

## Developmental Strategies Used by Principals to Develop Small Schools in Sri Lanka: A Case Study

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### Abstract

The demand for most under privileged small government schools in Sri Lanka is being decreased rapidly. However, there are very few exceptions and very good example for that in Sri Lanka. This study used a case study approach to study about those schools, and this study is qualitative nature. Three schools were selected purposively and interviews, observations and documents surveys used to gather data. Thematic analysis used to analyze data. Findings of this study very important and anybody can use those findings to develop their small schools. These principles has applied principles and theories of management correctly as change agents; work depending on the "attitudes and quality first" philosophy. They utilize their foreign experiences and charismatic leadership depending on one aim, one dream and have used open door policy to develop their school up to better standard. Personality, educational and professional background, positive attitudes, management and leadership skills, networking, commitment, excellent communication skills, genuine shared leadership, understanding of rules and regulations, outstanding marketing strategies, charismatic leadership of the leaders directly affect for the successfulness of these schools.

**Key Words:** Effective Principals, Charismatic Leadership, Open Door Policy, Small Schools

### 1. Introduction of the research topic

This study investigated the strategies used by the principals of the small government schools to develop their schools in Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka, more than 9000 government schools were functioning in 2011. Table 01 shows some key information about school education in Sri Lanka.

**Table 01- Salient Features of school Education in Sri Lanka**

Item	2010	2011
Schools	10,502	10,527
Government schools	9,685	9,714
National schools	340	342
Other schools	817	813
Private Schools	98	97
Pirivena	719	716
Students	4,120,000	4,150,000
New Admissions	333,000	330,000
Teachers	225,000	229,000
Student/Teacher Ratio (Government Schools)	18	18
Total Govt. Expenditure on Education (Rs. billion)	104.2	121.3
Current Expenditure (Rs. billion)	85.2	99.00
<b>Capital Expenditure (Rs. billion)</b>	<b>19.00</b>	<b>22.30</b>

Source: Central Bank Sri Lanka (2011) & Ministry of Education, SL (2011)

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Table 1 has been prepared according to the education information published by the Central Bank of Sri Lanka and the Ministry of Education of Sri Lanka. Several indicators are taken in to consideration to identify small government school in the country. Generally, admission for grade one classes and the number of students in the school is considered as an indicator for identifying small schools in Sri Lanka. According to the education information published by the Ministry of Education in 2011, there were 131 schools have received only 1 application for grade one class, 196 schools have received only 2 applications and 237 schools received 3 applications for grade one classes in 2011. There are 1918 schools have received less than 9 applications for grade one classes in 2011. That is a big number of schools comparing with the total number of government schools functioned in 2011. In addition, the Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka has categorized government schools by difficulty level as: very congenial schools, congenial schools, not congenial schools, difficult schools, and very difficult schools. In 2011 there were 1466 very difficult schools and there were number of 2000 difficult schools in Sri Lanka. Also the Ministry of Education publishes the statistics of the student population of the government schools every year. In the year 2011 number of 1609 schools (16.5%) were functioned with less than 50 students, and number of 1479 (15.2%) schools were functioned between a 51-100 student population in 2011. Moreover, there were 233 government schools which had less than three teachers in 2011, and the student numbers of those schools were less. While 16.5% of schools functioned less than 50 students, total percentage of schools functioned with less than 100 schools are 31.7. However, in the same time it was functioned 979 (10%) schools with more than 1000 student population. Fundamentally, if the schools where have less than 50 students will be considered as small schools by the Ministry of Education. Therefore, according to the information indicated in the table 1, the 1609 schools can be considered as small schools functioned in 2011. The percentage of that is 16.5%, and it exceeds the percentage of the schools which have more than 1000 students. It seems that there are a big number of small schools which have less than 50 students. In each and every year it is closed down big number of schools due to less number of students, and lack of demand/applications for admissions.

According to the indicator which is the less than 50 students, there are more than 1600 small schools in Sri Lanka. It can be identified some common characteristics of small schools in Sri Lanka as: poor students' performance, negative attitudes of the staff and the stakeholders, poor physical environment and human recourse management, lethargic leadership, lack of human and other resources, neglected by higher education authority, less skills of the staff, ineffective management. However, there are exceptional cases among those small schools. Some of those exceptional small schools in Sri Lanka are developing very fast, and at present the position of those schools is improved and better. According to the anecdotal information, principals of those exceptional small schools have been developing their schools using management strategies which are exceptional to the other principals. It is imperative to explore those strategies used by the principals to develop their schools. Therefore, this qualitative study carried out to explore the experiences of the principals, and to discover the strategies used by them for the development of their schools. The findings of this research study may therefore support to get a better understanding of the strategies used by the principals to develop their small schools in Sri Lanka. And also the findings of this study may be useful for future policy decisions, and for the principals, staff and stakeholders of other small schools to develop their schools. These exceptional schools can be used as role models for developing small schools in Sri Lanka and in other countries as well.

## 2. Significance of the research

Significantly, this study focused on to investigate the strategies used by the principals to develop their small schools in Sri Lanka. Rural small schools in Sri Lanka played a huge role in the 1960's and the 1970's where economic and socio-cultural improvement was boosted, led by huge influx of educated youth. Qualitative improvement in the education in rural areas during that time resulted in weakening the rural to urban migration. This situation hugely changed during the late 80's, with the introduction of Provincial Council Administration system with the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment of the constitution where education has become a devolved responsibility to the nine provincial councils. As such, 90% of the schools were taken under the administration of the provincial government. Almost all the rural schools were categorized in to the Provincial Government schools with minimum resources and less funding. New reforms also created a new school system called national school where all the prestigious urban schools were taken under the control of the central government with more funding and more resources. National schools, with the high level of resource allocation from the government as well as from rich parents and well wishers, are better equipped with diversified extra curriculum programs, qualified teachers provided with computers, internet facilities, English and other foreign languages and market based education to face global challenges and maintain high quality outcomes. Thus they attract more students, draw further resources. This encouraged middle class rural parents to send their children to national schools in urban areas. Conversely, children of poor people's continue in the same rural schools. As a result of that the demand for rural schools is being decreased, and those schools are becoming small. Less demand, poor management, less resources, small number of students is some of the key characteristics of those small schools. Different terms are used to identify small schools like: underprivileged schools, unprivileged schools, poor schools, marginalized schools and. The Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka generally considers as a small school which has the student population less than 50. According to that criterion there were 1609 small government schools (16.5%) in 2011.

Sri Lanka faces many different challenges in school education. Unsuccessfulness of small school is one of the biggest challenges which has not addressed yet successfully. Since the lack of demand and the less number of students, conservable number of government schools was closed down in the last couple of years. Therefore, the students and parents of those schools faced many difficulties. Many researchers and education authorities state that, the small schools are declined every year due to many reasons. Many small government schools across Sri Lanka were closed down in last couple of years under the scheme to maximize the use of limited financial resources, while the students are to be transferred to other schools. But, according to some educationists, if small are closed down the children are more likely to drop out instead (Bahns, Pickett, & Crandall, 2012). The government's 'School Rationalization Programme' in Sri Lanka' shut down schools with few students. The schools were closed down under the government's scheme of maximize the use of limited financial resources, and the teachers transferred to other schools. The students were offered admission in nearby schools. Yet parents complain that they are forced to send their children to schools far from their homes due to the lack of facilities in village schools. As a result, there is a serious problem of overcrowding in the bigger schools with more than 45 students packed into classrooms.

Sri Lanka, with an admirable literacy rate of 98 percent and computer literacy rate 38%, has a school going population of 4 million in 2011 (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2011). The Sri Lanka's education policy is committed to providing a primary school within two kilometres of

the home of every child in the six to 10 age groups, and a secondary school within 5 kilometres of children over 11 years. Therefore, the small schools have to play a very imperative role in Sri Lanka. However, many small government schools across Sri Lanka were closed down in last couple of years. According to the Department of Statistics Sri Lanka (2011), there were 1298 schools functioned with less than 50 students in the year 2000, and this number has been increased up to 1609 by 2011. During that period of time 112 schools have been closed down since the shortage of students to run those schools.

While many small schools are being closed down due to shortage of the students and lack of demand, some schools are being developed very rapidly by the principals with the collaboration of the stakeholders. They use many strategies to develop their schools. It seems that the principals are very influential in developing these small schools. At present, every government school has a principal centred decision-making process. Principal is the main decision maker. Power, authority and responsibility of school activities are centred to the principal. Most of the decisions made by the school community can be changed or altered by the principal by using his/her power (Perera, 1998; Victoria, 1988; Fernando, 1986; Gunasekara, 2000; Wedamulla, 2002; NECSL Report, 1992). An important element of quality schooling in a multi dimensional construct is the amount and type of leadership that principals provide directly and promote among teachers and support staff (Lipsitz, 1984). In the process of the development of school the leadership of the principals of these small schools is very vital. Leadership is described as an imperative to change and the quality of schooling is greatly influenced by direct leadership from the principal (Bickle, 1990; Hord, 1991; Sergiovanni, 1995; Spedding, 1996; Stoll & Fink, 1995; Wang, 1998). Gersten, Carnine and Green (1982) note that at if the schools where the principals actively support to change will be developed. Sergiovanni (1995) indicated that one difference between high and low achieving schools was the impact of the principal. In high achieving schools the principal was a strong leader who participated directly and frequently in instructional matters and had a high expectation of success. Moreover, Sergiovanni (1995) points out that many supporting studies suggest that more significant in establishing successful schools are the amount and quality of leadership density that exists in schools.

Fleming (2000) noted that the principals in schools were studied concentrated their efforts to create conditions that were optimal for teachers to adapt to new ways of working in schools by focusing on structures within the school and relationships between stakeholders at the school. Creating settings where principals and teachers collaborate continuously to increase their effectiveness through their own learning appears to be important. Ross, Powell and Elias (2002) cite the research findings of Levine and Lezotte which describe unusually effective schools as being actively engaged in efforts at fostering a positive school climate and culture, including elements they describe as developing a shared mission, working toward cohesion and collaboration among staff, and collegiality among faculty. Further, Ross et al. (2002) also report that effective schools emphasized problem solving, decision making, recognition of positive performance and social and emotional skill development as priorities for students and staff. Leadership quality is often cited as key to school success. According to the above research findings and the statements made by the researchers, principal's role is a very influential element in developing a school. His/ her strategies, management style, leadership qualities, background, attitudes directly affect for the school development. The leadership and decision-making provided by a school principal is proximate and tied directly to outcomes in the school. A dynamic and skilled school leader is frequently described as the key element of a high-quality school (Adams & Gamage, 2008).

From anecdotal accounts, the importance of principals seems most apparent when considering schools serving disadvantaged populations. It is frequently asserted that high poverty schools are hurt by being unable to attract and retain good principals. The demands of leading such schools, including the need to overcome less desirable working conditions in order to attract and retain high quality teachers, may amplify the importance of having an effective leader. Small number of papers carried out in Sri Lanka has examined the strategies used by the principals for school development and effectiveness. Brewer (1993) and Eberts and Stone (1988) find that specific principal characteristics are related to student achievement, school development, teacher motivation. Therefore, this study carried out to get a better understanding about the strategies used by the exceptional principals of some of the small schools development in Sri Lanka.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Statement of the research question and the objectives of the study**

This study investigated the strategies used by principals of the small government schools in Sri Lanka to develop their schools. The main research question and the objectives of this research are as follows:

#### **3.2 Main research question**

What strategies used by the principals of small government schools to develop their schools?

#### **3.3 Objectives of the study**

- i. Identify the nature of strategies used by principals of small government schools to develop their schools
- ii. Explore the perception of stakeholders of schools on the strategies used by the principals to develop their schools.
- iii. Identify constraints and challenges related to small school development.

#### **3.4 Introduction of the methodology**

In order to explore the strategies used by principals of small government schools to develop their schools. This research used qualitative inquiry. With special reference to the Colombo district schools in Sri Lanka, the researcher used a case study approach. Several data collection methods were employed such as: document analysis, observations and interviews. Data was analysed using qualitative analytical method.

#### **3.5 Research paradigm**

There are number of research paradigms commonly used in educational research. Bassey (1999) defines a paradigm as "A network of coherent ideas about the nature of the world and the function of researchers which, adhered to by a group of researchers, conditions and the patterns of their thinking and underpins their research actions" (Bassey, 1999 in Morrison, 2007, p. 19). According to Filstead (1979) paradigm can be identified as a set of interrelated assumptions about the social world.

Cohen et al. (2007) state that the research within the interpretive paradigm is often small scale, reaching social life, non statistical, subjective, personal involvement of the researcher, interpreting the specific and individual perspective. It can be identified three key types of research paradigms as positivism, interpretivism and critical theory (Ponterotto, 2005; W. Willis,

Willis, Jost, & Nilakantha, 2007; Yin, 2009). The interpretive paradigm strives to understand and interpret the human and lived world, socially constructed, reflect understanding and subjective and objective research methods are acceptable (Ponterotto, 2005; Walsham, 2006; J. W. Willis, Willis, Jost, & Nilakanta, 2007), and interpretivism emphasize the goal of understanding the lived experiences of those live it day to day (Ponterotto, 2005). While positivist researchers use experimental design, interpretive researchers mostly use qualitative techniques, like case study methods to study the particular research problem.

Since this study expected to understand the nature of the strategies used by principals of small schools to develop their schools, interpretive paradigm appeared to be a good fit as it aimed to study each school as an individual case and gathered information from stakeholders of school including principals, teachers, parents and past pupils in order to explore their experiences about the strategies used by principal. In particular this study explored the experiences of stakeholders regarding strategies used by principals for leading and managing schools. Therefore, interpretive paradigm was appropriate in this study since this study explored the lived experiences of staff and stakeholders of the small schools, and on the other hand, the nature of this study was a small scale, reached social life and there was a personal involvement of the researcher.

### **3.6 Qualitative research**

Qualitative research uses a variety of interpretive research methodologies that seek to investigate the quality of relationships and experiences (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2001). 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 multilayered and complex, it is ongoing flow" (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 138) Therefore, the qualitative research approach is most appropriate in this study, because this research explored live experiences and perceptions of stakeholders of the small schools in relation to the strategies used by the principals in school management. Especially, since this research expected to uncover the personal experiences of the stakeholders regarding school management and decision making, qualitative research approach was most suitable approach to gather information from participants in this study.

### **3.7 Case study**

The case study research approach has being used by qualitative and interpretive researchers for a long time in disciplines (Burns, 2000) since it has a number of advantages. This approach can be used to investigate actual contemporary life settings and life cycles of people, and it allows researchers to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events of people (Yin, 2009) While some scholars highlight the advantages of the case study approach, many scholars and authors provide definitions. 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 case study as "an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in a real life context" (Simons, 2009 in Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Since this study designed to explore deeply the experience and perceptions of the stakeholders in selected schools in Sri Lanka about the strategies used by the principals of small schools for their school development, it seems that the Simons' definition highlights very significant features that are relevant to this study.

This study investigated the nature and the patterns of the experiences of stakeholders in the small schools; experiences of stakeholders were different school to school. In addition, school environments, management and leadership styles used by principals in managing schools, background, talents, experiences and qualifications, attitudes of the principals were not similar in each school. Therefore experiences and perspectives of the participants on small school management were different. Therefore, the information collected was very significant in understanding about the actual situation of affairs in relation to the strategies used by the principals in small school management in Sri Lanka. The information provided by the different participants was helpful to get a better understanding of the actual situation in the participation of stakeholders in small school management in Sri Lanka. Therefore, case study approach was well fitted in this study. Since this study was a small scale research, researched about actual real life experiences of stakeholders of schools regarding strategies used by principals in management of the small schools, case study was very helpful to understand the real situation of the study phenomenon.

### **3.8 Data collection**

Interviews, document surveys and informal observations were employed to gather information in this study. Interviews were the main data collection strategy employed to gather information from the principals, teaching staff, parents and past pupils of the schools. As this study planned to gather in depth information from the participants, and as this was a qualitative case study research, those data collection instruments were more appropriate to collect data.

#### **3.8.1 Interviewing**

Qualitative researchers use various types of methods for data collection: “observation (participant and non participant), interviewing, and document analysis” (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002, p. 430). But the interview appears to be the most popular data collection instrument in qualitative research. 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 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 intended to explore the experiences of the staff and the community members on the small school management strategies are being used by the small school principals, interviewing was seemed as a suitable method of data collection in this study, because it was seeking particular experiences and perspectives of the stakeholders of those schools regarding study phenomenon. Interviewing allows researchers to gather rich information directly from the participants. In the time of interviewing it has more opportunities to get more clarification in relation to the participants’ ideas, opinions, information etc. As this study employed semi structured interviews, participants had opportunities to present their information freely.

#### **3.8.2 Documentation**

According to Hodder (2000, p. 704) documents are important in qualitative research because “access can be easy and low cost, ... the information provided may differ from and may not

available in spoken form, and ... texts endure and thus give historical insight". Atkinson and Coffey (2004, p. 59) state that "documentary materials should be regarded as data in their own right. In this case study research, public documents was one of the data sources used. Documents were important because in the nature of school management, it has more paper work, and documents provided the formal frameworks of school management. The documents in this research were minutes of the school meetings, school plans, policy statements, internal school policy documents and guidelines.

### **3.8.3 Observation**

It is difficult to understand clearly the activities people carry out in different social settings and situations only asking questions, thus, it is required to see those people in action, to experience what it is they do at the site they work or behave. There is a research method to collect that real information, it is called observation. "observation as a research method tells us that it is 'research characterized by a prolonged period of intense social interaction between the researcher and the subjects, in the milieu of the latter, during which time data, in the form of field notes, are unobtrusively and systematically collected" (Bogdan 1972: 3). Wilkinson & Birmingham (2003) state the advantages of using observation for data collection as: "Observation is an extremely handy tool for researchers in this regard. It can allow researchers to understand much more about what goes on in complex real world situations than they can ever discover simply by asking questions of those who experience them (no matter how probing the questions may be), and by looking only at what is said about them in questionnaires and interviews"(Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003, p. 117). In order to gather rich data, informal observation was used in this study. An advantage of the observation is that: it was used to gather real data in a relatively directly looking at the subjects. Observation is an effective tool to gather straightforward and factual information (Silverman, 2009; Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003). The data gathered through observations was used to triangulate the data collected by using other instruments in this study. Therefore, the data gathered from observations was useful to get a better understanding of the strategies used by the principals in management of small schools. For the purpose of collecting data three school sites were observed in this study. `

### **3.9 Participants**

This study gathered information from principals, teaching staff, parents and past pupils of three selected schools. Before five years ago those schools considered as small schools, and but now the states of those schools is better due to the management strategies used by the principals for developing their school. Participants in this study were selected using a purposive sampling method. Best & Kahn (2006) suggest, purposive sampling permits the researcher to choose the participants who provide the richest information. Sample was comprised the principals from three selected developed small schools, fifteen teachers, fifteen parents and fifteen past pupils from the schools in the Colombo district and Baduula district in Sri Lanka. Altogether 16 participants from each school were represented in this study. Accordingly total number of 48 participants was participated in this research. The principals, teachers, parents and past pupils in the school have experiences on school management and the strategies used by the principals to develop their respective schools. Therefore, they have valuable experiences as they have been involving in various activities of their schools.



#### 4. Data analysis

The researcher brought together document analyses, observation and interview data to illustrate the strategies used by the principals to develop their schools. Data was analyzed, interpreted and presented, and quotations were directly taken from the transcriptions as required to validate the interpretation.

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 in the data, and pursues identifiable themes and patterns (Aronson, 1994). Themes were emerged within the transcribed interview data, data in the questionnaire and documents. Those themes were organized, described and interpreted (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Radnor, 2002). Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) suggest going over transcriptions of interview data, observation data and documents data many times, and eventually meaningful categories will emerge and then group the data to a few key ideas.

In summary, the participants in this study, principals, teachers, parents and past pupils of the schools presented their experiences as their real life stories, and those stories were the research data in this study. Thematic analysis is one of the most common approaches of qualitative data analysis (Bryman, 2001; Mutch, 2005) and it was the most appropriate method for analysing qualitative data, and this study had qualitative data in the interview transcriptions, observations and documents. In the process of analysing the data from the transcriptions, observations and documents, it was identified themes, then coded, and identified patterns in order to find out the similarities between the cases in this study. The analysed data was very useful for the researcher to achieve the expected outcomes of the study.

#### 5. Findings

The principals are appointed to the government schools in different ways. Some principals are appointed from Sri Lanka Education Administrative Service (SLEAS), some are from Sri Lanka Principal Service (SLPS), and in addition, the people who are in the teacher service are also appointed as the principals to the government schools in Sri Lanka. There are three SLEAS grades as: grade I, grade II and grade III. Newly recruited officers are given grade III position, and they are promoted to other grades considering their period of service and qualifications. Sri Lanka Principal Service also has three grades as: grade I, grade II and grade III. Two principals in this study are from Sri Lanka Principal service Grade III, and the other principal is from teacher service.

#### **Background information of the Participants**

Majority of principals, past pupils and parents are male, and majority of teachers are female. Although the entire principal represent 46-55 age group, majority of parents and teachers are in 36-45 age group and majority of past pupils are in 26-35 age group. However the majority of respondents are in 36-45 age group, and 30 out of 48 respondents are male (63%).

**Table 2- Age & Gender of the Participants**

Item	Principals	Teachers	Parents	Past Pupils	Total
<b>Age</b>					
26-35	-	5	-	10	15
36-45	-	08	11	04	23
46-55	03	02	04	01	10
Above 55	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>03</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Gender</b>					
Male	03	04	12	11	30
Female	-	11	03	04	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>03</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>48</b>

Source: Research data

According to the information indicated in the table 3, majority of respondents have possessed degrees or postgraduate qualifications, and all the principals are graduates. Principals in this study and the majority of teachers have more than 06 years service on the post that they hold currently. Since the background of the respondents in this study, the validity and reliability of the information provided by them was increased.

**Table 3- Qualifications and period of service of the respondents**

Item	Principals	Teachers	Parents	Past pupils	Total
<b>Qualifications</b>					
Postgraduate	02	10	-	07	19
Degree	01	02	08	02	13
GCE (A/L)	-	01	03	04	08
GCE (O/L)	-	02	04	02	08
<b>Total</b>	<b>03</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Service (Years)</b>					
0-5	-	07	-	-	-
6-10	01	06	-	-	-
11-15	02	02	-	-	-
Above 15	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>03</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>

Source: Research data

### Shared Decision Making and Community Participation

Majority of principals (67%) in this study use shared decision making style as a strategy for developing their schools. Especially every government schools are implementing School Based Management (SBM), titled as the Programme of School Improvement (PSI) at present. According to the guidance and instructions provided by the Ministry of Education to the schools, shared decision making should be put into practice in implementing the PSI. Moreover, it seems that the principals apply shared decision making in their school management very genuinely. They welcome ideas and proposal of the stakeholders, and use them for school development. Almost all the decisions of these three schools are transparent for the public. There are more

avenues for stakeholders for participating school decisions in these schools. All the principals in these three schools have opened doors of the schools for stakeholders for participating in school developmental activities, in school management and in decision making. Most stakeholders are happy about the decisions made by the principal since they incorporate the ideas provided by the stakeholders, and moreover the stakeholders support principal and staff of school to implement those decisions. According to the majority of parents and past pupils (more than 67%), outside community members provide resources enthusiastically for the development of their children's school.

One parent indicates his idea about decision making in their school as: *“our principal always welcome our ideas for school management when he makes decisions. We can provide ideas at the meetings or personally, sometimes over the phone or in writing. However, ultimate decisions are made by him considering all our ideas and proposals. We are happy about his decision making style”*

One principal says that: *“this school is not my property. This is owned by the students and the parents of them. My duty is to develop this school with collaboration. I have opened the gates and the doors of my school for the outside community members. They have several opportunities to participate in management and decision making for the development of their children's school. I think they are happy about my decisions, and therefore school is developing day by day”*.

It is evident that the shared decision making strategy genuinely applied by the principals in this study, and it is directly affected for school development. Community participation is very effective in these schools. Community members participate in school activities providing funds, resources, ideas, proposals, and furthermore they communicate their needs to the principals which are expected from the school. The school and community relationship is increased since the principals desire to welcome ideas of the community. Attitudes of the stakeholders' have been developed by the principals, and thus most of the stakeholders (80%) believe that the development of the school as their responsibility. Majority of principals (100%), teachers (80%), parents (80%) and past pupils (80%) indicate that effective school - community relationship driven and change the school from the horrific situation to the present better place.

However, minority of teachers (40%) indicate that the principal invite community members to provide their ideas for school development, but principal always try to implement his agendas in managing schools. Very few parents and past pupils (less than 40%) also confirmed above statement of the teachers. But majority of respondents (more than 60%) do not agree with that.

### **Principal Leadership**

Every principal in this study are graduates and they have satisfactory experiences in the post of the principal. All of them have followed at least one management course locally or internationally. Two of them have foreign experiences, and they have followed international degree courses. Therefore, they have very good knowledge about school management and leadership. It seems that the qualifications, management knowledge and experiences of the principals affect to lead their school very effectively. Many stakeholders (60%) say that the principals of their schools have charismatic leadership. The grounds to say like that are their background, working style and performance. These principals have very good networking with the community, and also have vast knowledge about the rules and regulations related to government school management. According to all the principals in this study, they always use

situational leadership style, and they perform as effective instructional leaders. All of them have followed a Postgraduate Diploma in Education course at a university. Therefore they have good knowledge about teaching and learning process of a school, school supervision and about education science. Majority of parents and past pupils (more than 60%) say that, in these three schools first priority is given to students, and principals are always enthusiastic about their performance and total development. Better students' performance and high teacher commitments reflect the leadership skills of the principals' of these schools.

One principal indicate that: *"I always make decisions according to the situations. Sometimes I am very human, but not always. I know how to teach effectively. I advice, motivate and encourage my teaching staff very kindly to teach well, and always appreciate their achievements and children's performances. I delegate my leadership power not only to the staff but sometimes to the student leaders if necessary. I can trust them and they always maintain trustworthiness. Therefore, I am very lucky to have a better teaching staff and good students"*. Majority of teachers of two schools (more than 60%) agree with this statement. But the teachers of the other school (more than 53%) do not agree with that. They say that *"Our principal is not kind always; he does not know how to speak out people, he does not delegate sufficient power to us"*. It evident that there can be seen some exceptions among these three schools.

One teacher confirm the above statement as: *"Our principal sometimes is very rude but not always. He gives us some decision making power, therefore we can work but not very easily as teachers in this school. However, we all are very happy about his leadership. I know our students and their parents also like to his leadership, because he has developed this school within five years period very rapidly. Five years ago our student number was four, and now four hundred. That is a very good example about his leadership"*. It is evident that the leadership styles used by the principals of these schools are appreciated by the majority of stakeholders. It seems that the principals in these three schools always try to make their staff members, students and stakeholders happy. Majority of respondents agree with that (80%).

### **Planning and Generation of Funds**

According to the rules and regulations issued by the Ministry of Education, schools are expected to prepare five year plan, annual plans and project plans. Each and every school work accordingly, and submit those in writing to the Zonal Education office. According to the anecdotal evidences of the researcher it sees that some of the government schools in Sri Lanka prepare plans just to fulfill the requirements of the Ministry of Education or Provincial Ministry of Education. However, in addition to the five year plans and annual plans prepare for fulfilling the ministry requirements, most schools prepare extra separate long term plans and short term plans to develop their schools. All the principals of this study always follow fundamentals and principals of management in their school planning. Majority of respondents in this study (more than 60%) indicate that the principals always direct stakeholders, teachers, students and outside community members for achieving vision, mission and sub targets of the school. Almost every stakeholder has better awareness of their particular school targets. One parent states as: *"at the beginning of the year our principal introduces us school plans, projects and targets of the current year. Moreover, he assigns us some activities planned to achieve in the year. Since we represent some committees of the school, we know what we do for the school development. This is my children's' school, therefore we must support principal and staff to achieve school targets. When he prepares plans we provide our ideas and proposal according to his request. We believe plans will address our needs"*. One teacher state that as: *"in each and every year principal*

*provides us targets. And also he emphasizes us to go for one aim, one target, and one dream as a one team. We always work and committed for that. He welcomes our ideas for school planning. Therefore, annual plans are included our ideas and proposals. Some teachers directly involve in school planning and management".* According to the information provided by the majority of teachers (80%), majority of parents (67%) and majority of past pupils (60%) the strategies used by principals in planning, such like participatory management, welcome ideas of stakeholders, transparency are more effectively impact for the development of their schools. Thus, those strategies has directly affected for successfulness of the principals and the school development.

Although Sri Lankan government provide free education for students from grade one to university level, schools have to find resources since the government does not provide adequate amount of resources for every school activities. Principals in this study are well strategic in generating funds for school development through outside community members. They maintain very good network with political leaders, with business organizations, with government organizations, with non government organizations and with well-wishers. According to the majority of participants (60%) the principals of this study do not pressure the students and their parents requesting funds for school development. The strategy used by the principal is generating funds from outside community and use those funds for students' benefits, and also use them for staff development and school development. In addition, these principals organize various fund raising activities and generate funds for school development. These three principals are very skilful for managing existing resources and limited funds. Therefore, these schools have sufficient funds for their school activities and development. Funds are not an extra burn for the students of these schools and for their parents. Therefore the students' performances are relatively higher than the other similar schools.

### **Charismatic Leadership and Marketing Strategies**

These three principals have very good educational background, experiences, networking and a good personality. According to majority of teachers (67%), parents (80%) and past pupils (80%), the attitudes of these three school principals are very positive; they are committed for performing their role as principals well. In addition, they have noted that these principals use new technology for their school development. Each and every these three schools have computer laboratories. These facilities have been acquired to the schools by making personal effort of the principals. It seems that these three principals have very good entrepreneur skills and creative ideas. Their skills and creativeness are directly used for school development. Very special thing is that, they have invented new technological items, and those invented items are used for school development. For example one principal has produced a solar power system, and it is used for supplying electricity to the school. He has developed a water pump which can be used without power, and he has produced a power generator. His school is located in very rural area and on a hill. Therefore they have no water and electricity provided by the government. As a result, this principal has invented those items to address those issues in the school. Stakeholders have recognized him as a scientist. Other principal has built a school library and a class room using unused motor buses. That school does not have enough buildings, and therefore this principal has used this strategy to overcome that issue in his school. In addition, he has invented new things for his school development. Other principal has built a number of low cost buildings in the schools for using as classrooms. He has used only labour of parents of the students, and the parents work voluntarily for constructing buildings. The class rooms of his school are in very good standard comparatively other similar schools. These principals generate funds, and rapidly

develop their schools without depending on the government funds. Therefore, the stakeholders consider that their principals as charismatic leaders because of their great inventions. One parent's states as: *"Our principal has unbelievable talents. He has produced several items for the school which can't be produced anybody else. I think he is a scientist"*. One teacher explains the skills of her principals as: *"I can't believe the interpersonal skills and critical thinking of our principal. He built two big buildings having only community support. The government did not provide any funds for that. People willingly helped the principal for that, and even we provided foods for the parents in the period that they worked there, and sometimes we supplied our labour also"*. Majority of teachers, parents and past pupils (more than (60%) confirm the above statements.

In addition, principals use many marketing strategies to make public and popular their schools. These principals maintain a very good relationship with journalists and with public media. One television channel has produced a film regarding the achievements of one of the schools in this study. Different strategies used by these principals to make their school popular. They use those strategies to increase the demand for the school. As a result of that there is a very big student demand for these three schools. One school has increased student population from four students to four hundred students within a five year period. The important thing is that, there was a decision made by the higher education authorities to close down these three schools due to less demand and shortage of student population. In that moment these principals were appointed to the principal posts of these schools by the higher education authorities. From that these principals have made lot of effort to increase demand and the student population for their schools. For that they have used many strategies. The present situation is that, the student population of these three schools is increasing year by year rapidly.

### **Constrains and Challenges**

Most of the principals have faced challenges to find resources for school development in Sri Lanka since the government does not provide adequate amount of resources to the schools. In addition, according to the principals (100%) and the majority of teachers (80%), lack of support given by the higher education authority for school development can be considered as a big challenge. All the respondents (more than 60%) state that the unnecessary rules and regulations in relation to school management obstruct effective school decisions. Moreover, negative attitudes of some of the stakeholders and less commitment of them are also considered as a challenge by all the principals. Less power delegated to the principals for human resource management is indicates by the majority of principals as a big challenge for school development. However, these exceptional principals work for the development of their schools without thinking of challenges and obstacles they have to face. Majority of teachers, parents and past pupils (more than 60%) state that, their principals always have pre plans and strategies for facing future challenges.

## **6. Conclusions and Recommendations**

The strategies used by the principals of these three schools have been directly affected for the success of the schools. Therefore, the majority of stakeholders appreciate management style and decision making of these principals. These principles apply principles and theories of management effectively as change agents in the school. The strategies used for planning, decision making, and generating funds for school development has been succeed. Effective

principal leadership, strong school community relationship is seen as key attributes of successfulness of these schools. Especially the charismatic leadership of the principals directly affect for the successfulness of these three schools. It is recommend to make consider attitudes, educational and professional qualifications, management knowledge and managerial experiences when recruit principals for the government schools. The principals those who have already recruited and work in the small schools should be provided opportunity to see these kinds of successful schools, and given them a chance to have a chat with the staff of those schools for absorbing positive attributes and strategies used by the principals to develop those schools. The Ministry of Education can arrange such activities for the benefit of the principals who are working in the small schools.

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