Shifting the Principal's Role as Manager to that of an Academic Leader: Case of Sri Lanka

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Abstract—**The study was undertaken in order to identify how the school principal's managerial role has shifted to that of an academic leader. Twelve principals and two hundred and twenty five teachers were selected from four types of schools in the Sri Jayawardenepura educational zone, Colombo district of Sri Lanka. The selection of school principals and teachers was done randomly. Data for the study were mainly collected through a questionnaire. It was executed among principals and teachers. Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted to gather more descriptive data. The study revealed that principals were aware that their role has changed from manager to that of an academic leader. Though the principals were aware of their leadership role, in most instances they tended to exist as a managerial administrator than an academic leader. As an academic leader, principals tended to be more democratic and participatory leaders. Principals in type 3 and type 2 schools were considered as democratic leaders compared to principals in 1AB and 1C schools. Teachers do expect principals to be democratic leaders than managerial administrators. It was revealed that all the principals were interested in enhancing the effectiveness of the school. In order to improve the quality in education, principals have followed a number of steps as a practice. Though the principals consider themselves as democratic leaders, this study has brought out evidence that principal's responses and teacher responses were not in agreement.**

Index Terms—**Academic leader, leadership style, school principal.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Education in Sri Lanka has a long history which dates back two millennia. The academic structure of the country was such that it was well organized and simple as Gurugrdara-village school, Pirivena- temple school, Mahaviharaya-higher education institute. Basic education was provided by the "Gurunnanse" village teacher. Secondary and Tertiary education was based on temples where the monks took the leadership role in education. This education was efficient enough for the smooth function of society. Colonial expansion since 1505 changed the traditional education system eventually. The beginning of the modern schooling system in Sri Lanka was begun by the British based on the recommendations of the Colebrook Commission in 1836.

The introduction of the British school system was based on the education introduced by the Portuguese and Dutch. Later the British school system introduced, was powerful enough to be continued until today. The "Head Master" was the key figure in the school. He was the one who was responsible for the smooth functioning of academic and administrative functions of the school. The social, economic and political changes made the designation "Head Master" to that of "Principal" in the school.

Since the 1990's, decentralization with the devolution of authority and responsibility to individual schools become a special phenomenon that is spreading to almost all school around the globe [1]. These changes had an impact on changing the administrative procedures in Sri Lankan schools. Within the Sri Lankan context the principal was considered a managerial administrator. In the recent past, this was highlighted as the parliament of Sri Lanka passing an act in 1991, The National Education Act, No 19 of 1991. Consequent to the act, The National Education Commission (NEC) was set up the same year. Its main function was to make policies which ensured the maintenance of good quality and management in education. The General Education Reforms of 1997, emphasized the need to give greater responsibility to the school to manage itself with the help to the school community. Further Reforms in 1997 suggested that School Based Management (SBM) be adopted to make schools function more effectively [2], [3]. Based on the Reforms of 1997, the NEC identified School Based Management as the key strategy for the improvement of schools in their own capacity and recommended its implementation. This was a major change which took place in the school administration within Sri Lanka.

When implementing the SBM project the school principal was to be given authority and power through devolution. This made the principal responsible for the management of the school towards the achievement of its goals. This made the principal the key figure in decision making within the school. This helped principals to perform more as administrative managers than leaders. Further, the principal's management skills were enhanced to make SBM a success.

The principals role has been transformed considerably. Traditionally, the principal resembled a middle manager. Today, we consider the school principal as an academic leader. The draft proposal of the New Education Act for General Education in Sri Lanka emphasizes, that principals face the challenge of understanding and reorienting themselves from management to leadership [4]. Different research findings are in line with this view [5], [6].

This study focuses on how the principal's managerial role has transformed in to that of an academic leader within the school community. Strong emphasis was placed on the leadership styles performed by them when they interacted within the school community as an academic leader.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

"Management" and "Leadership" are two important functions, but they have different purposes and they seek to achieve different outcomes. Drucker explain, as, "Management is a function, a discipline, a task to be done; and managers are the professionals who practice this discipline, carry out the functions, and discharge these tasks" [7]. Further, Stroner & Freeman explain, "Management - a process of planning, organizing, leading and controlling the work of organizational resources to reach stated organizational goal" [8].

Management and Leadership are two concepts mostly discussed in the literature. Northouse explains leadership as , " a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" [9]. When we consider the two concepts, in a simpler manner we could identify the difference between the two. The key function of a leader is to establish the vision of the organization. The leader's main task is to reach the expected vision by influencing the followers. The main function of a manager is to implement the vision. The manager and subordinates act in ways that constitute the means to achieve the state end [10].

In the contemporary world it is identified that the principal's management role has been changed to that of an academic leader. Many research findings in different school contexts have shown how the principal's role has changed to that of an leader [11]-[13].

In the school context it is said, " to very greater extent the success of a school depend upon its' principal. He is the leader and he must be prepared to give the lead. If he is keen, lively and conscientious his example will be followed... first of all then principal must be very high standards. He must insist on only the best, both in work and behaviour, from everyone and because he himself strives to live up to high standards. He will find that, with encouragement, the rest of the school will follow where he leads" [14].

The principals management functions and leadership capacity are mostly interrelated. However, the day to day management of the schools becomes the liability of the school principal and principal represent the most important character in the school community. Moreover, the principal should be prudent enough to attract the stakeholders towards his leadership. In the Hand Book for Principals (1986) of Sri Lanka has emphasized how principal should behave in the school community in order to get support to his leadership [15].

The importance of the leadership style adopted by principals in order to reach the expected vision of the school has been identified. Leadership style is the manner and approach to providing direction, implementing plans, and motivating people. Reference [16]-[20] are research conducted in different school context which have explained the powerful impact of the leadership style performed by the principal towards school development.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The following objectives were identified as relevant to the main purpose of the study.

- Examine the principal's self perception of one's role as manager and a leader
- Examine how principals perform as a leaders
- Identify the problems faced by principals when functioning as leaders
- Identify how teachers have view their principal as a leader
- Identify what is expected by the teachers from their principals as leaders

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. The Sample

The stratified random sampling method was used in selecting the schools sample. From a population of 94 schools in the Sri Jayawardenepura educational zone, 12 schools were selected. These school represented four types[1] of schools, namely 1AB, 1C, type2 and type3. The selected sample consisted of 12 principals and 225 teachers.

B. Data Collection

Questionnaires were the main instrument of data collection. They were executed among principals and teachers. The questionnaire was of three parts. Part A captured the general information, Part B consisted of direct statements to be selected from a five-point *Likert* scale. Part C, consisted of open-ended questions. Interviews were conducted with all principals and focus group discussion were carried out with twenty five percent of teachers in the sample, in order to get more descriptive data. All instruments were in line with research objectives.

C. Analysis of Data

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to tabulate data and simple descriptive statistical techniques were used to analyze and was presented using percentages and graphs. Data obtained through open-ended questions and interviews were analyzed qualitatively.

V. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The results revealed that all principals were aware of that they had to perform their role as an academic leader within the school community. But, the results show that they failed to understand and differentiate their functions as a leader from that if a managerial administrator. Though the principals were aware of leadership, they admit that in most instances they are mainly involved in the managerial functions of the school. This finding was supported by research findings of reference [5], [6] and [11] which explains that a large number of principals perceive their role in relation to managerial functions of the school.

As an academic leader, a substantial number (83%) of principals were interested in improving their relationship with the school community. In order to become a successful leader

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[1] 1AB / Schools with Science stream in G.C.E. Advance Level.
1C / Schools without Science stream in G.C.E. Advance Level.
Type 2 / Schools up to Grade 11
Type 3 / Schools up to Grade 5

within the school community, principals were aware that it was important to have a positive relationship with the school community. Because of this they were interested in reorienting themselves to being an academic leader. But the results revealed that a majority of principals prefer to continue their functions as an administrative manager than an as academic leader. Further, principals prefer to maintain their authority and maintain a distance with the school community. In some instances, they believe that such a distance will help them to maintain the smooth function of the school. This finding was in line with a research findings of reference [11].

It was revealed that the principal's behaviour changes according to the school type. Principals in 1AB and 1C schools performed a more administrative role than that of an academic leader. These schools were considerably large schools compared to type 2 and type 3 schools. 1AB and 1C schools were considered as respectable schools or "Big schools" in society. There the administrative structure is decentralized and personal relationships are restricted due to the existing system. Teachers' personal as well as official relationship with the principals was restricted because of the administrative decentralization of the school. Compared to the other three types of schools, principals in 1AB schools seemed busiest personnel's. They are kept busy engaging in and catering to the needs of the higher authorities in the field of education. As such, most of the administrative and academic activities were conducted by the Deputy principals, Assistant principals and Sectional heads. Their busy schedules distance them from personal relationships with the majority. Principals in Type 2 and type 3 maintained much closer relationship with the teachers and the school community in both personal and official matters.

With regard to leadership aspects, principals believed that they perform well as leaders. The study revealed that instructional leadership of principal helped in the smooth functioning of the school. Coordination between the staff, curriculum development, focusing on learning, were considered by the principals with greater care with the help of other officials in the school. This finding is in line with a research findings of reference[6]. Moreover, principals in the sample practiced a democratic leadership style in most instances. The study revealed that the principals in type 2 and type 3 schools practiced greater democratic strategies compared to 1AB and 1C school principals. Further, it was revealed that the leadership style of the principal changes according to the existing context and situation. Principals agreed that they practised autocratic and *laissez-faire* leadership styles in some instances. This finding was in line with a research findings of reference [21]. Teachers also agreed that they had identified the democratic leadership of their principal as well as their autocratic and *laissez-faire* leadership style in different situations. The focus group discussion with the teachers revealed that they did not expect principals to change their leadership style. Further, teachers expect principals to be democratic all the time. It was identified that the teachers believed, that their principals were better managers than academic leaders.

Teachers are the largest professional body in the school. As academic leaders, principals were conscious of empowering

the teachers in order to maintain the quality of the school. To achieve this, principals have followed a number of ways and means as a practice. Table I explains the steps taken by the principals.

TABLE I: STEPS TAKEN BY PRINCIPALS

Steps taken by principals	Principal response (%)	Teacher response (%)
Encouragement	100	70
Provide job security	100	65
Discussions	91	66
Help professional development	75	72
Equality	66	47

The principals try to provide democratic leadership in order to enhance teacher satisfaction. Responses in table I revealed that the principals' responses and teachers' responses were not in agreement. Though the principals believed that they practiced a democratic process with regard to empowering the teachers, the teachers have not perceived it in the same manner as principals.

Table II indicates the steps taken by teachers when interacting with the existing leadership of principal.

TABLE II: STEPS TAKEN BY TEACHERS

Steps taken by teachers	Teacher response (%)
I follow the formal procedure	70
I point out the options and gain what I want	68
Somehow I achieve what I want	58
I Negotiate	54
I get things done through discussion	50
I do the right thing according to my wish	42
My desire is to get a transfer	45

A majority of the teachers (70%) tend to follow the formal procedure to obtain what they need on their own. The study revealed that a substantial number of teachers (45%) were not satisfied with the leadership of the principal and they expressed their desire to get a transfer to another school because of job dissatisfaction.

From the sample 50% of the principals belong to the age group of 50 to 60. A majority (75%) of principals were qualified with a Bachelors or Post Graduate Degree. As a principal, 92% of principals have obtained the opportunity of participating in a short term or long term leadership training. But, 8% of the principals remain in the system without proper training. It was further revealed at the interviews, that their experience as a teacher and Deputy principal have helped them to perform as a leader. But they were more interested in participating in leadership programmes that dealt with updated leadership procedures.

TABLE III: PROBLEMS FACED BY THE PRINCIPALS

Problems faced by the principals	Principals response (%)
Regard to the teaching learning process	100
School administration	91
Official/Political interference	91
Interference of parents	66
Teacher discipline	33

When performing as a leader principals do face different problems in the school community. The problems faced by the principals are shown in the Table III.

As mentioned in the table III, all principals face problems in teaching the learning process and they were confident enough to solve them in a positive manner. The results show that the majority of the problems they face are related to the managerial functions of an administrator. They were unhappy with the interference of the Official/Political personnel towards their leadership functions. They tolerate it in silence as it is common to all of them.

The following table explains the steps taken by the principals to overcome the existing problems.

TABLE IV: PROBLEM SOLVING STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY THE PRINCIPAL

Steps by the principal	Principal response (%)
Discuss with relevant party	100
Guidance and Counseling	83
Negotiation	75
Discuss with other principals	75
Seek advice from higher officials	16

Responses in table IV explain that principals practiced a democratic leadership style in order to address the problems that arose. The first three steps indicate that the principals try to solve problems within his/her leadership capacity. When things were critical, principals seek help from their colleagues and higher authorities. At the interview it was revealed that, with regard to disciplinary matters and financial problems, principals tend to seek the advice of external authorities.

A majority of the teachers in all school types have identified their principals as democratic and participatory leaders. But, they were aware of the autocratic and laissez-faire leader ship style of their principal as well. Principals rigid managerial decisions have created job dissatisfaction among teachers.

TABLE V: TEACHER SATISFACTION

Problem face by teachers	Principals response	
	Satisfactory (%)	Unsatisfactory (%)
Teaching learning process	78	12
Problems among student, parents and teachers	70	9
Problems among teachers	60	18
Adequate help to complete the given task	57	10
Problems in professional development	49	21
Interest in solving personal problems with mutual understanding	12	-

In order to improve their job satisfaction, they expect principals to be more democratic and participatory leaders in all the time. Further they were not supportive for the autocratic and *laissez-faire* leader ship style of their principal

as well. However the focus group discussion revealed that about 30% of the teachers believed that the principals were unconcerned and biased. Specially with regard to taking leave for academic or personal purposes or, when attending professional development programmes principals cater in different manners. This finding was supported by research findings of reference [22] and [23].

The study revealed that teachers face a number of constrains within the school community. In order to overcome their problems they needed to seek the help of their principal. Table V illustrates teachers satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the steps taken by the principal in order to solve their problems.

Table V illustrates that the majority of teachers were satisfied with the response shown by the principal in order to solve their problems. This reveals in most instances that principals act as democratic leaders. But a small number of teachers were dissatisfied with how principals responded to their problems. The principals are constrained in getting involved in the personal problems of the teachers. It is significant that none of the teachers were dissatisfied with how principals help to solve their personal problems. At the forces group discussion it was revealed that principals had helped teachers to solve their medical problems, problems with their children and family and financial matters. All teachers were aware of such instances and appreciated the principal's involvement in crucial situations. However, at the interview it was revealed that principals were very careful when attending to personal matters of teachers. They were aware that their involvement may be interpreted by the school community and others in the wrong way.

Teachers expect principals to be democratic leaders all the time. The principal's positive leadership behavior helps to enhance teachers' loyalty, job satisfaction and performance in the teaching process. This finding is in line with a research findings of reference[5]. Table VI shows what is expected by the teachers from their principal as an academic leader.

TABLE VI: TEACHER EXPECTATIONS

Teachers expectations	Teacher response(%)
Continue to help in professional development	98
Act independently	90
Appreciate teachers	89
Trust the teachers	80
Principal should improve professionally qualifications and leadership skills	78
Provide professional guidance when needed	65
Discuss, Be patient and improve listening skills	60

The table above explains that teachers expected principals to be more democratic as academic leaders. Teachers expect principals to lend a helping hand in their career development. A majority of them expect principals to be independent, trust the teachers and appreciate what is being done by them. In addition, a substantial number of teachers (78%) expect principals to enhance their professional qualifications and leadership skills further. The focus group discussion revealed

that teachers desire to work under the leadership of a qualified and democratic principal.

VI. Suggestions

The following suggestions are made in order to improve the existing situation.

- Professional development programmes conducted for principals should pay a special attention to enhancing positive leadership styles among principals.
- Create awareness among principals on the importance of participating in leadership training programs/ professional development programmes, regularly in order to enhance their professional abilities.
- Financial support should be given to uplift their personal life. Such action will directly help principals to perform well as leaders.
- Encourage researchers to conduct more research on the leadership of principals.
- The relevant authorities should focus their attention on what the research finding are and implement suggestions made by the researchers in an appropriate manner.

VII. Conclusion

This study, examines how the principal's role has changed from that of a manager to one of an academic leader in the school community. A majority of the principals in the sample tended to be more a manager than a academic leader in most instances. As leaders they tended to be democratic and participatory leaders in most instances. Further, they were aware that flexibility in leadership style is needed in order to be a success as a leader. Particularly, special emphasis is on democratic and the participatory leadership style against autocratic and *laissez-faire* leadership styles. In practice principals have followed different leadership styles according to the context and situation.

Acknowledgment

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