



The application of governing boards as a panacea for the problems of schools: Special reference to Sri Lankan schools

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Abstract

In 2006, the Ministry of Education introduced the School Development Committee system into the government schools in Sri Lanka. The main purpose of this system is to enhance the participation of stakeholders in school management process and to introduce participatory management culture into the school system in Sri Lanka. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the implementation, effectiveness and the role of School Development Committee in the Gampaha district schools in Sri Lanka. This study used a qualitative, multiple case study approach to study the research problem with special reference to the Gampaha district schools. The purposive sampling technique used to select the participants in this study, and data analyzed using thematic data analyzing technique. It was revealed that most principals influence the selection of SDC members, and the selection of members for the SDC is not materialized democratically and also according to the MoESL guidelines. However, some schools are enthusiastic to cultivate a participatory management culture in their schools through their SDCs. The SDC members have chances to be involved in the decision-making process and to contribute their ideas in the SDC meeting. The SDC members do not have better knowledge and understanding of school management policies. The background of the parents of the students does not sufficiently accommodate the development of schools. The SDC members do not show a self-encouragement and also a self-interest to regularly participate in SDC meetings. It is vital to encourage all school governing board members to attend regular workshops on school management, and emphasize the responsibility of education authorities organizing such training and awareness programmes.

Keywords: school governing boards, school development committee, school management board, school-based management, participatory management

Introduction

The Sri Lankan government decentralized their power and authority to the provincial levels with the 13th amendment of their constitution. However, there was a criticism in which that a real decentralization of education was not happened with that amendment. And later on, the Ministry of Education made steps for delegating power, responsibility and authority which they have on school affairs to local school level in 2006. With that reform the individual schools are supposed to established a School Development Committee in making participatory decisions with the vast participation of its stakeholders. That reform is called as the implementation of the Programme for School Improvement (PSI), the Sri Lankan version of School-Based Management (SBM). As a result of that the public schools have adapted to group decision making culture or participatory decision-making style. According to the guidelines of the Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka (MoESL) (MoESL, 2013) ^[12] schools have to make decisions responsive to the needs of the stakeholders of school. All the schools have formed School Development Committee (SDC), School Management Committee (SMC), and some other subcommittees. With the implementation of this new school management model, doors of the schools have to be opened for stakeholders in participating school management, decision making and several school events (MoESL, 2013) ^[12]. According to the guidelines of the MoESL, participatory and democratic decisions are encouraged by this management model, and therefore, internal management

culture has to be changed (MoESL, 2005). Since this change bureaucratic and traditional management culture which was existed in the schools earlier, has been overlooked, the MoESL permits school level decision-makers to adopt education policies to local realities and to decide the appropriate mix of inputs and efficient use of available resources in the schools (Aturupane *et al.*, 2013; Kasturiarachchi, 2014; Kasturiarachchi & Perera, 2014; MoESL, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2014, 2018) ^[1, 10, 12, 13].

A participatory decision-making culture

It can be seen that a participatory decision-making culture in schools, across many countries. Those schools have formed school governing boards in different titles. Every school in Cambodia has a governing board to make key decisions of schools, name as 'School Support Committee' comprising of a representative of local authorities at village or community level or head of monk; principal of the particular school; one community representative who has a very good reputation in the society and being charismatic; one from parent association; one accountant; one treasurer and one secretary. The functions and roles of School Support Committee include: enhancing enrolment of children through education campaign and encouragement of parents; taking part in revenue mobilization and budget through school development plan; improving school infrastructure; involving in school construction and repairing physical assets by fundraising and obtaining support of the parents; preventing irregularities inside and outside of the school;

participating in school planning, implementation and monitoring student learning through community parent meetings (Thida & Joy, 2012) ^[15].

Thida and Joy (2012) ^[15] recommend to, implement more participative decision-making approach at the school level since the participation of teachers and School Support Committee members in school management and decision making remains low in Cambodian schools. By the way, the principals have a responsibility to make sure that the teachers and School Support Committee are engaged in school management since they have devolved power to the committee members and the teachers in the school (Thida & Joy, 2012, p. 1039) ^[15].

Ayeni and Ibukun (2013) ^[2] comment about the significance of school governing boards in the schools as: “effective SBM committee is the engine room for school and community partnership and vital for school effectiveness and students’ success. Effective school management committee is a building block for school and community partnership in school governance. This process will enable the key stakeholders in education to receive first-hand information on the quality and quantity of resource inputs; strengths and weaknesses inherent in teachers’ instructional task performance and the leadership behaviour of principals; staff and students welfare; and stimulate government and other stakeholders to see the need for adequate provision of learning facilities and capacity building of principals and teachers in order to improve institutional management and curriculum delivery for better learning outcomes in secondary schools” (Ayeni & Ibukun, 2013, pp. 41,42) ^[2].

It seems that, in Malaysian schools, the administrative control model of SBM is implemented. In this model, the principal is empowered with more authority to make major decisions at the school. The principal is provided more authority on decision making with regard to financial affairs, education development, and resource management, etc., however, sometimes he/she has to make decisions with the consultation of teachers, parents, students and community members, when it is required (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998, p. 328) ^[11].

Decision-making authority

Gropello (2006) ^[6] indicates some aspects of decision-making authority shifted to school-level stakeholders in Latin American countries as an authority on human resource management, curriculum, and instructional management, financial management; physical resource management and monitoring and evaluation have been devolved to schools (Thida & Joy, 2012) ^[15]. However, usually, the principal keeps the power and authority in dominating over the decision making in the areas of monitoring and evaluation, which can be seen in several countries (Santibañez *et al.*, 2014; Sumintono, Mislan, *et al.*, 2012; Thida & Joy, 2012) ^[14, 15]. The principals of Cambodian schools play the leading role, and they have much responsibility for decision making in schools. The teachers in Cambodian schools have more authority and responsibility on teaching and learning, planning and development as well as environmental management. The school support committee representatives, and especially the director, have been empowered to take part in some aspects of school operation, including planning and development, budget management, maintenance, and infrastructure management (Thida & Joy, 2012) ^[15].

“The most effective school councils were, those that served

largely to coordinate and integrate the activities of the various decision-making groups operating throughout the school” (Wohlstetter, 1995, p. 184) ^[17]. Researchers have identified that school governing boards in the UK schools, in England and Wales have been provided decision making power to manage their own affairs within the national framework of rules and regulations (Bush & Gamage, 2001) ^[4]. Those governing boards are comprised of representatives of relevant stakeholders. The transfer of decision-making power to governing boards can be seen as a strategy to strengthen the stakeholders of schools in the UK (Bandur, 2012, p. 317) ^[3].

The practice of schools in the Philippines was intended to improve shared governance, democratic decision making, accountability, transparency and communication among stakeholders (Guzman, 2006). In Indonesian schools, school councils have been devolved the power which was entertained earlier by bureaucrats and school leaders. Currently, school council members utilize the power, that they have been provided for decision-making at the school level, and every member of school council has an equal chance to be involved in the decisions which are relevant to the well - being of the school (Bandur, 2012) ^[3].

The opportunity which is given to stakeholders to be involved in decision making of schools creates a feeling and a sense of ownership of the school in the community members. It may affect to improve their dedication more efficiently and effectively (Gamage & Zajda, 2009) ^[5]. Participatory decision making is one of the attributes of the SBM, and most SBM systems in countries encourage school leaders to be adapted in participatory management culture. Therefore, participatory decision making is one of the responsibilities of all school leaders where the SBM is implemented. The SBM is being implemented in various countries for many decades, therefore, participants and stakeholders have much experience in implementing this management system. Many researchers and government policymakers indicate that, and also the research findings demonstrate that one of the major goals of the implementation of SBM is to increase the level of involvement of stakeholders in the decision making and school administration (Bandur, 2012; Gamage, 2009; Sumintono, Mislan, *et al.*, 2012; Vally & Daud, 2015) ^[3, 5, 14, 16, 16]. “the implementation of SBM with mandatory school councils has led to participatory decision- makings and partnership at the school level” (Bandur, 2012, p. 326) ^[3].

The schools where the decision-making authority is not sufficiently devolved, and stakeholders are not extensively involved in decision-making processes, the SBM has not been accomplished to the expected level in Japan (Hirata, 2006) ^[8]. According to Malaysian experience, “the SBM requires clarity of goals agreed and accepted by the school community, and has the real power to influence the issues and decisions made by them” (Malaklulunthu & Shamsudin, 2011, p. 1492).

The governing boards must be provided with sufficient power in decision making if the higher-level education authorities expect effective implementation of SBM in their school systems. Stakeholders of schools in Japan have been provided opportunities to be involved in decision making. The school is the basic decision-making unit within the educational system (Murphy & Beck, 1995), and schools must be given the opportunity to identify and respond to the students’ needs (Hirata, 2006, p. 63) ^[8].

Participation

One of the main aims of SBM models in most of the countries is to increase the participation of the vast majority of stakeholders in school management and school activities. They believe that several benefits can be obtained for both the school and the stakeholders with increasing opportunities for participation of stakeholders in school affairs. The overall goal of the SBM programme in Cambodia is, to establish and implement a participatory approach to school, quality improvement and performance-based resource management (Benvensite & Marshall, 2007; World Bank, 1999, 2004; Thida & Joy, 2012) ^[6, 15]. One of the expectations of the MoESL is to empower various education partners and stakeholders of schools in implementing the PSI. If parents and community members are involved, they anticipate the contribution of stakeholders for school development (Aturupane *et al.*, 2013; Kasturiarachchi, 2012a, 2014a) ^[1, 10].

In Cambodia, at the school level, the success of schools lies in the hands of the stakeholders of schools.

The participatory decision making is encouraged by principals under their leadership. The involvement of local community and non-governmental organizations are supposed to have influenced the success of school management, improve the transparency and accountability of school affairs (Thida & Joy, 2012) ^[15]. In Sri Lanka, according to Aturupane *et al.* (2013) ^[1], parents of the students and the community members are supposed to have attended meetings and events organized by schools; they are expected to be involved in school governance and advocacy since they have the opportunities for representing governing boards, school committees and societies of schools, etc. Outside stakeholders can also be engaged in voluntary work or provide resources to schools. According to MoESL schools are responsible and accountable in providing effective education for the children in the community (MoESL, 2014) ^[12].

The developed mechanisms will be operated to exchange information related to education development of the students. Sometimes, community members are supposed to give their hands in organizing non-instructional activities of the schools as well. They are expected to attend meetings organized by the schools, and the parents are anticipated to provide a supportive home environment for intellectual development and education of their children (Aturupane *et al.*, 2013, pp. 11, 12; Kasturiarachchi, 2014a; MoESL, 2013c, 2014) ^[1, 10, 12].

The SDC can lead to improved communication between stakeholders, and facilitate the awareness of principals, teachers and parents concerned (Aturupane *et al.*, 2013) ^[1]. Malaklolunthu and Shamsudin (2011) have stated the importance of open and genuine relationship among members, and the active participation of every member in decision making for the effective functioning of the Malaysian schools (Malaklolunthu & Shamsudin, 2011, p. 1492).

As stated by Bandur (2012) ^[3], the effectiveness of the schools in Indonesia always depends on the commitment and preparation of the stakeholders of school (Bandur, 2012, p. 44) ^[3]. According to a survey carried out by the World Bank in 2010 ^[6], 'World Bank SBM National Survey', Vernez *et al.* (2012, p. 10) have indicated the contributions of parents to the development of schools on various activities. Four hundred principals had participated in this

survey.

Sri Lankan schools

In the Sri Lankan schools, the main duty of SDC is to take steps for preparation of school development plans and educational development programmes, SMC assists SDC to make school development decisions, and also SMC is the implementation body of school development plans prepared by SDC. Therefore, it is expected to have a close relationship and cooperation between SDC and SMC. According to the MoESL, all partners of school are supposed to be committed to creating an effective school (MoESL, 2014, p. 05) ^[13].

The duties and responsibilities of SDC members have especially been mentioned in the instruction manual issued by MoESL, in 2013. Primarily, SDC has a responsibility in preparing: strategic plan for the school, preparing of school development plans and project plans. These plans should be prepared to address the needs and expectations of stakeholders of school. Each school is given more autonomy in making decisions on school affairs. School managers are encouraged to implement participatory management style in managing their schools. In the process of implementation of the PSI, the functions of school planning have been given considerable official recognition. As a planning technique, the 'strategic planning' is encouraged by the MoESL. However, according to the anecdotal evidence and as well as the experiences of the researcher, the majority of government schools have failed to prepare strategic plans (Kasturiarachchi, 2012, 2014) ^[10]. However, preparation of strategic plans for the school is one of the main responsibilities of the SDC members of school (MoESL, 2013c, p. 04) ^[12].

The procedures for selecting members for SDC have been revised with the issue of MoESL circular 07/2013, and the instruction manual and they have become the current bylaws in the implementation of the PSI. The currently introduced procedure to select members for the SDC and the SMC is included in the instruction manual issued by the MoESL, in 2014. Selection procedure and the composition of SDC had been mentioned in the MoESL circular 24/2005 and MoESL circular 35/2008. The MoESL circular 07/2013 ^[12] has provided some different instructions to schools in establishing their SDCs. According to the MoESL instruction manual in 2013 ^[12]: the SDC must be comprised of the principal as ex officio member, representatives of teachers, representatives of parents of the students, representatives of past pupils and one of the officers from education authority. The principal will be the chairperson of the SDC. However, according to the previous instructions of the MoESL circulars, one of the deputy principals represented the SDC, and the deputy principal's representation has not been mentioned in this circular (MoESL, 2013c, p. 04) ^[12].

According to the MoESL circular 07/2013, teacher representatives in the SDC are selected according to the number of teachers who are working in the school. According to this circular, all the teacher representatives need to be selected in a democratic manner, and they will be selected with the consent of the majority of teachers. As stated by the MoESL (2013) ^[12], the staff meeting is the suitable platform and the forum to select teacher representatives for the SDC. The staff meeting which will be held to select teacher representatives for the SDC

supposed to be chaired by the principal, and also, at least 2/3 of staff members must attend the meeting (MoESL, 2013c) ^[12]. The MoESL has provided guidelines and the instructions in selecting representatives of the parents of the students for SDC. They should be selected according to the student number of schools.

All the parents who represent the SDC must be selected from primary and secondary sections of the school. Those members should be selected at a general meeting of the parents and guardians of current students of the school at the SDS meeting. Two past pupils must be selected among members of past pupils of school, if there is a past pupil society. Otherwise, they must be selected from past pupils of schools, and the required approval should be taken at a general meeting of SDS. One of the officers from the Zonal Education Office (ZEO) will be appointed to represent the SDC of each school, and it will also be decided on the availability of human resources in the ZEO (MoESL, 2013c, p. 04) ^[12].

The duties and the positions of SDC members

According to the guidelines of the MoESL, some of the members of the SDC are elected, and other members represent as ex officio members. The chairperson, the treasurer and the secretary of the SDC are selected from members of the SDC. However, there are some guidelines issued by the MoESL in selecting members for those positions. Chairperson of the SDC will be the principal of the respective school; secretary will be one of the representatives of the parents of the current students of the said school; and treasure of SDC will be one of the teacher representatives of the SDC in the particular school (MoESL, 2013c, pp. 04, 05) ^[12].

The term of the elected members of SDC is for a period of two years; the member of education office can continue his/her service until his/her position in the SDC is changed. The maximum number of terms of elected members of SDC is four consecutive years, only for two terms. The meetings of the SDC will be held at least once a month. According to the needs of the SDC members, a number of meetings may vary. A special general meeting of SDC can be called by a written request of 2/3 of members of the SDC or at a request of the chairperson of the SDC. The quorum of SDC meeting is 2/3 of the members, and all the decisions made by the SDC must be approved by the majority of the members. Responsibility of maintaining the records of the SDC is held by the secretary of the committee. A special SDC meeting can be called at the request of the secretary of the MoESL, secretary of education of provincial council, or the director of provincial education (MoESL, 2013c, pp. 04-06) ^[12].

In the instruction manuals issued by the MoESL, in 2013 and in 2014, the main duties of the SDC members have been identified and indicated. Accordingly, the key duties and responsibilities of the SDC members are categorized into various sub-sections. School planning is considered as a very significant key function of the SDC. Middle term and annual action plans should be prepared by SDC in order to achieve the expected targets of school. SMC will also be invited for preparing school plans. Expected sources of funds should be included in the plans, e.g. from MoESL, PMoE, SDS, etc. The annual action plan for subsequent year should be prepared before 15th December every year, by obtaining proposals from sectional heads and staff of school. Approval for annual plans of schools is needed to be taken

from the director, ZEO, if schools are governed by the PMoE. National schools are advised to obtain approval for their plans, from the director for national schools of MoESL. Every school is supposed to take necessary steps in order to obtain grants for implementing the approved plans, and SDC is expected to make a priority list for implementing activities of school plan. All the plans should be prepared according to the priority list prepared by the SDC, and they will be prepared on 'outcome-based approach'.

The SDC has a responsibility in preparing the 'annual school performance report' for school, and the progress of annual programmes of school will be included in this report. This annual school performance report must be available for stakeholders of the school. In the process of planning, SDC is supposed to identify available resources and development needs of students in schools, and the potentials for gathering resources. If there is a shortage of resources to achieve the expected targets, school must take necessary actions to obtain those resources from outsiders (MoESL, 2013, pp. 06, 07) ^[12].

Each SDC is supposed to prepare effective mechanisms to: utilize donations, quality inputs and other resources for school development; encourage students in participating extra and co-curricular activities; provide support to develop library facilities and other educational facilities; take steps to obtain support and contribution of resource persons for curricular, co-curricular and extracurricular development of school. Moreover, the SDC members are anticipated to prepare programmes for staff appraisal for continuous improvement of the quality of staff; take steps to provide career guidance to school leavers, those who are entering to the work of world; contribute maximum for creating a joyful and peaceful learning environment in improving inborn talents and competencies of students (MoESL, 2013, p. 07) ^[12].

Preparation of SBTD programmes is one of the main responsibilities of the SDC. Thus, SDC is supposed to: identify developmental skills and training needs of teachers through teacher performance evaluation processes; organize SBTD programmes for the professional development of teachers; make arrangements for teacher training and education; implement construction and renovation programmes for strengthening the physical environment; take steps to develop school plant through community support. Moreover, SDC is expected to be dedicated to managing capital assets of the school effectively (MoESL, 2013, p. 08) ^[12]. The SDC is supposed to: the preparation of a much practical school-community development plan, and to create a sense of ownership of the school within the community; implement community development programmes in school community; implement programmes to create child friendly environment at homes of students; direct teaching staff to carry out action researches to address the development needs of school; form subcommittees for fulfilling the development of school.

Annual school performance report and financial reports must be produced at the SDC meeting held in March every year (MoESL, 2013) ^[12]. In addition, for the purpose of financial management of a school, two committees are mandatory to be formed, that is 'procurement committee' and 'technical evaluation committee'. All those committees are represented by only the internal staff members of school. The duties and the functions of those committees are

included in the instruction manual issued by the MoESL, in 2013 ^[12] (MoESL, 2013, pp. 21-28) ^[12]. It seems that the implementation guidelines for functioning the SDC have clearly been informed by the MoESL to individual schools via instruction manuals, circulars, circular letters, etc.

Materials and Methods

The main research question of this study is: how is the nature of implementation of School Development Committee of government schools in Sri Lanka? The specific objectives of the study are to: discover the selection procedure of School Development Committee members of schools; identify the background of School Development Committee members of schools; recognize the nature of participation of members for the activities of School Development Committee and to identify the challenges faced by the members of the School Development Committee in managing schools. In order to investigate the effectiveness of the SDC in the government schools in Sri Lanka, this study employed a qualitative inquiry. Especially a case study approach was selected to investigate this research problem.

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. A qualitative researcher places his/her validity on multiple realities, meaning structures and holistic analysis of a social phenomenon (Burns, 2000; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). Qualitative research strives to ascertain knowledge through researcher and participant relationships during the research process in natural settings. This calls for the developing of relationships based on trust and respect for participants (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Therefore, the qualitative research methodology was most fitting in this study because this study designed to discover the insights of the SDC members, principals, deputy principals, teachers, parents and past pupils who represent the SDC in the schools. Case study research can be categorized as a single case or multiple cases (Yin, 1993, Berg, 2001). With reference to the Gampaha district schools in Sri Lanka, the researcher employed a multiple case study approach to study the research problem. 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). The case study investigates social reality and examines a social unit as a whole (Best & Kahn, 2006). This study aimed to investigate the experiences of the internal and external community members of the SDC in the schools. Qualitative researchers use various methods for data collection: "observation (participant and non-participant), interviewing, and document analysis" (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002, p. 430).

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 be available in spoken form, and ...texts endure and thus give historical insight". Atkinson and Coffey (2004, p. 59). The interviews are one-to-one, and most often unstructured, because the researcher is interested in gaining a rich and comprehensive account of the participant's experience, and also the interviews produce

first-person accounts of the experience (Polkinghorne, 2005). Especially, in this study, two main data gathering, research methods were employed. Those were document analysis and semi-structured interviews. In addition, the informal observations, as well as the informal discussions, also used to uncover the real-life stories of the participants.

The purposive sampling is one of the non-probabilistic sampling techniques that is, "based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight, and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). Therefore, the sample of this study was purposively selected, and five principals, five deputy principals, ten teachers, ten parents, ten past pupils participated in this study as research participants in providing information.

As this study is a qualitative interpretive research study the thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data gathered through the participants. As McMillan & Schumacher (2010) note, qualitative analysis involves a systematic process of categorizing and interpreting data to provide explanations for the research questions under consideration. In qualitative studies, generally, there is a large amount of data to be analyzed, summarized, and interpreted. With considering all the above advantages, and the thematic analysis was used as one of the most common approaches to qualitative data analysis (Bryman, 2001; Mutch, 2005). And also, it was the most appropriate method for analyzing qualitative data in this study.

Results and Discussion

In order to maintain the anonymity of the research participants in this study, and to protect them, and also to maintain the confidentiality of the information provided by them, a coding system was employed to identify them. For instance, the schools were coded as; A...E, the principals were given coded like; PRA...PRE, deputy principals were assigned codes as; DPA...DPE, Teachers were identified as; TA1, TA2...TE1, TE2, the parents identified as; PA1,PA2...PE1, PE2, and past pupils were assigned codes like; PPA1,PPA2...PPE1,PPE2, etc.

Selection of members for SDC

The selection of members for the School Development Committee is a very imperative element in a school. According to the information and the experiences shared by the SDC members, research participants, however, except the principals, the selection of members for the SDC is not materialized democratically and also according to the MoESL guidelines.

The DPA described the selection process that had been employed in selecting SDC members in his school. According to him, the representatives of parents for SDC had been selected in considering their nationality and religion. "*We selected members in representing Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim communities*". He further explained that SDC members from past pupils had been selected by the principal since a past pupils' association was not functioned in his school. According to DPA, when they selected teacher representatives for the SDC, their behavior and attitudes are considered, and the teachers who have positive attitudes are given priority. Moreover, he (DPA) stated that the SDC members have not been provided proper training on school management.

The principal of SC expressed his idea about the process of

selecting members for the SDC as: *“when I selected parents as SDC members, I deliberately selected parents who have good relationships with the political leaders in this area. I thought that it would be helpful to get support from the political authority for the development of this school”*.

According to the above statement of PRC, it was realized that this school has not followed the MoESL guidelines in selecting SDC members. However, it was observed that the selection process in this school is not much transparent.

Further, PRE explained about the mechanisms that she had used to select members for the SDC: *“when I selected teachers for SDC, their seniority was considered, since most of the teachers are new to this school, definitely I had to select the senior teachers for the SDC. I don’t say that, the junior teachers are incapable,...when I selected parents for the SDC, I gave priority to the parents who have a good economic background. At the time I selected past pupils, same criteria were used”*.

It seems that the internal staff members are not happy about the mechanism which are adopted in selecting secretary to the SDC. One teacher (TB2) explained her views on that as: *“the secretary of SDC should be an internal staff member of school, at present, the secretary is from outside community. It is a problem for internal committee members”*.

According to all the above statements, it is realized that, in the process of selecting members for the SDC in the schools, the MoESL guidelines have not been properly followed. So, rationally the principal and relevant managers have to make decisions considering the actual situation of their stakeholders. Therefore, it seems that the nature of the selection process of the SDC members is not similar between schools, and also does not match with the guidelines of the MoESL.

The findings of this study are totally different from the findings of Hirata (2006, p. 71) [8], in which, it is not anticipated that council members of schools be elected by community members in Japan. However, it seems that the SBM system in Sri Lanka is different from Japan SBM system. According to the responses provided by the majority of the past pupils, parents, and teachers of SDCs, most principals influence the selection of SDC members.

Participation of SDC members

According to PRE, the participation of SDC members and their inputs in decision making is not adequate. When the researcher inquired about the nature of the delegation of leadership to SDC members in the schools, it was revealed that PRA, PRB, and PRE have not delegated authority of leadership to outside SDC members in their schools. The PRA believes that the delegation of leadership is not essential since the outside SDC members and the other community members of his school are not directly engaged in school activities.

One parent (PC2) explained: *“the decision-making power has not been distributed among SDC members in this school. So, we believe that all the power is still with the principal and the staff of school”*. In addition, another parent of school D (PD1) explained about the real situation of the SDC as: *“parents do not have a big voice at the SDC meetings”*.

Similar findings support this study, Gamage (1996) had identified that the level of community participation in secondary schools is much lower than in primary schools. According to the participants, the community members of

popular schools tend to involve in school activities than the other schools in Sri Lanka.

However, according to findings of the study of Zajda and Gamage (2009, p. 03) [5], schools in Cambodia, community members, and parents have been more involved in school activities. Thida and Joy (2012) [15] support this study, the degree of participation of local school community members significantly varies in Cambodian schools.

Ayeni and Ibukun (2013, pp. 41, 42) [2] determine effective school management committee is the engine room and a building block for school and community partnership in school governance. As found by Gamage (1993) [5], the school committee is seen as a bridge, that links the school, parents, and communities on several matters relating to teaching and learning practices, that occur in schools of Australia. This is similar to the findings of Bush (2002) [4], Land (2002) and Leithwood *et al.* (1999) [11].

One past pupil (PPD1) appreciated the SDC mechanism in his school. According to her, SDC members have chances to be involved in the decision-making process and to contribute their ideas in the SDC meeting. As she indicated that most of the things are being discussed at the SDC meetings in this school are open to the community. A past pupil (PPC1) asserted that: *“I believe that, the present situation in this school is very democratic, I like to indicate that, we can discuss anything at the SDC meetings. I think outside community members did not have any chance to discuss school matters like today here before”*.

A parent in this school (PC2) confirmed the above statement. *“I am very happy about the freedom that has been given by the principal to discuss very important matters with regard to the education of our children at the SDC meetings*. He further stated that, the importance of selecting well qualified outside members for the SDC. And his idea is to select very active parents and past pupils for the SDC. A parent in school C (PC1) proposed to increase opportunities in the SDC for more stakeholders to minimize disadvantages.

Townsend (1994) found that the community will get involved in school events only when they see the benefits to be gained. Schools in Australian Capital Territory have much community participation in school programmes (Karmel, 1973 cited In Gamage & Zajda, 2005a: 38) [5]. The main aim of the implementation of SBM in New Zealand, just as in other countries, had been to achieve a systemic efficiency and to increase local community involvement (Gamage & Zajda, 2005a; Robinson & Ward, 2005) [5].

According to the information provided by the participants, it was realized that some schools are enthusiastic to cultivate a participatory management culture in their schools through their SDCs. For instance, school C and school D are well forwarded on that in contrast to school A, school B, and school E. However, as a whole it cannot be contented about the participation of the SDC members, and their commitment in providing rich ideas, proposals, criticisms, arguments in order to develop their schools. It seems that some schools have not yet realized the importance of the philosophy behind the SDC concept.

One teacher (TC2) explained about the SDC meetings and the nature of outside SDC members: *“I have noticed that parents do not speak openly at the SDC meetings if they have issues or problems to be discussed”*. The internal SDC members think that parents are reluctant to speak or provide their ideas openly because their children are still

studying in this school". However, the MoESL expected to create a very democratic environment in implementing SDC in government schools in Sri Lanka.

According to the information provided by the participants, and the information gathered through informal discussions and informal observations, it was realized that the understanding of the SDC members on the democratic participation in the SDC meetings is slightly different among members.

SDC meetings

The PRB detailed about the mechanisms that his school is applied to make decisions at the SDC meetings. According to him, prior to the regular SDC meetings, internal SDC members get together and discuss the matters which are going to be discussed at the meetings, and come to a conclusion, and forward them at the formal SDC meetings. However, the PRB commented that his school is applying collaborative decision-making style, and a participatory management culture. The PRB believes that his school is implementing participatory decision-making style as recommended by the MoESL.

As stated by a teacher of school A (TA2) the SDC meetings are not held regularly once a month in her school. It was observed that in this study most of the parents and also the past pupils are attending meetings if they are informed. It was noticed that they are not informed about the meetings in a regular manner. It appeared that school E gets the signatures, consent, approval of the SDC members for the important decisions without conducting regular meetings.

The majority of SDC members of school A expressed their views on SDC meetings. It was noticed that mostly SDC meetings of school a are conducted before 7.30 am. They further commented that SDC meetings are held according to the needs of school, and SDC members are informed about the meetings over the phone.

Starratt (1996) revealed that SBM requires governing board members to spend more time on school meetings through their teamwork, and they sometimes resist such initiatives. Cavanagh & Dellar (1995) had revealed that the expected outcomes of restructuring education system in Western Australia have not been achieved well, and 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 school.

The majority of participants indicated that the Education Office member of their SDCs is not attending meetings regularly, sometimes at least for one meeting per year. One teacher (TD2) provides proofs for that as: *"community participation in the SDC meetings are only a formality for the purpose of legitimacy. Everything is previously arranged by the principal and what is required of the members of the SDC is their agreement and signatures"*. It is also useful to note that this teacher perceived the role taken by the principal as too dominant in the SDC meetings. However, Aturupane *et al.* (2013, pp. 11,12) ^[1] found a different behavior and role of the community members and parents in schools as outside community members of schools attend meetings/events organized by schools, they are involved in school governance and advocacy, engage in voluntary work or make financial contributions to maintain/improve physical conditions, resources, and services in schools.

According to the information provided by the majority of

respondents excluding the principals, in most of the occasions, only a half or less of the outside SDC members are invited to attend the meetings, and these are always the same people in each time. It seems that only a limited number of outside SDC members are actually attending the SDC meetings. Thus, most of the time, only the same members in SDC actively engage in the meetings.

Comments made by the majority of the parents and the past pupils during the interviews it was clarified that the monthly SDC meeting is seen as a mechanism for informing and consulting with members of the SDCs on school decisions rather than as a mechanism for decision making. The principal has previously designed the school's plans, and at the meeting, SDC members are asked to approve this particular scheme. It is likely that even though members should be in a position to bargain, the principal holds more power than they concerning this decision.

Although the SDC meetings need to be held with the full participation of its members in a participatory manner, the practical situation is rather different, as per the information of the participants. It was noticed that there is no mechanism for monitoring those activities by the higher education authorities and taking remedial measures.

Background of SDC members

When the researcher questioned about the background of the outside SDC members, who represent the SDC, the PC stated: *"they are not government servants; most of the past pupils in this school are not doing very good jobs. So, we had to select SDC members from among them"*. As he explained, he had only considered the relationship of the past pupils and parents with the local community. The principal of School E stated the background of the past pupil as a challenge. He has not considered management knowledge, decision-making skills, qualifications of the past pupils and parents in selecting them as SDC members.

As one past pupil (PPA1) commented, the principal and the teachers in this school believe that, past pupils and parents are not educated or experienced on school management, and therefore, they do not genuinely consider their ideas. According to the experiences of this past pupil, sometimes, outside SDC members provide very good ideas and proposals for school development. Since the negative attitudes of the staff towards their background, those proposals and ideas sometimes are neglected.

One deputy principal of school E mentioned that the education and social background of the parents and past pupils of his school diminishes the quality of SDC. One past pupil (PPD2) expressed his feelings about school development and management capacity of internal staff members as: *"We always think about our school, though the busy lives, fewer experiences and poor knowledge on school management, interrupt us to be committed on school development. We believe that the staff members have a better knowledge of school management than us. Most parents and past pupils like to help school, but they are not economically confident. The parents of some students are abroad, engaged in jobs, and their children are looked after by grandparents or one parent, so they face problems in attending school activities"*.

Bandur (2012, p. 327) ^[3] found that the school governing board members do not have better knowledge and understanding management policies and programmes at regional, national, and international levels. Therefore,

Bandur (2012, p. 327) ^[3] recommended that, to encourage all school governing board members to attend regular workshops on school management, and has emphasized the responsibility of education authorities organizing such training and awareness programmes, for the benefit of school.

It is realized that the background of the parents of the students does not sufficiently accommodate the development of schools. Therefore, most of the programmes related to school development are not appropriately functioned in many schools in this study. It seems that the outside SDC members do not show a self-encouragement and also a self-interest to regularly participate in SDC meetings. According to the information provided by the outside SDC members as the participant of this study, it appears that the busy lifestyle of the parents and past pupils, and also the attitudes towards the education of their children, school development, and also their attitudes towards the implementation of SDC harmfully affect school activities.

Challenges faced by SDC members

The majority of principals indicated that the SDC members' lack of experiences and poor knowledge in school management, and other SDC members; parents, past pupils, and teachers argue about the poor leadership qualities of the principal displayed in school management as a big challenge in implementing SDC. One of the other major challenges is poor attitudes of the community members towards the SDC. Therefore, it appeared that they do not provide their maximum inputs and support for the success of the implementation of SDC.

As Thida and Joy (2012) ^[15] found, the principals in Cambodian schools play the leading role, and they have key responsibilities in all aspects of school decision making. As mentioned by one of the teachers (TB2), although every SDC member has been allocated several activities and responsibilities of school most of them do not commit in performing them well. And it is considered as a big challenge in implementing SDC in schools.

Kasturiarachchi (2014) has revealed that schools face challenges due to a lack of understanding of governing board members on school management. One parent (PE1) indicated as: "though the education reforms are introduced in many times the lack of resources is the big challenge in achieving the targets of school. So, I propose if someone introduces something, sufficient resources must be given to schools for achieving its aims. SDC is also as same as other reforms in education". In contrast, Bandur (2012, p. 45) ^[3] found that schools in Indonesia create a collaborative work, and increase the level of participation of parents and the local community in providing resources for school development.

Some schools face challenges in selecting suitable, dedicated, committed and educated community members for the SDC. The SDC members have not been empowered for making a contribution in the SDC meetings for their school development. School leaders face difficulties since proper supervision and necessary guidance is not provided by the higher authority of education.

Similarly, Cranston (2009, p. 21) found that the principals dominate decision making and teachers tend to keep parents at 'arm's length' of schools in Queensland. As found by Cranston (2009, p. 19) generally, parents are not involved in

decision-making about curriculum issues, the principals and deputy principals tend to maintain a final say over major issues in Queensland schools. Some principals still keep his or her influencing power on decision making. Students have not yet been given opportunity in involving decision making though they are real customers of schools.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It seems that the schools are unwilling to get involve external community members in the SDC activities may also lead to a lack of trust, since trust is related to school openness and, therefore, cannot be established if external community members' expectations for increased involvement fail to materialize.

The selection process of SDC members is not much democratic as expected by the MoESL. It is evident that participatory management is not being practiced in all schools. Most of the decisions still made by the principal, or he/she is directly influenced the school decisions. The majority of SDC members are not empowered for participatory decision making. It should be provided several opportunities for the different community members to increase their involvement in setting school policy, planning, and decision-making. Therefore, very democratic manner should be adopted to establish SDCs, selecting members and conducting SDC meetings. Since the lack of awareness of stakeholders of the schools on the SDC concept, at least the SDC members need be given opportunities for participation in school management and awareness programmes. There is a need to establish a better monitoring system or governing body to supervise the schools. Those governing boards need to provide such inputs, necessary recommendations, and guidance for important parties and stakeholders of the schools.

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