# Principal Role in the Schools where the Programme of School Improvement (PSI) is being: A case study with reference to the Gampaha district schools

C.K. Arachchi

Department of Social Science Education, Faculty of Education, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

chaou05@yahoo.com

**Abstract:** This study designed to investigate the nature of the role of the principals in the Gampaha district schools where the Programme of School Improvement (PSI) is being implemented in Sri Lanka. This study used qualitative case study approach to study the research problem. Data gathered from the principals, Deputy Principals and teachers in the schools located in the Gampaha district. Data gathered from the participants administering semi structured interviews. The study reports the series of interviews with the principals, the deputy principals and the teachers with regard to principal's roles in several areas namely; school based teacher development, human resource management, decision making, financial management, school governing boards, the participatory management and major challenges of the principal's role. 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 no massive changes in the role of school principals as a result of the introduction of the Programme of School Improvement (PSI). However, the study indicates that the workload of the school principals following the introduction of the PSI has increased. In addition, the role of the school principal has also increased in association with the emerging role in working with the school development committee, and in relation to the decision-making and the human resources management. At present, the decision making process in the PSI implemented schools is more transparent than earlier. However, selection process of members for the school development committees is not very much democratic. It is recommended that to establish a specific supervisory body for monitoring the schools where the PSI is being implemented, and an effective PSI awareness programme is essential to get maximum benefits of the PSI system in Sri Lanka.

**Keywords**: Participatory management, Principal's role, School-based management, School governing boards, School leadership

## I. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Many researches 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 [4] 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" [4]. The

Sri Lankan version of School Based management introduced in 2006 for the government schools, 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 are expected to be achieved. They are: to provide quality education to students, be sensitive to the aspirations of the school community, increase transparency of school activities through creation of opportunities, improved flexibility of internal activities of the school, 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 schools. SDC, SMT and relevant stakeholders are involved in preparing the school development plan. Resource mobilization and fund racing activities are applied to achieve set mission and objectives of the school. Very close relationship with the community is expected to be established by the internal community of the school in this programme. Other very important feature of this programme is for development of the individual potentials of the students of the school accordingly; a very essential outcome is school based staff development programmes. SDC has authority to organize and conduct programmes to develop their staff in the school or outside the school.

## 1.2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Principal is the chair person in the new decision making structure (SDC, SMT) in the PSI school, and he/she has new roles to be performed. In order to get maximum benefits of the PSI management system, principal has to lead the school effectively. Even in this management system principal can be identified as the key team member in the school. Wohlstetter and Briggs [10] 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. According to the above statement provided in [10], it is understood that the principal is performing a key multi role in the SBM/PSI schools. Spilman [8] 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". 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 schools. Therefore, it was very imperative to investigate the principal role in the PSI schools in Sri Lanka. Thus this study carried out to get better understanding about role of the principal in the PSI schools in the Gampaha district.

## 1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

The main research questions of this study were: 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 purpose/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 schools. Another

purpose was to discover the components of the job profile of the Gampaha district school principals working under the PSI with shared governance. As final objective, it was intended to identify the challenges faced by the principals in which is being implemented the PSI.

## II. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

### 2.1. Introduction

With reference to the Gampaha district schools in Sri Lanka, the researcher used a qualitative research method, and a case study approach to study the research problem. Multiple case study approach was employed to understand the real situation in implementation of the PSI among the selected schools in this study. Semi structured interviews was used to gather data from the principals, deputy principal and teachers in the schools where the PSI is being implemented.

### 2.2. Qualitative research

Qualitative research uses a variety of interpretive research methodologies that seek to investigate the quality of relationships and experiences. 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" [6]. Therefore the qualitative research approach was most appropriate in this study, because this research also aimed to investigate the perceptions of the members of the staff on principal's role in the PSI schools in relation to the implementation of the programme of school improvement in Sri Lanka.

### 2.3. Case study

The case study research approach has being used by qualitative and interpretive researchers for a long time in disciplines 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 [11] and it provides the researcher with a holistic understanding of a problem, issue, or phenomenon with its social context [5]. Since this study intended to explore deeply the perspectives of staff members on the role of the principals in their schools case study research approach was more appropriate

*Interviewing*: Qualitative researches use various methods for data collection: "observation (participant and non participant), interviewing, and document analysis" [2]. 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 [7]. Various types of interviews are used in qualitative research. These are: semi structured, informal, and retrospective. Interpretive researchers believe and tend to prefer semi structured and so called open or unstructured interview [9]. As this study planed to explore the perceptions of principals, deputy principals and teachers of the PSI schools on the role of the principal interviewing was more appropriate for data collection. Interviews were very useful for gathering direct and richest information from the participants. In addition interviewer had many opportunities to get more clarifications when interview the participants.

*Selection of the Participant*: The participants in this study were the principals, the deputy principals and the teaching staff on the governing boards who have experiences of the implementation of the PSI system in Sri Lanka. Participants in this study were selected using a purposive sampling method. Best and Kahn [3] suggest that 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

All together five principals, five deputy principals and ten teachers participated in this study from five government schools in the Gampaha district as this is a case study research.

2.4. Data Analysing

Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analyzing strategy that starts in the data, and pursues identifiable themes and patterns [1]. 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 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.

III. FINDINGS

*School based teacher development*: It seems that the most of the PSI schools have not tended to conduct school based teacher development activities in the school site. Majority of the principals' perception is that the lack of funds provided by the higher authority is not sufficient for the teacher training and development. According to the financial rules and regulations, outside resource persons can't be paid reasonable amount of money, therefore suitable resource persons are not be participated in the teacher development programmes. 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. However due to many reasons it is not being happened effectively in the PSI schools.

*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 the teachers 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 decision 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 activities and decisions on human resource management in the school.

*Decision making, school governing boards and participation*: According to the guidance given by the Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka, the PSI schools are supposed to form new management boards, School Development Committee (SDC) and School Management Team (SMT). 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 the members for the SDCs and SMTs is not so democratic in most of the PSI schools and the community of the schools lack knowledge of the selection process of the members for the SDCs and SMTs. According to the responses of the majority of teachers of SDCs; principals of the schools influence to select members for the SDCs. Thus, it seems that there is no democratic and genuine participatory decision making process in the PSI 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 in the school development in the PSI schools. It seems that the SDCs of majority of the PSI schools are not functioned independently since the principals do not make efforts to make them more democratic. According to the information given by the participant, it seems that the principals of the PSI schools do not encourage outside community members to participate in school decisions.

*Financial management*: A main finding of this research is that the contribution of financial resources by the stakeholders have not changed significantly as a consequence of the introduction of the PSI policy by the government of Sri Lanka in 2006. Stakeholders do not provide financial support autonomously. However, principal and the SDC members make efforts to generate funds for the 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 principal has a new role in the PSI school to find additional fund raising activities. 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 the principals in the PSI school:* According to the responses made by the majority of principals and teachers, schools face challenges finding resources for the 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. There is no adequate self encouragement of the community members for the participation in the school developmental activities. Since most of the community members are not financially strengthen, school has to find new ways for finding resources for the school development. It seems that the majority of community members are not having very good understanding about the concept of the PSI or SBM. However, some members of the SDCs have not been empowered to participate in the school development. Although there should be a shared responsibility when SDC is functioned, the principal holds the final responsibility of each and every activity in the school.

## IV. 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 schools. However, SDCs and the principals make much effort to finding financial resources for the school development. Community participation is not very much supportive in the PSI schools. Awareness of stakeholders on the concept of the PSI/SBM is not adequate. Therefore the community members should be made aware on the PSI/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 schools and the principals must 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 implement the PSI to achieve outcomes as expected level.

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