

A CASE STUDY: PARENTAL PARTICIPATION IN THE PROGRAMME OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT (PSI) IMPLEMENTING SCHOOLS IN SRI LANKA

Chandana Kasturi Arachchi

*Department of Social Science Education, Faculty of Education
University of Colombo*

S.Damayanthi Edirisinghe

Department of Commerce and Financial Management

Faculty of Commerce and Management Studies

University of Kelaniya

INTRODUCTION

The policy makers of the Programme of School Improvement (PSI) in Sri Lanka stress deeper and stronger community participation in school management. The Sri Lankan School Based Management (SBM) programme is named as the Programme of School Improvement (PSI), and presently it is being implemented in every government schools. This study aimed to investigate the practice of parental participation in the PSI implementing schools in Sri Lanka. With the implementation of the PSI, two new decision making boards were introduced to the government schools. Those decision making boards are named as School Development Committee (SDC) and School Management Team (SMT). Those decision making boards are comprised of parents of students and various stakeholders of the school. Community involvement in school management is indicated as a key element in the PSI policy. Therefore parental participation in the school management was examined in this research to get a better understanding. The location of the research study was Colombo district in Sri Lanka, and this study critically analysed the nature of the parental participation in the PSI schools in Sri Lanka. Parental participation in school decisions and school management, financial contribution made by parents to school, attendance for the meetings and inputs provided by parents at the meetings were especially explored. This study is important because since 2006, decision making power and authority in school education have been transferred to the schools through the PSI (Ministry of Education, 2008). So far, no many qualitative researches have been undertaken in Sri Lanka on the parental participation in the PSI implementing schools. Especially researchers have not paid their attention to explore perspectives and experiences of staff and stakeholders in the schools where the PSI is being implemented. The findings of this research study may therefore useful to get a better understanding of the parental participation in the PSI implementing schools in Sri Lanka. And also, the findings may be useful for the policy makers in making future policy decisions on the Programme of School Improvement in Sri Lanka.

METHODOLOGY

In order to identify and examine the parental participation in the PSI implementing schools this research used qualitative inquiry. 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 designed to explore experiences and perceptions of stakeholders of the PSI implementing schools in relation to the parental participation in Sri Lanka. In particular, it was explored the experiences and perceptions of school principals, staff members and parents in relation to the participation of parents in the PSI implementing national schools in Sri Lanka. With specific reference to the Colombo

district schools in Sri Lanka, the researcher used a case study approach. Qualitative researchers use various methods for data collection: “observation (participant and non participant), interviewing, and document analysis” (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002, p. 430). In this study two data collection methods were employed: document analysis and semi structured interviews. Sample was selected purposively, and it is included three schools. Three principals, nine teachers and eighteen parents participated in this study providing information. The main research objectives of this study were to identify the nature of school-parent relationship of the PSI implementing schools, to realize the understandings of parents about the PSI system in Sri Lanka and to explore the nature of parental participation in school decisions. Thematic analysis is one of the most common approaches of qualitative data analysis (Bryman, 2001; Mutch, 2005) and it is the most appropriate method for analysing qualitative data. Therefore, data was analysed using thematic analytical method.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study found that the characteristics and the extent of parents’ participation in school management has changed and increased significantly as a result of the PSI implementation initiated in 2006. However, prior to the PSI implementation, parents actively participated in terms of supplying resources and participated in school meetings. However parents had limited access to financial information, and also had limited engagement with school budgeting and school planning. This study also revealed that in the Sri Lankan context, the SBM, as institutional channels for community involvement in education provided by the PSI policy are not effective in terms of representing and engaging parents in school management as expected by the Ministry of Education.

Parental participation for school decisions

Majority of parents indicate that they do not have reasonable avenues to engage in decision making in school, and moreover they say that the principals and the staff of the school still play key decision making roles in the school. More than fifty percent of teachers also state about the less avenues given for them in engaging school decisions by the top management of school. However, the idea of the principals is different than the other respondents in this regard. Majority of principals (more than 70%) indicate that lack knowledge of teachers on school management and negative attitudes of them as big barriers of school management.

Nature of Parental participation in school

The teachers state that the parents expect to participate in school management providing resources and ideas about school functions. It seems that the parents of schools participate for most of the non managerial activities in school. Although the PSI recommends practicing team work and participatory management, most principals of the PSI implementing schools still play a very dominant role in school management. According to the instruction given by the Ministry of Education, members of the decision making boards, SDC and SMT should be selected democratically in the PSI schools. However, in this study it was revealed that the members of the SDC and SMT in most schools have been selected by the respective principals. Majority of the parents do not have very good understanding of the PSI system. Although most parents of SDC have some knowledge about the obligation of the PSI implementation in local schools they still do not have thorough knowledge about the concept of PSI and the principles of SBM. Parents do not have better understanding about the rules, regulations and the recommendations made by the Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka for the implementation of the PSI in the schools. Therefore, it seems that the parents blindly participate in the school activities as SDC members in the PSI implementing schools. Therefore, it is doubtful that the schools make effort to maximize parents’ contribution for school development. The teacher interviews demonstrated similar perceptions. Teachers on the whole felt that parental participation had changed slightly since the schools had implemented the PSI.

Funds from the parents

Although PSI emphasizes to generate funds through community members it appears that the Ministry of Education prohibited schools for collecting money from community members. Therefore principals do not make much effort to generate funds from the community. As a consequence of community contributions being banned, the government allocated additional funds for schools through the PSI.

Schools were provided money within the range from Rs. 5,000 to Rs. 300,000 according to the proposal forwarded by the schools to the higher authority of education. If school managers still consider the money is not enough, then they have to organize fund raising activities to earn money at school level. Schools are allowed to generate funds by circulars issued for PSI implementation. But on the other hand school are banned to collect money from the parents of students other than the school facility fee.

Attendance for the meetings

The SDC members: principals and teachers indicated that most of the time, only a half or less number of parents attend the meetings of the school, and most of the occasions same people attend the meetings. This fact indicates that only a limited number of parents actually attend the annual meetings, other meetings and school activities. For the SDC meeting, everything is set up by the principal prior to the meeting. Parents are invited merely in order to get their agreement, and the SDC is only a formality. All of the decisions are still in the hand of the principal. Even sometimes the teacher's voices are never considered by the principal.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the evidence above, this research concluded that in the context of the Sri Lankan school education system, PSI policy implementation has not necessarily enhanced parent participation in school management. In this respect, PSI is not the only possible answer for enhancing and empowering parental participation in school education. Although parents do not have better understanding about the concept of PSI or SBM it is required to organize effective PSI awareness programme for enhancing parents' involvement in school management. Especially SDC and SMT members should be empowered to make effective decisions in schools. Principals should be made aware to make necessary steps to select members for the governing boards, SDC and SMT according to the guidance given by the Ministry of Education. In addition, when make school decisions, members of the governing boards must be given autonomy to make impartial decisions, and decisions should stress the responsibility and accountability of decision makers. Parental awareness programmes should be developed to obtain maximum contribution of parents and stakeholders for school development.

Key words-

Parent participation, Programme of School Improvement, School governing boards, School Based Management

REFERENCES

- Antunes, P., Santos, R., & Videira, N. (2006). Participatory decision making for sustainable development--the use of mediated modelling techniques. *Land Use Policy*, 23(1), 44-52.
- Ashmos, D. P., Duchon, D., & McDaniel Jr, R. R. (2007). Participation in Strategic Decision Making: The Role of Organizational Predisposition and Issue Interpretation*. *Decision Sciences*, 29(1), 25-51.
- Bauer, S. C., & Bogotch, I. E. (2006). Modeling site-based decision making. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 44(5), 446-470.
- Ching, A. U. Y., & Loretta, P. D. Global Perspectives on School-Based Management (SBM) and Implications.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education*. London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis group.
- Cook, T. D. (2007). School-Based Management in the United States. *Background paper prepared for the programmatic study on school-based management, World Bank, Washington, DC*.

Gamage, D. (2005). School-based management leads to shared responsibility and quality in education. *Curriculum and Teaching*, 20(1), 61-77.

Hugh Watson. (2004). Report on evaluation of school based management. Canberra: Hugh Watson Consulting

Irvin, R. A., & Stansbury, J. (2004). Citizen participation in decision making: Is it worth the effort? *Public Administration Review*, 64(1), 55-65.

Kasturi Arachchi, C. W. (2011). *Educational Management* (1 ed.). Sri Lanka: P & P Associates.

Lonsdale, M. (2009). School-community partnership : a capital idea for school improvement. *Teacher*(203), 54-57.

Ministry of Education, S. L. (2008). *Circular: Programme of school improvement*. Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka.

Nir, A. E., & Ami, T. B. (2005). School-parents relationship in the era of school-based management: harmony or conflict? *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 4(1), 55-72.

Punch, K. F. (2009). *Introduction to research methods in education*. Los Angeles, USA: Sage.

Raihani. (2007). Education reforms in Indonesia in the twenty-first century. *International Education Journal*, 8(1), 172-183.

Somech, A. (2010). Participative Decision Making in Schools: A Mediating-Moderating Analytical Framework for Understanding School and Teacher Outcomes. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 46(2), 174.

Correspondences should be addressed to Chandana Kasturi Arachchi Dept. of Social Science Education, Faculty of Education, University of Colombo. (Email: chaou05@yahoo.com)

or

S.Damayanthi Edirisinghe, Dept. of Commerce and Financial Management, Faculty of Commerce and Management Studies, University of Kelaniya (Email: swarnadammi@gmail.com)