

School governance and current trends of school-community relationship: School Based Management experiences of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

This article discusses the community participation and decision making in the schools where the Programme for School Improvement (PSI), the Sri Lankan version of School Based Management (SBM) programme is being implemented in Sri Lanka. The Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka (MoESL) has projected to enhance the community participation in school affairs by implementing the PSI (MoESL, 2005,2008,2013,2014). A few number of Colombo district government schools were selected as the research location/site in this study. Particularly this study aimed to explore the nature of participation of community members in school affairs, and also to identify challenges with regard to community participation and decision making at the school level. Since this study aimed at exploring the insights and the experiences of the participants, case study research approach was used. Questionnaires, document surveys, and interviews were employed to gather information from principals, deputy principals, teaching staff, parents and past pupils on the School Development Committees (SDC), and the participants of this empirical research study represented ten public schools in the Colombo district. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were employed to analyze the data in this study. This study revealed that the internal community members of schools are not much enthusiastic to welcome ideas, suggestions, and criticisms of external community members when they make decisions at the school level. Most governing board decisions of schools are influenced by the principals. Therefore, the decision-making process does not seem as democratic and transparent as expected by the MoESL. Lack of time, shortage of financial resources, and less commitment of higher education officers destructively influence the community participation and decision making at the school level. Lack of awareness and training on SBM and school management of stakeholders directly affect the effectiveness of the implementation of the SBM in these schools. Therefore, it is required to pay immediate attention on the training of stakeholders, and also supervision of schools and the governing board members who are involved in the decision making of schools.

Key Words-

Community participation, Decision making, Participation, School Based Management, Programme for School Improvement

1 Introduction

This study investigated the community participation in the decision-making process and school affairs in the Colombo district schools in Sri Lanka where the programme of school improvement (PSI), the Sri Lankan version of School Based Management (SBM) is being put into practice. In particular, it was investigated the real influence of SBM initiatives on the community participation and school decisions in the public schools. This study critically investigated the nature of community participation in the decision-making process and affairs of some selected schools in the Colombo district. Especially, it was explored the constraints and challenges which are very related to the community participation and decision making in those schools. This study is significant because, since 2006, decision making power and authority on school education has been transferred to school level through the SBM implementation (MoESL, 2005,2008,2013).

So far, no satisfactory number of investigations have been undertaken on the community participation and decision making in relation to the SBM/PSI implementation in Sri Lanka. The findings of this empirical research study could, therefore, be useful to understand the prevailing situation of the community participation and decision making in the government schools in Sri Lanka. In addition, the findings may be useful for making future policy decisions on the PSI system.

Sri Lankan version of SBM was introduced as a pilot project in 2006, as titled as the Programme for School Improvement (PSI). Presently PSI is being implemented in almost each government school throughout Sri Lanka. The MoESL instructed every school to implement this management model by 2010 as it as a mandatory project. According to the guidelines of the MoESL (2015, 2013,2014), community participation in school management and school decisions, and participatory decision making are considered as key characteristics of the PSI. This study explored the experiences of stakeholders: including principals, deputy principals, teachers, past pupils and parents in the schools. All the respondents represented the School Development Committees (SDC) of their schools. Therefore, respondents had valuable experience on the implementation of the PSI in their schools.

1.1 Theoretical and historical background of the SBM

Many countries have been implementing School Based Management (SBM) in their school systems for many years. Researchers have carried out many studies on the

SBM, and therefore, it has a number of definitions, which reflect how different countries implement this school management system in their schools. 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” (p. 3). The SBM is being implemented in different terms with different meanings, but all referring to a similar and increasingly popular trend which involves allowing schools more autonomy in decision making at school level with the participation of vast community members and stakeholders of schools.

Caldwell (2005) described the 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” (p. 3). It seems that the SBM is a systematic decentralization of authority, a delegation of decision-making power to school level in order to facilitate them for making their decisions at their school site. This includes delegation of power, authority, and responsibility to the local schools by the central and provincial education authorities. In addition, the SBM schools are given appropriate autonomy to make their decisions in a democratic and participatory manner at their school level. Hence, it is expected to amplify ample community participation in school decisions and to increase the involvement of stakeholders in performing various types of school activities. The PSI in Sri Lanka encourages participation of stakeholders of school in managing schools, and in particular, in preparing school plans and also decision making of schools.

Decentralization is one of the key elements of the SBM, and most countries implementing SBM include, decentralized decision-making as a part of the process (Osorio, Fasih, Patrinos, & Santibanez, 2009). Decentralization of decision making power and responsibility to school level is also expected by the MoESL through implementing the Programme for School Improvement (PSI). In the Sri Lankan context, PSI involves the delegation of power, authority, and responsibility to school level by the central, provincial and Zonal level education authorities (MoESL, 2008, 2013, 2014). With the decentralization of the authority and the responsibility, the schools are seen as having more autonomy for making their own decisions. Furthermore, MoESL expects more community participation in school decisions by this management change of schools.

Raihani (2007), Briggs & Wohlstetter (2003) and Cheng (1993) list some common characteristics of SBM schools, such as a shared mission, school-based staff development, participation of stakeholders in decision-making, shared school leadership, participatory and democratic decision-making, and power distribution. These were new to the schools in Sri Lanka as they had not practiced participatory decision-making before 2006. Johanson (1999) indicates eight key elements of successful SBM schools, namely: an active vision; meaningful decision-making authority; distribution of power; development and use of knowledge and skills; collecting and communicating information; rewards for progress; shared leadership; and cultivating resources.

Leithwood and Menzies (1998) identify four models of School Based Management as:

- (1) Administrative control model of SBM – the principal, as representative of the education administration, is dominant;
- (2) Professional control model of SBM – the teaching staff receives the authority;
- (3) Community control model of SBM – a local group or the parents, through a board, is in charge;
- (4) Balanced control model of SBM – the parents and the professionals (teachers and principal) share authority equally.

Some of the above characteristics reflected in the PSI system in Sri Lanka. For instance, the participation of principal, deputy principal and representatives of teachers, past pupils and parents in school decisions, and the distribution of decision-making power among school staff. The MoESL expected to implement balanced control model of SBM in Sri Lanka. However, according to the anecdotal evidence, still, some schools implement professional control model or some other model of SBM in their schools. Therefore, the school leaders are supposed to be empowered to shift from professional control model or some other model to balanced control model of SBM. Balanced control model of SBM emphasizes effective community participation and equal involvement of external and internal community members of schools in managing school functions and school decision making.

The number of articles converses merits and demerits of SBM. Some authors argue that SBM is the panacea for quality improvement, while others argue that its introduction has led to a deterioration in quality, especially in the marginalized schools. However, the merits and demerits of SBM are determined basically on the strategies used by the education authorities of various countries in implementing this school management policy in their school system. Lugaz and De Grauwe (2005) argue that the lack of transparency, especially in the use of funds at school level by the principal and the

school board as a challenge for the smooth functioning of SBM in many countries. Recently a research has been carried out by the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) on school functioning in the context of decentralization in West Africa. It shows that parents and teachers have nearly no knowledge of or control over the use of the fees which they pay for their children's schooling (Lugaz and De Grauwe, 2005). According to the anecdotal evidence, decision-makers in the Sri Lankan schools also face many challenges in implementing PSI system in their schools. However, it is obvious that the problems and challenges may emerge when any novel policy is being implemented. Relevant international research findings also may be useful to understand the real situation of SBM in other countries, and the research findings of local research may be helpful to find solutions for the problems faced by school leaders in implementing the PSI in Sri Lanka. Therefore, it seems that the researchers in the field of education in Sri Lanka also have a big responsibility in investigating the real situation in the implementation of the PSI at the school level.

School Based Management (SBM) has become a most famous element of public school management systems in most countries around the world (Osorio, Patrinos, & Fasih, 2009). SBM is being increasingly advocated as a shortcut to more efficient management and quality improvement in education. Especially in developing countries, concerns remain about the possible detrimental impact of SBM on school quality; equity among different schools in the same system; the motivation of and relationships between principals and teachers; and financial as well as administrative transparency (Botha, 2012; Gamage, 2009; Mokoena, 2012; Patrinos, 2009). Therefore, the international experiences of SBM can be used for improving the effectiveness of the PSI system in Sri Lanka.

2 Research Methodology

2.1 Research question and objectives

The main research question of this study is: what is the real nature of the community participation in decision making and school affairs in the schools where the Programme for School Improvement is being implemented?

2.1.1 Objectives of the study

- i. To identify the nature of school community relationships in the schools.
- ii. To discover the prevailing decision-making environment in the schools.
- iii. To recognize the nature of community participation in the decision-making process of the schools.
- iv. To identify constraints and challenges in decision making and community participation in the schools.

2.2 Qualitative research

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 ongoing flow" (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 138). Therefore, the qualitative research approach was most appropriate in this study because this research has an aim to explore the lived experiences of stakeholders of schools on the community participation and decision-making in their schools.

2.2.1 Case study

The case study research approach has been used by qualitative and interpretive researchers for a long time in disciplines since it has a number of advantages (Burns, 2000). This research approach can be used to investigate the actual contemporary life settings and the life cycles of people, and it allows researchers to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events of the people (Yin, 2009). For example, Mutch (2005) defines case study as: "a study that focuses on a bounded object, usually a person, group, setting, or concept". Alternatively, 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 listed in Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Since this study aimed to explore deeply the experience of stakeholders in selected schools in Sri Lanka, it seems that the Simons' definition highlights very significant features that are relevant to this study.

According to the anecdotal evidence on the PSI and also the school management, the community participation in school decision making is different from school to school. In addition, appointing of the governing board members, particularly for the School Development Committees (SDC), a delegation of power, authority, and responsibility are not similar in each school. Therefore, it was assumed that the decision-making environment and also the experiences of the participants on community participation and decision-making process of schools may be different from school to school. So, the experiences of the SDC members of schools was very significant to understand the actual situation of the community participation in the schools. Therefore, the case study approach was well fitted in this study to investigate the real experiences of the participants on the phenomena.

2.3 Data collection

2.3.1 Interviewing

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 seems that the interview is a 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 (Punch, 2009). Various types of interviews are used in qualitative research. These are semi-structured, informal, and retrospective (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2001). Interpretive researchers believe and tend to prefer semi-structured and so-called open or unstructured interview (Willis, Jost, & Nilakanta, 2007). As this study projected to explore the experiences of the staff and the stakeholders, interviewing seemed as a suitable method for data collection, because, it was very useful for seeking particular experiences of the stakeholders of schools on school-community relationships and decision making in the Sri Lankan schools. Semi-structured interviews were administered to gather information from the principals, deputy principals and also from a selected number of teachers, parents and past pupils (40%) participated in this study. The interview protocol was included more open-ended questions for gathering rich data. All the participants provided rich information and explained their insights very freely during the interview time. Teachers, parents and past pupils were interviewed following the questionnaire survey. Interviews were conducted by the researcher with two research assistants, and it was spent about half an hour per single interview. All the interviews were conducted in Sinhala language and digitally recorded, and then transcribed them into text form. Once member checking process was completed, they were translated into English, and after that, it was analyzed them by using techniques of thematic analysis and descriptive statistical tools.

2.3.2 Documentation

According to Hodder (2000), 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 the spoken form, and ... texts endure and thus give historical insight" (p. 704). Atkinson and Coffey (2004) state that "documentary materials should be regarded as data in their own right" (p. 59). Documents were important, because, the nature of the PSI has more paperwork, and documents provided the formal framework for the PSI. The documents in this study were minutes of the SDC, SMC meetings, and school plans, policy statements, and PSI guidelines etc. Researcher personally attended to survey documents, which were most relevant to the PSI implementation. In addition, the information gathered through document survey was used to triangulating the data which was collected by the other instruments.

2.3.3 Questionnaire

In order to gather rich data, a questionnaire survey was also administered in this study. The data gathered from the questionnaire was used to triangulate the data, and it was very useful to enhance the accuracy of the data gathered through other data collection methods in this study. Therefore, the data gathered from the questionnaire survey was very useful to get a better understanding of school-community relationships and decision-making process of schools in this study. The data was collected from selected participants of schools in this study. In order to gather rich information from the participants, and also to provide more freedom to the participants in explaining their ideas liberally and freely, more open-ended questions were included in the questionnaire. For the purpose of collecting data from teachers, parents and past pupils, they were given questionnaires by the researcher personally and collected them in the same manner. Some questions were included in the questionnaire to gather personal information of the participants, and additionally, it was included more open-ended questions. Overall response rate of the questionnaire was about 90%, and the teachers' response rate for that was 100%. Especially, the researcher personally involved in the data collection process of this study.

2.4 Participants

The information was collected from the members of the governing boards of schools who have experienced on school community relationship and the decision-making process in the public schools. The participants in this study were selected from schools by using a purposive sampling technique. Best & Kahn (2006) suggest that the purposive sampling permits the researcher to choose the participants who provide the richest information. Respondents of this study represented ten government schools in the Colombo district. It shows in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample of the study

Participants	Number of Participants
Principals	10
Deputy Principals	10
Teachers	30
Parents	30
Past Pupils	30
Total	110

The principals, deputy principals, teachers, parents and past pupils on the school governing boards have a role in implementing the PSI system in their schools. They have valuable experiences since they have been implementing the PSI in their schools for more than ten years.

3 Findings and analysis

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) suggest that “qualitative researchers analyze and make meaning from the data, starting with specific data and ending with categories and patterns” (p. 367). Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analyzing strategy that starts with the data and pursues identifiable themes and patterns (Aronson, 1994). Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) suggest going over transcriptions of interview data, questionnaire and documents many times, and eventually, meaningful categories will emerge and then group the data into a few key ideas.

In summary, the participants in this study presented their experiences as their real-life stories, and those stories have been the research data in this study. Thematic analysis is one of the most common approaches in analyzing qualitative data (Bryman, 2001; Mutch, 2005) and it was considered as most appropriate method for analyzing qualitative data in this study. More qualitative data was used in this study, which has been gathered through interviews, questionnaires, and documents, and based on that information, it could be able to come to conclusions and also to made necessary recommendations.

It was revealed that the PSI has opened doors of schools for the community members to be involved in management activities, preparation of school plans and decision making in their schools. It appears that the PSI system has extended the authority of schools by empowering governing board members, so that, it has been increased gateways for community members in decision making in school. The MoESL expects to address community needs and maximize their satisfaction through more community participation in school affairs in implementing the PSI. However, it appeared that most PSI objectives of the MoESL have not yet been achieved, especially, the expected outcomes of the PSI, especially the community participation in school decisions and school management.

Community involvement in school decision-making process

The community representation on School Development Committee (SDC) seems to have been problematic in the schools of this study. The SDC is the main decision-making board of the schools where the PSI is being implemented. According to the guidelines and the instructions of the MoESL, all public schools in Sri Lanka are supposed to establish SDC, especially, in order to make school-level decisions with the participation of the representatives of their stakeholders. However, the measurement of community involvement in SDC provides an indicator of community involvement in decision making and budgeting. Even though the

MoESL has provided instructions, it seems that the selection of members for the SDC has not yet clearly been implemented in the majority of schools. Especially, it was observed that the community members of schools do not have sufficient knowledge of the selection procedures of SDC members. According to the majority of parents, past pupils and teachers (more than 60 %) principals make many influences to select members for the SDC, directly as well as indirectly in the majority of schools in this study. However, it was revealed that the 30% of schools have selected their SDC members in a democratic way. The majority of respondents (more than 60%) of schools confirmed the above state of the schools. A super democratic and genuine participatory decision-making process does not seem to have been materialized in most of the schools as expected by the MoESL. The SDC meetings are also not being held in a participatory manner in the majority of schools in this study. One teacher described: “*the external community involvement at the SDC meetings is only a formality for the purpose of legitimacy. In the most occasions, everything is prepared previously to the meetings by the principal with the internal members of SDC, and what is needed from the external community members of the SDC is their agreement and signatures*”. It is also worthwhile to note that, this teacher has perceived that the principal is dominant in the SDC meetings. The experience of the majority of teachers, past pupils, and parents (more than 60%) is also somewhat similar to the above statement. However, one school in this study reflects a different situation in the decision-making process of their school. As indicated by the majority of participants in that particular school, the principal has never influenced the selection procedures of the SDC members, and moreover, they appreciated the democratic approach which is being practiced by the principal in managing their school. However, as per Grauwe (2005) states, the pressure made by the local authorities or communities for more participatory decision-making process has generally been absent in developing countries. The boards of trustees of New Zealand schools were to be given wide-ranging power and authority, including the employment of staff, negotiation of industrial staff, and the full control of the agreements with the budget Longe (1988). Rose (2003) differentiates community participation in schools in Indonesia as ranging from genuine participation to pseudo-participation. One example, at the beginning of the implementation of the SBM in Alberta, Canada, there were no site councils (Caldwell, 1994), but then in the 1990s site councils were established, and they generally played an advisory role to the principal. In contrast, members of the governing boards of the schools in other countries play a very imperative role, and they have

more power in influencing school decisions. Education authorities in Australia face legislation transferring of significant powers to the community of SBM schools (De Grauwe 1999).

According to the information provided by the majority of respondents except for the principals (70% of parents, 60% of past pupils and 50% of teachers), only a half or less of the external SDC members are invited to attend SDC meetings, and mostly, there are always the same members in each time. Although in most occasions only a limited number of external SDC members attend SDC meetings, it was observed that the real situation in some schools is not as similar as other schools. As indicated by the principal, deputy principal and more than sixty percent of teachers of one school, the participation of external community members for the SDC meetings is more satisfactory. However, when they were interviewed, the majority of parents and past pupils (more than 60%) stated that the monthly SDC meetings are seen as a mechanism for informing and consulting with members of the SDCs on school decisions rather than as a mechanism for obtaining ideas for decision making. Even though, the principal previously designed the school's financial plan, it seems that at present, the SDC members have an opportunity to give their input for improving school financial plan. It is likely that, even though members should be in a position to bargain, the principal holds more power than they concern this decision. However, some schools (less than 30%) conduct their SDC meetings according to the guidelines and the instructions provided by their higher authorities.

One parent pointed out that, *"I think the SDC is important as a mediator between the school and the parents. For example, if the school asks for our financial contribution, we can count on the SDC to negotiate with the school so that the amount of the contribution is reasonable. It is impossible for us to negotiate directly with the school management as we are less powered than the school"*. It is evident that the parents have an understanding of the importance of the SDC and its necessity for defending their interests when they feel uncomfortable in approaching school management directly by their own. The majority of parents and past pupils (more than 80%) are also in the same attitude towards the SDC. It seems that this can be seen as a general attribute in the majority of schools in this study. According to the responses of 80 percent of parents, 70 percent of past pupils and 60 percent of teachers, the prevailing situation in the decision-making process in these schools is not much democratic as expected by the MoESL. However, the participation of the community members in the school decision-making process has slightly been increased following to the implementation of the PSI in schools. It was indicated by more than

80% of respondents in this study. However, the selection process of SDC members in these schools is inquisitive whether they are being selected according to the guidelines of the model.

Most of the schools and their local community members are empowered via the decentralization policy underpinned by the SBM (Daun, 2002). Empowering of school community members has become more apparent in many countries, and for instance, in the United States, Caldwell (1994) writes that in Dade County, Florida, devolving power from state governments to the district and then to school levels has been pursued because of the importance is given to teacher involvement in decision making. In New Zealand, school boards were re-empowered with the structural reform in 1989, when parents were given new responsibilities. This trend towards greater empowerment has also been evident in developing countries in Africa, Asia and Central America (Bray, 2000). It seems that the Sri Lankan model of SBM is slightly different than especially, the SBM models of some developed countries. Particularly, it was observed that the community involvement in school management and decision-making processes of schools in this study are not as similar as the other developed countries where the SBM is being implemented. It was able to identify some of the main reasons behind the above particular situation prevailing in the Sri Lankan schools, and especially, it was observed that the degree of community participation in school management and decision making is different from school to school.

Financial contribution of community members to their schools

One of the key findings of this study is that the overall exercise of community participation in school management and also their financial contribution to the schools have not significantly changed as a result of the implementation of the PSI policy regulations in Sri Lanka. The majority of schools (60%) have not paid enough attention to generating funds for school development, and they always depend on the parental support of their current students. A very few number of schools (30%) mostly generate funds from the external community members like past pupils and business organizations rather than depending on the parents of their current students. In addition, it was observed that some schools (less than 50%) have made efforts to generate funds in organizing various funds generating activities, such as organizing school fairs, carnivals, tick cards campaigns etc.

One past pupil stated: *"the nature of our participation is actually associated in contributing money to the school. Every time we are invited to meetings at the school, mostly, by the principal, what we are thinking*

about that is money and resources. Honestly, we think that the principal is going to explain us the financial condition of the school and asking us to do some arrangement for generating resources". Before the changes brought by the PSI, government schools used to collect money from external community members, especially from the parents and also from the past pupils. One principal noted: "so far, community participation is good in my school. They have been really supporting me since I first took on the position as a principal in this school. When I arrived in 2000, there was no an office to the principal. Then we planned everything, the community members and the School Development Society (SDS) took a meeting about this and decided that how much money must be contributed to this project by every community member. Every year in the recent past there was an improvement in school facilities; we built a low-cost office for the school and for the principal. All of these became possible as a result of the community participation and their maximum contribution. Especially, as per the implementation of the PSI project in my school, the community participation has slightly been increased. However, not even after the PSI project, earlier to that project, it had a good community participation in this school like today. But we did not have authority and encouragement like today, to collect funds from the community members, officially".

One principal of another school also confirmed the above statement. According to him, community participation had been quite good in terms of financial support for school facility improvements. During the interviews, almost all the parents reported that, prior to the implementation of the PSI, they have contributed schools by providing school facility fees and extra donations. It seems that the financial plans and strategies of schools which have been used for fund generation are different from school to school and sometimes from principal to principal. It was observed that there is a tendency, in which, the majority of schools (more than 60%) depend on the government funds and resources provided by the parents of current students.

The MoESL encourages schools to obtain voluntary parental contributions through the PSI implementation, in the meantime, at present, all types of unofficial or informal financial contributions have been banned by the MoESL. Similarly, the MoESL has instructed every school not to obtain parental financial contributions without their authorization except school facility fees. Most parents interviewed came to feel that since the government provides free education there is no obligation to contribute schools financially, and particularly most of them are not willingly participate school management activities. In addition, they feel that parents don't know much about the school finances since

they do not attend meetings and do not ask about financial information. This situation is rather different than the school-based management policy initiatives in other countries, the SBM in Indonesia has not provided national standards for school funding or finance in general (Sumintono, Mislán, & Said, 2012).

One parent described: "since the schools provide free education, there is no more parents' contribution for the schools. As a result, the parental involvement process in the school seems only one-way, and parental participation is stagnant. Parents cannot participate anymore".

The principals' view on parents' participation reflects the same picture: "since the schools provide free education, parents do not have a proper understanding of what happens at school anymore. They think that the government spends all for their children, so, there is nothing else to do. However, they are more concerned about school effectiveness and most parents encourage their children for good education, but this is not completely because of the PSI". However, as the government funds cover only a limited number of items, other costs become the responsibility of the individual school and also the parents of the students. Therefore, schools need to find resources, and that has become a big responsibility of school leaders. It seems that the majority of principals (60%) do not show their maximum enthusiasm in generating funds for school development. However, the majority of teachers and past pupils (more than 70%) of schools indicate that one of the success points of their schools is the capability of generating funds from well-wishers and also from external organizations. Especially, the teachers described that their real experience with regard to community participation in their schools, and, a teacher specifically mentioned that: "in my opinion, as a consequence of free education, parents act as, they do not have any responsibility for education of their children, so, they are not willing to pay for anything of school. When the school collects money or resources from the parents, some of them used to provide very less support. However, those types of parents rarely come to ask about the progress of their children". Since children are provided free school education, parents seem not care enough. They just demand the best in achievement for their children but do not want to sacrifice in terms of supporting schools financially. In contrast, Dimmock (1993) and Caldwell (1994) indicate that the School Based Management allows for greater mobilization of resources: parents and other stakeholders will be more eager to contribute to the funding of their school if they have a voice in the organization and management it. Overall, it appeared that the community support provides to the schools in financially is different from school to

school. Basically, it depends on the capability of school management, and the attitudes and the financial strength of the external community members of schools.

Challenges faced by schools

According to the responses made by a majority of principals and teachers (more than 60%), schools face challenges in finding resources for school development. One of the big issues is that the poor attitudes of the community members towards the development of schools and also on the participatory management. De Grauwe and others state that: “the transfer of responsibilities to the community and the staff of SBM schools involves challenges” (De Grauwe et al., 2005, p. 276). Moreover, they indicate that weak governments cannot be expected to develop accountability frameworks to counterbalance school autonomy or to provide support to schools. Therefore, they do not provide their maximum support to the school. Since most of the community members are not financially strong, the school has to find new ways in finding resources for school development. Some schools (60%) face challenges in selecting suitable, dedicated, committed and educated community members for their SDC. It seems that the majority of community members do not have a very good understanding on the PSI and the SBM. Therefore, they do not know how they can involve in school decisions. However, some members of the SDC have not been empowered to contribute their maximum potential for their schools. Kandasamy and Blaton (2004) indicate that, in many developing countries, only a minority of principals is well-trained professionals. De Grauwe (2005) and Gamage (1993) state that as increased pressure, especially in terms of time, may render it more difficult for women who also have domestic responsibilities to occupy such posts in SBM schools. Most of the staff members and external community members cannot spend their time appropriately in school activities as they have a heavy workload at their homes.

4 Recommendations and Conclusions

Results from this study suggest that prior to the implementation of the PSI, parents and most stakeholders were not likely to be involved directly in school management and school decisions. With the implementation of the PSI, parents' participation has been increased; however, it has not yet been improved up to the expected level of the MoESL. The introduction of the PSI to the schools in Sri Lanka appears to have altered significantly the roles of both the parents and the community members in the school planning and decision-making processes. Sri Lankan model of SBM appears to have mixed or blended characteristics of all other models of SBM. It seemed that the characteristics of SBM are different from school to school in Sri Lanka,

so similar pattern cannot be seen in every school throughout the country. Sri Lankan model of SBM includes some of the characteristics of each model of SBM, for instance, the administrative control model, the professional control model, the community control model and also the balanced control model of SBM. Therefore, the Sri Lankan model of SBM can be specified as ‘Blended model of SBM’ or ‘Mixed model of SBM’.

However, the active involvement of the school community within the SDC is likely to be lesser. Thus, the parents and the past pupils indicate as: the SDC plays an important role in maintaining a school-community relationship than earlier. Generally, parents and past pupils perceived that the SDC's bridge the gap between the external community members and the school. The school community is benefited by the mechanism of representation of the SDC since it is supported by such mechanism, community members are kept well-informed of the school activities, the learning process, facilities, teachers' improvements, etc. There is a kind of transparency as everything is being reported to the SDC.

Within the context of education decentralization through the PSI, community participation in school management, particularly regarding access to and control over financial resources, decision making, and challenges faced by the stakeholders were investigated in this study. Overall, the characteristics of community participation in the areas of financial contribution, decision making, attendance at the meetings, and control over financial resources have less been increased as the consequences of the PSI implementation. Moreover, it seems that the schools are unwilling to involve external community members may also lead to a lack of trust, since the trust is related to school openness and, therefore, it cannot be established if external community members' expectations for increased involvement fail to materialize.

It is vital to provide several opportunities for the community members to increase their involvement in setting school policy, participation in planning and decision-making of schools. Therefore, a very democratic style should be adapted to form SDC, selecting SDC and SMC members and conducting SDC meetings. Since the lack of awareness of stakeholders on the SBM and the PSI, at least, the SDC and the SMC members need to be provided such opportunities to participate effective awareness programmes on PSI/SBM. It may be beneficial if those programmes are organized by the higher-level education authorities, and in addition, it is essential to be established a better monitoring system or a governing board system at national level and provincial level to supervise schools where the PSI is being implemented. Those governing

boards may provide such inputs for the improvement of this PSI system and can make necessary recommendations and guidance for the benefit of the essential parties and stakeholders of the government schools in Sri Lanka.

5 Author's Biography

Author of this paper is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. He has completed his Ph.D. in Education. The author's first degree is B.Sc. Business Administration and his specialized area of research is Educational Management. He has published several journal papers and conference papers in Educational Management. The author is a practitioner, trainer, consultant, resource person in the field of Educational Management in Sri Lanka. He has been working as a resource person for several national level research projects conducted by the Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka. He is a resource person of various training and development programmes of the National Institute of Education, Sri Lanka. In addition, he is working as the supervisor of several Postgraduate, Masters and Ph.D. degree courses conducted by local and international private and public universities.

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