stakeholders' engagement and participation in school development appear to contribute to students' success. Therefore, Sergiovanni (2001) suggests that teachers, students, parents, and community need to collaboratively and interactively engage in all the aspects of student learning through shared vision, ideas, values and beliefs in creating bonds of fellowship.

The Deputy Principal of school A (DPA) stated about the lifestyle of the community members, and its relationship with the education development of students in his school as: *"one main problem that we face in developing the performance of students is, lack of teachers in teaching some subjects at junior secondary level classes. ...Most of the teachers are new to this school, and there are some cultural gaps between teachers and students. The lifestyle, behaviour and the customs and traditions of people in this area are very different. The lifestyle of these students is also different, thinking the style of the parents is not up to a standard, and it is not even at an average level(DPA).*

The findings show that various education development programmes have been conducted by schools for the performance development and co-curricular development of students. However, parents have to bear a part of the expenses of those activities. Schools have to make big efforts to obtain resources from the government for those activities. Land (2002) indicates supporting evidence to the findings of this study, in which, the parental and community input contributes to students' achievement, attitude, and aspirations.

This study found that some students in some schools cannot write or read though they are in grade eleven classes, sometimes, they have been neglected by their teachers, and nevertheless some teachers do not perform their duty in proper manner, and it seemed that there are no better mechanisms to minimize those circumstances in schools. On the other hand, it appeared that the education officers always concern about the examination results of students, as stated by the staff of school, they do not care about the facilities available in the school or the facilities provided by the education authorities to schools, and, they do not care about the difficulties that schools face in teaching students who come from very difficult areas. Very less number of students is committed to education. Hence, the performance of the students at the national examinations are very poor in the majority of schools, and as a result of that, some teachers are frustrated. Malaklolu and Shamsudin (2011, pp. 1491,1492) indicated that producing excellent students is not an easy task unless the school has the freedom to choose or select students of good standing. If students of mixed abilities are enrolled in the school, it may place heavy demands on the teachers to help weaker students excel in academic and at the same time assisting good students to become excellent in academics and in the selected niche areas. As commented by Grauwe (2004), without a supportive central government and adequate accountability mechanisms in place, SBM runs the risk of system disintegration and disparities. Evidence from developed countries shows that it takes time for SBM reforms to start enabling changes at the school level and to bring about any significant changes in student achievements (Bruns, Filmer and Patrinos 2011).

In particular, it was revealed that the quality of teaching learning and the performance of students have also improved in some schools in this study. This is similar to the findings of Khattri et al. (2012) which is, the SBM program in the Philippines shows that school-averaged student performance on national tests had been improved. It seemed that many opportunities have been provided stakeholders to be involved in school management process in the schools in this study. It was revealed that the responsibility and accountability of stakeholders have been improved, customer care has also been improved, and staff members seem to obtain administrative experiences in involving management tasks of school. Some SDC members value the opportunities that are available for the stakeholders in providing their ideas and suggestions for education development.

The parents of students do not have high-level expectations in educating their children. This study revealed that teachers and schools face many difficulties in improving the performance of students. Every school has implemented education development programmes to increase the performance of students at national examinations. Funds are provided by parents of students, well-wishers, and additionally, they use quality inputs money for the education development activities. However, these schools do not have a rich crowd of parents and past pupils. The majority of schools display poor results at the national examinations. The schools, where there are good examination results, have a big demand. The majority of students of schools in this study do not participate extracurricular activities due to lack of sufficient facilities.

The majority of schools have not identified the importance of SBTD and its relationship with education development of the school, however, some schools have taken very constructive steps for the development of their teachers, and but, they also face many challenges in implementing those activities. Some stakeholders do not have a better understanding of the relationship between teacher development, education development and performance development of the students of their school.

One past pupil explained his views on the responsibility of staff development as: *“we do not know much about the SBTD, I think teacher training is the duty of higher education authorities. We do not have resources for that. Government always puts all the responsibilities to schools, for instance collecting funds from outside community members for school development and the SBTD, so, if they try to get all done by schools, they will not have any responsibility for school education, and as a result, staff members of schools and stakeholders may be discouraged” (SAPP2).*

The deputy principal of school C (**DPC**) indicated about the strategies used them for the training of their teachers at their school level as: *“teacher training is being carried out by our school properly. We organize activities for staff development and teacher training. Every Wednesday we conduct a teacher supervision session. We select a class and observe a teacher when she is teaching, in order to identify training and developmental needs. Then, we discuss with the teacher and find ways to minimize those weaknesses. We guide them and also direct them to think positively and encourage them to contribute school development and to perform their role very effectively” (DPC).*

The majority of schools display poor results at the national examinations. However, according to MoESL (1998), the examination result is not the only objective of education development of a school. The government does not provide adequate facilities and resources to schools. These findings give a signal to policymakers to amend, revise or to reform the existing teaching-learning process, evaluation mechanisms and also curriculum system in the school sector, to create global citizens with sufficient skills, knowledge, attitudes, and competencies. Therefore, MoESL has a big responsibility to take immediate actions to change the existing situation with the next reform of school management. Furthermore, the principal of school C (**PC**) stated the activities which are carried out for education development of students in her school as: *“although we organize additional classes for the students, who are going to sit for the national examinations, I am not very happy about their participation (PC).*

4. Implications

Teachers of school in this study have an excessive response to improve the performance of students. The responsibility and accountability of internal staff members on education development of students have been increased with the SBM project (MoESL, 2014). However, it was revealed that the majority of teachers are not directly involved in education development decision-making at the school level.

As indicated by the MoESL (2013) there are specific objectives to be achieved in implementing SBM. It is expected to: provide a quality education for every student; identify education needs of the students; be sensitive to the expectations of the students, and to improve achievement level of students. However, it was revealed that the majority of parents of the students in the schools do not seem to have a real sense of those objectives. It was found that most of the stakeholders do not have a better scientific understanding of school education.

It was revealed that every school has conducted educational development programmes to increase, mainly, the performance of students in the national examinations. However, still, the majority of schools have not achieved their targets. The schools where the examination results are excellent have a big demand from the students.

Another important finding is that the students in the schools in this study face difficulties in participating outdoor sports activities since schools do not have playgrounds, instructors, and facilities. There are students who have skills to perform in co-curricular activities, but no instructors for guiding them.

Teachers are supposed to increase the education performance of the students and prepare them to face national examinations. It was observed that well-prepared students obtain good results at the examinations. It was revealed that the domestic environment of the majority of students does not encourage their education. That can be identified as a big issue to increase the performance of students of schools.

The findings show that several programmes have been conducted by schools in order to performance development of students and also to the co-curricular development of the students. However, it was revealed that the parents had to bear a big part of the expenses of those activities. Schools have made many efforts to obtain required resources from the government for organizing those activities.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Teachers have a big responsibility to enhance the performance of students. The responsibility and accountability of internal staff members of schools have been increased with the SBM. However, teachers are not directly involved in most of the activities of this programme. The parents of students do not have high-level expectations in educating their children. This study revealed that teachers and schools face many difficulties in improving the performance of students. Every school has implemented education development programmes to increase the performance of the students in the national examinations. Funds are provided by parents of students, well-wishers and additionally, they use quality inputs money which has been provided by the government to the schools for education development activities. However, these schools do not have a rich crowd of parents and past pupils. The majority of schools display poor results at the national examinations. The schools, where there are good examination results, have a big demand. The students of schools in this study face difficulties in participating extracurricular activities since schools do not have sufficient facilities.

The majority of schools display poor results at the national examinations. However, according to MoESL, the examination result is not the only objective of education development of a school. The government does not provide adequate facilities and resources to schools. These findings give a signal to policymakers to amend, revise or to reform the existing teaching-learning process, evaluation mechanisms and also curriculum system in the school sector, to create global citizens with sufficient skills, knowledge, attitudes and competencies. Therefore, MoESL has a responsibility to take immediate actions to change the existing situation with the next reform of school management.

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