

How to Make Decisions with the Programme of School Improvement System in Sri Lanka: Case Studies from Colombo District Schools

Chandana Kasturi Arachchi

Department of Social Science Education, Faculty of Education

Background of the Study

This study focuses on School Based Management (SBM) which is termed Programme of School Improvement (PSI) in Sri Lanka. This study expects to investigate the decision making process of the PSI implemented schools. Caldwell (2005) defines SBM as a “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). According to the Ministry of Education (2005, 2008), key characteristics of the PSI are the delegation of power, authority, and responsibility at the school level by the education authority seeking accountability for school decisions. Government schools in Sri Lanka have been implementing the PSI system for more than six years. The Ministry of Education (2008) points out that the decision making process in the schools in Sri Lanka has considerably changed since the PSI implementation. Conversely, many research studies have not been carried out by educational researchers in Sri Lanka on this theme. This paper expects to explore the nature of the decision making process with the new change in the PSI implemented schools in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the main research question focused in this study is “what is the existing nature of the decision making in the PSI implemented schools in Sri Lanka?”

Objectives

1. Examine the formulation and implementation of decision making boards in the PSI implemented schools.
2. Study the involvement of the community members in the decision making process in the PSI implemented schools.
3. Identify constraints and challenges faced by the decision makers in the PSI implemented schools.

Methodology

Three multiple case studies were used among PSI implemented schools in the Colombo district to address the main research question in this study. Yin (2009) states that case study 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.

Primarily, document analysis and semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from research participants in this study. Further, data were gathered through informal discussions and informal observations. Purposive sampling method was used to select the participants in this study. The sample consisted of three principals, three deputy principals, six teachers, six past pupils and six parents from the School Development Committees (SDC). Data was analyzed using thematic analysis.

Outcomes

According to the Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka (2008), each and every government school is anticipated to form a SDC to make school decisions. The school decision making process should be converted in to a participatory mode and SDC members must be selected in a democratic way (Ministry of Education, 2005, 2008). However, it seems that the selection process of SDC members is unofficially controlled by the principal, and sometimes by the other top level managers of the schools, with the intention of selecting knowledgeable and suitable members for the SDC. The majority of the respondents' argument is that the selection process of SDC members is influenced by the principals. Teacher and parent participants claim that *"most of the outside members of the SDC are nominated by the principal, and our duty in the SDC is to approve his/her agendas"*. One principal authenticates the above statement: *"the principal is responsible for all the things happening in the school. Therefore the principal must have power to select members for the SDC"*. According to the above statements it is evident that the principals informally use his/ her power in selecting members for the SDC. One deputy principal explicates the reasons for the interference of principal or other school managers in selecting members for SDC: *"every outside community members does not have adequate knowledge on the concept of PSI, and even school management. Hence, we must select suitable members for the SDC, otherwise selection would be ineffective"*. The above statement validates furthermore the real situation in the current selection process of SDC members. According to the majority of parents and past pupils, only a half or less of the outside SDC members are invited to attend the SDC regular meetings. In addition, only a limited number of outside SDC members actually participate in the SDC meetings, and most of the time, only the same members participate in the SDC meetings. The majority of principals indicate the lack of experiences of the SDC members in school management and lack of awareness and training on the PSI as main barriers in current school decision making. Other research participants point out the poor leadership skills of the principals as a big challenge in decision making.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Findings show that the selection process of SDC members is informally controlled by the principal and other top level school managers. It is clear that a participatory decision making process is not currently being practiced in the PSI schools. Most school decisions are made by the principal, and they directly influence the school decisions. Majority of the members in the SDCs have not been empowered for the participation in school decisions. Most of the community members do not have adequate knowledge on the concept of PSI and school management procedures. Therefore, it appears that each of the three schools do not have genuine community participation in school decisions. It is evident that the outside community members of the PSI implemented schools are still underprivileged in school decisions. These research findings focus on the need to maintain at least a minimum standard of PSI implementation. For that, it is vital to make the SDC and SMT members aware of the PSI concept. Besides, it is required to establish a better monitoring mechanism or governing body to supervise PSI implemented schools and to guide SDC members.

Keywords: decision making, programme of school improvement, school based management, community participation

References

Bryman, A. (2001). *Social research methods*: CSIRO.

- Caldwell, B. J. (2005). School-based management. *Education Policy Series. The International Institute for Educational Planning and The International Academy of Education, Paris and Brussels.*
- Cheng, Y. C. (1993). The theory and characteristics of school-based management. *International Journal of Educational Management, 7*(6).
- Crabtree, B. F., Miller, W., & Swenson, M. M. (1995). Doing qualitative research. *Nursing Research, 44*(4), 254.
- Cranston, N. (2011). School-based management, leaders and leadership: change and challenges for principals. *International Studies in Educational Administration, 30*(1), 2-12.
- Gamage, D. T. (2009). *School Based Management is an Alternative Path Towards the Creation of Better Quality Schools: Centre for Education Professional Competencies Development.*
- Ministry of Education. (2005). *The programme of school improvement, 2006.* Ministry of Education, Battaramulla, Sri Lanka.
- Ministry of Education. (2008). *The programme of school improvement. (2008/35).* Ministry of education, Battaramulla, Sri Lanka.
- Mutch, C. (2005). *Doing educational research: A practitioner's guide to getting started:* NZCER Press.
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods (Vol. 5):* Sage publications, INC.
- Zajda, J., & Gamage, D. T. (2009). *Decentralisation, school-based management, and quality (Vol. 8):* Springer Verlag.

