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Leadership Roles Played By School Principals: An Analysis of Cases

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Abstract
This research paper mainly focuses on the current practices of schools in Sri Lanka with regard to leadership and management roles of principals and the capacity of principals to perform the roles expected by the school community. Further, this explored how school leadership brought about improvements in student learning achievements and variations in the management tasks of school principals in relation to schools of different sizes and in different locations. The sample included 40 schools, which represented two media, the four school types and three of the provinces. Questionnaires, interviews and check lists were used to collect information from the principals, teachers, students and parents in the selected schools. The study revealed that the principals in the sample had considered their main role in line with the administrative responsibilities of the school. The best and worst cases were identified in relation to the expected leadership and management roles. It was revealed that the personality characteristics of principals such as commitment, dedication, confidence and motivation had overriding effects on the success of the schools.

Keywords: leadership roles, management, effectiveness, monitoring, supervision

INTRODUCTION

In Sri Lanka, the role of the school principal has been transformed as a result of the greater devolution of responsibilities to schools through different policies. School principals will increasingly be held accountable for the quality of learning outcomes of schools, resource mobilization and resource management, school quality monitoring and associated staff development programs. In order to fulfill those responsibilities, they may need to develop new management skills to work collaboratively and effectively with students, school management committees, teachers and school communities. This study focused on the expected management and leadership roles and capacities of school principals in Sri Lanka to perform those roles. A strong emphasis was placed on the instructional leadership roles of principals which concentrate on their abilities to set goals to raise school performance and student learning outcomes. The analysis of findings was matched to the competencies that were required to perform as effective school managers within the newly evolving policy context.

REVIEW OF PERTINENT LITERATURE

Previous research had identified three types of roles played by school principals namely the roles of an instructional leader, a transformational leader and a transactional leader (Burns, 1978; Bass & Avolio, 1996; Fullan, 2002). The capabilities of principals to perform such roles influence student learning outcomes aligned to school goals, school organizational structure and culture (Numkanisorn , B.N.P, 2003). Bass (1985) studied the effect of transformational leadership on individual followers and found that transformational leadership influences followers' lower level of values for higher values beneficial to the organization's collective effort. The research conducted by Heck (1992) revealed that once the environmental factors are controlled, the principals in elementary and high schools that are extraordinary high achieving as measured by constant academic achievement in a variety of curricular areas, may be substantially different from their counterparts in constantly low-achieving schools in terms of the type and effectiveness of leadership they provide.

A study of eight research projects from Singapore, Australia, Canada and the USA (Leithwood et.al, 1996) supported the view that transactional practices were necessary and associated with routine management whereas transformational practices were associated with their change of efforts. Jaufer (2001) indicated that the instructional leadership of the principal had both direct and indirect effects on students' achievement in Science when academic emphasis and teacher affiliation were taken into consideration. The main purpose of this research study was to investigate the current practices of school principals with regard to their performance of the main role as the manager and the chief administrator of the school and the three leadership roles identifies through the literature.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were identified as relevant to the main purpose of the study. To what extent are the school principals under study

- Managing and leading others (teachers, students, and parents/community) so that school plans and objectives are achieved?

- Promoting achievement of the school's mission, objectives and instructional goals
- Providing advice and guidance (e.g. promoting discussion of instructional issues, and participating in discussion/effects of instruction in achievement) to professional staff on educational issues?
- Emphasizing test results and analyzing student performance?
- Initiating and managing changes necessary for the development of the school?
- Preparing a budget for the school, using it to guide spending to improve learning achievement and present to the School Boards and parents, and
- Protecting school staff and students from external pressures

METHODOLOGY

Sample: The selection of the schools was based on a stratified sample of 40 government schools covering a range by medium, school size, school location and school type.

Table 1: Sample of the study

Province	Principals according to School type				
	1AB	1C	Type 2	Type 3	Total
Central	2	4	4	2	12
North central	2	5	2	1	10
Western	3	3	1	2	09
Sabarag amuwa	2	2	1	4	09
Total	9	14	8	9	40

Data Collection: Questionnaires were used to collect information about the capacities of principals from the principals themselves, and from teachers and students. In addition, interviews, focus group discussions and a checklist were used to collect meaningful data from parents and Directors of the selected provinces.

Data Analysis: Case study method was used along with narrative analysis and content analysis to analyze qualitative data collected in the study. Best and worst performers were selected mainly on the basis of the qualitative analysis on the basis of current practices in schools.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The findings are presented in line with the seven research questions. In order to limit the page numbers in only best cases are presented.

Managing and leading others

Two main areas were explored using the questionnaires and interviews:

i. Main role as perceived by school principals: The majority (47.4%) of the principals in the sample perceived their role as 'the management and leadership role'. Only 31.5% considered it as the total development of the school, which could be extended to roles such as instructional and transformational leadership roles. The main contributions of the school principal to school activities were also related to administration (36.8%) ,total management of the school (21.4%) and monitoring and supervision (18.4%). However, it was surprising to find out that 10.5% have narrowed down their contribution to 'preparation of the time table' which was normally considered to be a task of either the Vice principal or a senior teacher. No one had focused specifically on the 'instructional leadership' that is considered to be the main role of a school principal.

A substantial number of principals highlighted capabilities such as 'leadership skills' (18.4%) and 'managerial skills' (18.4%) as more relevant to their duties as principals. It was interesting to find out that some had referred to personal qualities such as 'dedication and hard work' (10.5%) as their strengths/ abilities.

ii. Roles performed by principals focusing on new developments in the school: Principals were also questioned about their opinion about the new developments in the school for further clarification of their roles. The responses of the principals were cross-checked with the answers of the assistant researchers, teachers, students and parents, wherever possible. The answers given by the principals are analyzed below under five sub areas:

Planning and organization of school activities: Many principals have referred to an annual plan. The following best two cases could be identified in relation to planning and organization of school activities.

Best Case (21S)- Annual Policy of the School

The principal developed and displayed a comprehensive document which included the mission of the school, details of the annual plan with some significant events happening in each month.

January 02 - Commencement of the new erm –court case for the land
09- Principals' meeting, discussion with eachers, 1.00 pm
10-Make our school friendly – Shramadana
12 - Admission of new students for grade 1
17 - Selection of student prefects
20 - Literature Club
25 - Girl Guides and Scouts
26 - Field Trip. English Grade 12, Geography Grade 7 ,
(This plan continued till December 8th)

Best Case (11C)- Annual policy of the School

In this school a small booklet has been prepared annually under the guidance of the principal to explain the School Plan. There the distribution of responsibilities among Deputy/Vice Principals and Sectional Heads are cited as follows:

Distribution of responsibilities among Deputy and Vice Principals

Deputy Principal Public examinations	Deputy Principal Policy, planning and internal supervision	Deputy Principal Educational development	Vice Principal In-charge of IT and school resource centre	Vice principal Planning and implementation of annual functions,
Seasons, Census, Free books, student ID, teachers salaries, internal supervision of religious activities	School time table, class record books, registers, new student admissions, supervise 5-8 systems, School examination	Quality input, supervision of examinations, student welfare and school calendar, AL projects	Facility fees, It account and supervision	Prefects Board, censes, Collage phi

The background of the above two schools and qualifications and training of the two principals were quite different though, proper planning and organization of school activities have facilitated the smooth functioning of those schools. All teachers, students and parents who took part in the study appreciated the manner in which that the activities were organized within the two schools and they wanted to work with the school authorities in the future also.

Management of the school curriculum: The following is an exceptional example of the satisfactory implementation of the common curriculum in a school In this case, the principal has managed to maintain a balance between the common curriculum and extra-curricular activities of the school leaving more opportunities for students for their total development.

Best Case (21S)- Management of the school curriculum

One of the most innovative features of the school was related to subject months (months are dedicated to subjects) under which all the activities of the school have been implemented and the example is given below.

Subject Months

This is a special programme implemented by the principal. In 2006 and 2007 months have been named as follows:

2006		2007	
February	Aesthetic	February	Aesthetic
March/ April	Technical sub. and Religion	March	Technical subjects
		May	Religion
May/ June	Sinhala/ literature	June	Mathematics
July/August September	Mathematics	July	Sinhala/ Literature
	Science/ Environmental and PT	September	Social studies history/ Civics
October	English/ Tamil	October	English/ Tamil
November/	Social studies/ history/ Civics	November	Science

© Management of resources

As the primary data has revealed, lack of resources is a common problem among a large number of schools under the study. However, there were cases where the facilities were expanded only because of the dedication and commitment of the principal. There was one school which is supported by a foreign agency/school as well.

Best case (21S)- Management of resources

This is the same case where a proper planning and organization of activities and proper management of the curriculum could be observed**.**

According to the information collected, this school is presently having problems with limited physical facilities. However, as reported by the assistant researcher as well as teachers and students in the school the principal has looked at the best possible means to improve facilities in the school.

The principal was able to secure support from the Mayor of Kegalle, to buy eight computers, and the Chief Minister, Sabaragamuwa Province, to build a new building, the School Development Committee to build a playground, the Forest Department to develop a plant nursery, Thorner School, England, to get sophisticated equipment for primary classes and so on.

(d) Management of students

The management of students was mostly done by engaging them in different activities of the school. Ten Principals mentioned about class monitors/prefects whereas four mentioned about leadership training. However, Subject months in Case 21 S was one of the most useful strategies identified in this study where students worked hand in hand with the teachers to complete the tasks allocated to them. The second case was related to procedures streamlined for the smooth functioning of day to day activities of the school.

Best Case (21S)- Management of students

This is the same case where planning, organization and management of school curriculum had a very good status. In this school, there were committees such as the Prefects Committee, Discipline Committee, Safety Committee, Health Committee etc to look after different activities of the school:. The activities of these committees are streamlined and supervised by the principal. For example, the Discipline Committee assesses the overall performance of students in each class and recommends them for different awards

Subject months (Months are dedicated to different subjects)

There is a "school policy' published in each year in which the subject months are indicated and instructions have been given for both teachers and students to plan activities in relation to each subject and get the approval from the Deputy Principal in advance.

(e) **Management of staff**

There are a number of procedures enforced by the principals to manage the staff in their schools. Allocation of responsibilities in writing was the most popular approach followed by the principals (9).The following case (Case 21S) is exceptional when compared with all the principals in other schools who had given the opportunity for best performers to act for the principal for a specified period of time.

Best Case (21S)- Management of staff

Middle level management- Those who have taken less than 15 days leave for the previous year have been given an opportunity by the principal to work as the principal for a one-week period.

Overall responsibilities-There are specific responsibilities allocated for each and every teacher in the school. According to 2007 documents one teacher has been allocated at least three responsibilities which were reviewed annually.

Class teachers-Two teachers are appointed to each class, one as the class teacher and the other as the support teacher. Both are involved in designing and conducting the activities in their class. As a result, no disturbance will occur for the continuity of the activities of the class when one wants to take leave.

Teachers taking leave-With regard to teachers' leave, those who have not taken leave will be praised in front of all the teachers and the teacher who has taken least number of leave will be selected at the end of each year. As the first thing in the morning, the Deputy Principal will make arrangements for relief periods if both teachers (Class teacher and support teacher) are absent on a particular day.

Late attendance of teachers-A very effective strategy to control late attendance is implemented by this school. For example, teachers who are late once or two times will be given an additional responsibility that should be performed before the school starts. The researchers who have visited the school were able to see how these strategies continueeven after the tenure of this principal.

Promoting achievement of the school's mission, objectives and instructional goals

It was clearly evident that good leadership (administrative) promotes the achievement of school vision/mission and instructional goals in many different ways. Especially in four schools where 5S system was successfully implemented, principals, teachers and students were well aware of the school vision/mission and they were displayed in different places in the school, documented, distributed and discussed at different staff and student meetings. The rest of the schools have been focusing on the improvement of student performance at public examinations irrespective of their missions/visions set as long term goals. In schools where no annual plans and no proper organization of activities were evident, achievement of school mission could be considered as an unattained task.

Best Case (16C)- Promoting school vision, mission, objectives and instructional goals

The vision of the school is to "make my ideas ours" and implement "5S" concept effectively. The vision and mission statements are very prominently displayed in the school at various places and in every classroom. The internal school supervision programme is conducted very systematically with the assistance of the Supervision Board in line with the short-term and long term objectives of the school.

The principal has taken leadership in implementing the 5S system in this school. Under the PSI programme this school has introduced a number of projects related to value education, environment, co-curricular activities, student performance and communication system.

Providing advice and guidance to staff on educational issues and monitoring and supervising them

Providing advice and guidance to staff: A good instructional leader should be able to maintain a continuous dialogue with the teachers about instructional issues. In this study it was revealed that principals mostly discuss with their teachers (13) and Subject Heads (10) about the instructional matters. A substantial number of principals are having discussions with teachers and subject heads only once a month. Those discussions might have focused on such issues in a more general manner.

As the teachers explained, there are three types of discussions conducted by the principals with his teachers which are directly related to their leadership styles: democratic, authoritative and laisser-faire. The following case can be considered as a best example for a democratic leader who appreciates others' views and involvements in the discussion.

Best Case (11C)- Providing advice and guidance to staff

The principal introduces himself as a democratic leader and tries to practice participatory decision making. According to teachers he is always ready to listen to them and take a collective decision about crucial matters. Teachers also confirmed that everybody is given freedom to carry out their responsibilities. According to some teachers,

- Clear and good quality support and advice given by the principal to teachers on an individual basis
- Freedom given to teachers to continue their work
- Distribution of work and close monitoring

are some of the positive characteristics of the school management.

All parties believe that there is a friendly atmosphere developing among students, teachers and administrators in the school.

Impact of discussions on teachers: Different types of discussions may have different implications on teachers. The data revealed, that there is direct impact on improving quality of teaching (47.5%) and on personality development of teachers (19.9%). From the point of view of students, such discussions led to an improvement of their achievement (29.4%) and confidence (19.9%) in an indirect manner through the improvements that take place in teachers (Table 5.9).

Monitoring and supervision within the school: Good leaders always look for effective ways of improving the existing conditions of the teaching-learning process. However, they should be aware of the problems that will crop up in order to avoid any negative implications that might arise on both children and students. The most popular suggestion is to supply relief work (29.5%) but it is relevant only for the schools that are having problems with the resources. As shown in Table 5.11, monitoring and supervision (23.9%) might be a good solution for teacher absenteeism (19.9%), negative attitudes of teachers (14.8%) and unhealthy environment (23.9%).

Emphasizing test results and analyzing them for improvement

Principals were asked to comment on the progress received in respect of the public examinations during his tenure and their answers were cross checked with the records available in the schools. According to Table 5.12, the majority (32.4%) related their answers to the progress received by the school in different areas. Some focused on increasing numbers (23.9%) and increasing the results (19.9%). It was quite clear that some school have achieved a substantial progress in different areas. The following two cases are reported to support this idea.

Best Case (21S)- Using results for the improvement of the school

The school promotes the total development of students by introducing a number of projects.

Selection of Golden Children: From Grade 1-11 one student each will be selected at the end of each week to be named as the Golden child and their names will be recorded in the Golden Book maintained by the school. The students who have behaved well, who have shown a significant improvement in his/her capabilities, who have supported in the functioning of the school, who have helped others to overcome their difficulties etc will be selected as Golden Children and will be awarded a badge to wear for that particular week.

Students are encouraged to participate in a number of extra curricular activities which would support the achievement of the school mission. ST Johns , Red Cross, Scouting, Guiding, sports, School Band, Subject Clubs, PT and the contacts and exchanges with Thorner School, England are only a few of those activities.

In order to increase student performance in examinations the following procedures are adopted.

Literacy promotion programme, Mathematics promotion programme, English Promotion Programme with the support from Thorner School, England and some special programmes for those who have some learning difficulties

A large number of principals agreed that there is a clear relationship between the school improvements (58.4%) and student progress and the discussions on these issue had a direct impact on improving student achievement substantially (53.4%) .

The discussions with students and teachers lead to substantial improvement of student achievement (53.4%) There are three main procedures used by principals to monitor progress of teachers and students as indicated in Table 6. The most prominent procedures are the tests/marks and CA. It was revealed that the examination results are mainly used to analyse student performance and give necessary feedback and also to inform parents (23.9%) and identify remedial measures (19.9%). Only a limited number of principals said that they assess results by comparing them with the instructional objectives (12.2%). At in-depth interviews principals explained the monitoring procedure applied in their schools. The data further revealed that in the schools with a large number of students and teachers, and in schools where PSI and Navodya programmes are implemented, principals are forced to implement a monitoring mechanism. In schools where 5S method is used, monitoring is an embedded mechanism to achieve overall objectives. The cases given below illustrate some exemplary mechanisms followed by the principals. The commitment of the principal to be involved in the monitoring and supervision process was clearly seen in the best cases reported in this study. In places where the principal cannot be directly involved due to the large number of students and activities, a systematic procedure has been implemented to monitor the activities of teachers and students.

Initiate and manage changes necessary for the development of the school

With regard to the next sub-objective of the study, data collected through interviews, questionnaires and check lists were analysed to identify the performance of principals as transformational leaders. It was very clear that the principals who had performed well in their administrative functions and roles related to instructional leadership were able to create a positive change in their schools and teachers, students and parents admitted it very strongly. Only the cases where a substantial change in the school development could be seen are reported here. The worst cases reported here are either focusing on routine matters which cannot be considered as innovations or where no information was given by teachers, students and parents about the innovative changes introduced to the school.

The following changes may have had a strong impact on the total development of the school in relation to the cases under study.

1. 5S method
2. Awards schemes for students and teachers
3. Subject months
4. Programmes such as value education, meditation etc
5. Decentralization of responsibilities among teachers and students
6. Production Room
7. Changes made in the student discipline procedures
8. Changes made in the attitudes of teachers, students and parents

Best Case (21S) – Initiate and manage changes

5S concept, Nutrition programme, Subject Months, Golden Children, Literacy Programmes, Environment Protection Programmes (Herbal Garden, Plant Nursary, prohibition of Polythine and Sugary items), Walagamba Thorner Club are some of the innovative changes introduced by the Principal. Below given are the views of teachers, students and parents with regard to those changes.

"Our principal is an asset to us. He is the driving force for our innocent children who are unable to enter in to a popular school" (Parents)

"Our principal always discusses with us when he wants to introduce a new project in the school. So he gets the cooperation form everybody" (Parents)

"Our principal tries to be an example for us. He is committed and devoted to the school activities. He is a perfect leader" (A teacher)

"If he finds litter on the ground he calls both students and teachers whoever close by, shows it and then collects it by himself. This procedure led others to be more careful about the environment" (A teacher)

"Our principal is dedicated to improve the school environment. He himself takes part in different activities to encourage us" (Students)

Preparing a budget for the school and presenting it to the school boards and parents

There are certain circulars that the principals should follow in preparing the annual budget for the school. With the decentralization of responsibilities to schools under Navodya and PSI programmes some selected schools get physical and financial resources from the line ministry or provincial ministries. Therefore it is important that the resources are used in an effective manner aligned to the mission, vision and instructional goals of the schools. The principals in leading schools produce an annual budget and report about student progress to School Development Board/ School Development Society. In addition, as students and parents revealed, there is continuous dialogue between the school and parents regarding the performance levels of students through out the year.

Protecting school staff and students from external pressures

Only a small number of principals reported about the external pressures towards the smooth functioning of the schools. The external pressures were mainly coming form politicians, religious groups and some anti-social groups. Parents expressed their satisfaction on those who have overpowered the politicians with the support of teachers and parents. The best case and worst case is reported to illustrate how the principals have been successful in facing such challenges.

Best Case (21S) – Protecting school staff and students

It appeared that the principal has an in-born ability to develop relationships with all the stake holders. Due to his friendly nature and the strong personality he manages to get the support form others to improve the facilities of the school. The following are views expressed by teachers, parents and students.

"He never criticizes us in front of outsiders. Always tries to give feedback individually. He is very friendly and responsive." (A teacher)

"He knows us by name and always wishes a very good morning when he sees us. We can discuss any problem with him" (Students)

"He maintains a very good relationship with us. He always respects us and tries to develop our confidence" (Parents)

Assistant Researcher also commented that "his strong personality, determination, commitment, instructional leadership and friendliness are the specific characteristics that contributed to make him a good manager"

CONCLUSIONS

In this study, the management and leadership roles of principals were analyzed in relation to seven different aspects. The majority of the principals in the sample have focused on the traditional management and administration roles as the main role performed by them. The strong focus on managerial and leadership skills as their special abilities further supported the idea that these principals are mainly concerned about their transactional leadership roles. New developments initiated by the principals as transformational leaders were in aligned to the five main areas namely planning and organization of school, management of curriculum, managing staff, students and resources. The principals who have experienced success in performing their transitional leadership roles were more experienced than others, had been trained in a foreign country and had a genuine desire and commitment for developing their schools.

Only a very few principals have taken necessary steps to promote vision, mission and objectives of their schools by increasing awareness of school community and involving them in school development activities as instructional leaders as the best case and the worst cases demonstrate.

It was revealed that the democratic leadership provided by some principals has created a very friendly and trouble free environment in some schools for both teachers and students. The focus on total development of students by these principals is very minimal. However, there are some exemplary procedures adopted by the best performers to strengthen different abilities of students other than subject-related abilities. The evidence supports the idea that only some principals take necessary action to protect school staff and students from external pressures. Finally, it could be concluded that the strong personality characteristics of principals such as commitment, dedication, confidence and motivation have overriding effects on the success of the schools. Further, there is a striking balance and a strong linkage between different aspects of leadership and management roles among the principals who have performed better than the others.

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