

Image of the Deputy Principals in the Schools where Programme of School Improvement is being Implemented:A Case Study

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Introduction

The intention of this research study was to explore the role of the deputy principal in the schools where the Programme of School Improvement (PSI) is being implemented. Main research aim and a research question were formulated, and a qualitative methodological approach was undertaken encompassing the methods of documentary analysis, questionnaires and group interviews.

The role of the deputy principal in the schools where the Programme of School Improvement (PSI) is being implemented has attracted scant research interest. This lack of research interest in the role has also been reported in other countries where much of the research focus appears to have been on the principalship (Harris, Muijs, & Crawford, 2003; Kaplan & Owings, 1999). Within the Sri Lankan context what is known from the exploratory study of researchers is that the role is a typically busy one, concerned chiefly with operational matters, but lacking a significant role in leading in the school. Together with other international research on the deputy principal's role have helped to set the direction for this research. This research study had been motivated by a personal interest and experiences of the researcher in relation to the deputy principal role in the PSI schools.

Research Problem

A turning point within school education management in Sri Lanka was the introduction of the PSI in 2006, Sri Lankan version of School Based Management (SBM). SBM has a number of definitions, which reflects how different countries apply it in their own education systems. There are, however, common characteristics. According to Banicky (2000), several terms commonly used to describe this localized governance model include “decentralization, restructuring, site-based management, participatory

decision-making, shared decision making, and school-based decision making. De Grauwe (2005) suggested that SBM basically means “the transfer of decision-making power on management issues to the school level” . Further Caldwell (2005) described SBM as the “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”. These reforms saw schools move away from centralised control to a locally managed model. According to Fitzgerald, Gunter and Eaton (2006) the principal became the publicly accountable ‘chief executive’ and the deputy principal, as part of the senior management team, assumed a specific role aligned to new corporate management ideals. They go on to say ‘site based management’ was “organisational and focussed on task effectiveness and efficiency with unity through structures and cultures”.

One of the effects of this increased workload was the delegation of some tasks and duties across the senior management team. The introduction of PSI (Ministry of Education, 2006) in this country amplified schools’ accountability and increased the workload especially for deputy principals who were often responsible for managing this system. According to the guidelines provided by the Ministry of Education one of the Deputy Principals represents the main decision making board which is called School Development Board (SDB) in the PSI system in Sri Lanka. Therefore, Deputy Principal has a significant role in this school management system (Ministry of Education, 2008). In the case of this study the intention was to understand how deputy principals experience their roles, in terms of the way they are structured and defined and the satisfactions that is associated with the role. It is felt that a constructionist perspective sits comfortably alongside the research questions for this study because such a perspective seeks to understand how deputy principals make meaning of their role and its position within the PSI schools. It provides them with a voice to construct meaning around the role and how it fits into the PSI school.

Objectives of the Study

To investigate the role and image of the deputy principal in the PSI schools in Sri Lanka.

Research Question of the study

What are the role and responsibilities of deputy principals of the PSI schools?

Methodology

In order to identify the role of the deputy principal in the PSI schools in Sri Lanka 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 multi-layered and complex, it is an ongoing flow” (Polkinghorne, 2005). Therefore the qualitative research approach was most appropriate for this study, because this research designed to explore experiences and perceptions of stakeholders of the PSI schools in relation to the role of the deputy principal in the PSI schools in Sri Lanka. In particular, it explored the experiences and perceptions of the principals, the deputy principals and the teachers in the selected three schools in Matara district in Sri Lanka in relation to the role of the deputy principal in the PSI schools in Sri Lanka. The researcher used a case study approach and, sample was selected purposively, and three schools were selected. Three principals, three deputy principals and eighteen teachers participated in this study providing information. Qualitative researchers use various methods for data collection: “observation (participant and non participant), interviewing, and document analysis” (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002). In this study three data collection methods were employed: documentary analysis, questionnaires and interviews. 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 the thematic analytical method.

Key Findings

The study found that the characteristics and the extent of deputy principals’ participation in school management have slightly changed as a result of the PSI system introduced by the government in 2006. However, prior to PSI implementation, deputy principals had actively participated in school meetings, had some power in managing financial activities in the

school, 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 deputy principals' involvement in education management provided by the PSI policy, are not effective in terms of representing and engaging deputy principals in school management.

A majority of deputy principals and teachers (more than 67%) indicate that the deputy principals are not provided adequate opportunities to engage in major decisions making in school, and moreover they say that the principals of the school still play the key decision making role. More than 50 percent of teachers and 67 percent of deputy principals also state that deputy principals do not have sufficient opportunities to engage in very important school decisions. As a result of that, deputy principals face difficulty in cultivating a self image as a leader in the school. However, the idea of the principal respondents is difference than of the other respondents in this regard. The majority of principals articulated that the deputy principals of their schools are given more authority for performing their duties and they are delegated a sufficient amount of power in covering of their duties. The deputy principal who represents the School Development Committee (SDC) has more power in making decisions than the other deputy principals in the school. One deputy principal in a school says that "we are deputy principals of this school but not top managers; therefore we do not have super power in making school decisions like the principal". In contrast, one principal of a school indicates that "According to my experiences most of the deputy principals in the schools do not like to take responsibility of crucial school decisions, and therefore principals do not like to delegate power to them. Some of them are not competent enough to make vital managerial decisions". However, one teacher indicates that "our principal do not like to delegate power to the deputy principals, but we know that they can work effectively if they are assigned work with the decision making power. They are only delegate responsibility not the power. But we respect our deputy principals since they are compassionate to us". According to the responses of the deputy principals (67%), they are assigned work time to time by the principals without any prior plan. Therefore, it seems that they face challenges in performing their duties effectively due to the lack of time to plan their duties. However, according to the information provided by the participants in this study, image of the deputy principals in the PSI schools is not much highlighted.

Conclusion

Thus, the deputy principals do not function as a key figure in the PSI schools since they are not given much authority in decision making. As a recommendation at school level, this points to the need for a clear definition of the responsibilities and possible restructuring of the role to leverage more chances to engage in school management for the deputy principals in order to get the maximum benefit of the PSI. Recommendations at the system level also suggest advocating for a set of professional leadership standards for the deputy principal in the PSI schools for the programme to draw better outcomes. Although deputy principals do not have better understanding about the concept of PSI or SBM it is required to set out an effective awareness programme for getting involvement of deputy principals for school development.

Keywords: Deputy Principal; Improvement; Schools; School Programme

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