

RESEARCH ARTICLE

OBTAINING COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR IMPLEMENTING THE SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM IN SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

A school is an institution that operates within a formal administrative pattern that is bound to serve a specific community. The implementation of a school's curriculum cannot be achieved with only the involvement of the teachers and students of a school, it is also essential to obtain the support of the community. The community can offer their maximum support to the school not only on a financial basis but also through labour and their knowledge of school activities. The main purpose of this research was to find out how community support can be obtained by schools. The objectives were to understand the importance of seeking community support in implementing the current secondary curriculum and identifying the problems faced by schools in the projects implemented on the basis of community support. This study employed a survey research design using a questionnaire to collect data, using a random sample of a total of 300 students from twelve schools representing 1 AB, 1C and National Schools. According to the responses the students were of the opinion that parents should participate in school activities. They have responded positively to the idea that the outside community participates in school activities. The responses also emphasised several programmes that can be developed with the help of the community. The student responses also identified some problems that can emerge with obtaining community support. The findings recommend that schools should identify specialized individuals in the surrounding community and organize programmes to connect them to the school as resource persons. They also highlight that community contributions can be beneficial to both the school as well as the community.

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INTRODUCTION

A school is an institution that operates within a formal administrative pattern that is bound to serve a specific community. This specific group of people in a school can be referred to as the school community. The secondary school curriculum is complex and consists of three parts, the formal, the informal and the hidden curriculum. The implementation of this curriculum cannot take place with only the involvement of the teachers and students of a school, it is also essential to obtain the support of the community. Commenting on education for the 21st century, Hettiarachchi (2000) said that community support is an important factor in providing innovative education according to student needs. Click (2000) states that parents can be used as facilitators of follow-up programmes on student development.

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Thilakarathne (2000) also states that the community can give their maximum support to the school, not purely on a financial basis but also with labour and through their knowledge of school activities. Thus, it is clear that community support can be sought from various sectors to implement the school curriculum. The main purpose of this research was to find out how such community support can be obtained for the school. Various attempts have been made in the past to get communities to participate in the school activities, but this has not yielded the expected results. The Rural Education Scheme of 1932, Select Committee in 1943, Education Reforms of 1992, and Education Reforms Resolutions of 1981 and 1997 are important among them. Gunasekara (1996) also pointed out the need to maintain a good relationship between the school community and parents. It further states that community support should be sought at every step of school management from determining the objectives to take the school to the standard of an effective school. However, at present there is a distance between the school community and the school authorities, and Gunasekara goes on to state the reasons for that (ibid.).

Inadequate understanding of one's role and responsibility, attitudes towards school, lack of understanding of the importance of school community relations by the administration, lack of time due to the busy schedule of the community, and negligence, are the reasons cited by Gunasekera. The main purpose of this study is to explore how community support can be used to implement the school curriculum. Accordingly, two specific objectives were planned to ascertain:

- The importance of seeking community support in implementing the current secondary curriculum and,
- Identify the problems faced by schools in the projects implemented on the basis of community support.

Review of Literature: The school curriculum should be functional along the lines of a participatory model and cannot be done in isolation. Pollard and Triggs (1997) argue that the school curriculum should be implemented in collaboration with the government, education authorities, the school and the community. Stephan (1998) points out that the social and economic level of the community around the school affects the level of education of the students who attend the school. Fullan (2000) also mentions that community support can be obtained in activities such as organizing field trips. Balsara (1996) points out that education is not self-sufficient and that it operates on support from parents and the community. Marcus and Ducklin (1998) point out that community support for school education can be obtained in areas such as cultural transmission, social control, social choice, and economic training. Fullan (2000) also outlined four ways in which community support can be obtained, through the participation of volunteers, parents functioning as learning facilitators at home, contributing to communication networks and functioning as trainers to engage in various activities.

Click (2000) also points out that community support can be used for policy making, support services, classroom support services, and encouraging the role of being a good teacher to their students. Sanderson (1991) believes that education is a social process and that education cannot exist without community participation, such as involvement in services and activities in the implementation of the school curriculum, participation in programme planning, administration and implementation and financial participation. Maclean (1996) states, that the government of the German Republic has taken action to enlist the services of community specialists for job training in the classroom. Chauba and Chauba (1994), Pink and Borman (1994), and Hess and Easton (1994) have pointed out that American states are also seeking community support, including participation on school boards.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a survey research design with the use of a questionnaire to collect data. Using random sampling, a total of 300 students from twelve schools representing 02 National Schools (Under the administration of Ministry of Education), 04 IAB schools (consisted of all streams for the Advance Level), 04 IC schools (which has Grade 01 – 11), 01 TYPE 2 school (which has Grade 6-9) and 01 Type 3 school in the Kandy District were selected. Percentages, a descriptive statistics method, were used for data analysis.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Considering the scattering of the student sample, 58.1% were female and 41.9% were male. Of the sample, 90.8% of the students were of the opinion that parents should participate in school activities. This is the reason for the involvement of parents in any endeavour. It was further emphasized that they contribute to activities such as the school development society, class circles, Shramadanas, various festivals, lunch programmes and values programmes. Parents' attendance at teaching and learning activities was as high as 63.5%. Of the respondents, 88.9% preferred to seek the assistance of external experts in school learning. Students have responded that the outside community participates in school activities as follows: sports 80.1%, teaching learning activities 68.2%, clubs and societies 67.2%, health programmes 66.6%, aesthetic programmes 66.6%, educational trips 65.5% and projects 63.9%.

The special areas where community support was required were, the computer sector (92.9%), the field of employment related issues (92.2%) and in the improvement in English teaching (91.5%). As these fields are in high demand in the world of work today, it is clear that in addition to the teaching that students do in school, they expect external support. Students indicated minimum willingness (71.0%) for involving outside parties in student evaluation activities. The student responses also emphasised several programmes that can be developed with the help of the community. Values, education, sports, cadetting, scouting, health, religion, drama, dancing, student welfare, computer, English, environmental projects were the programmes that received the highest response. Less than 20% of students responded to inquiries regarding the time when appropriate support could be scheduled, such as weekends, vacations and after school hours. The reasons for this were transportation difficulties, attending extra classes, and lack of support from parents. When asked about their willingness to go out of school and seek community-like support, 87.5% said they would prefer to receive practical training from employment agencies, factories, and farms. The reasons for this were the ability of gaining more practical experience, gaining social experience, being able to gain knowledge in addition to the subject matter, gaining job skills, being able to associate with experts and being able to experiment with what is learned in school.

The second objective was to examine the problems faced by schools in implementing the secondary school curriculum with community support. Following are some of the problems that were identified in the student responses:

- Inability to work according to the school schedule,
- Various problems caused by students and the community,
- Using students for political activities,
- Problems of the community around the school coming into the school,
- Being subjected to political and religious influences,
- Submitting requests that the school cannot fulfill in providing community support,
- Being angry when outsiders point out mistakes.

Accordingly, it was revealed that the students are more interested in implementing the curriculum and that such

assistance can be obtained especially in areas which enhance job development skills. It was also clear from the responses that they might face practical problems.

Conclusions and Recommendation

In the present context of globalisation, neither a school nor a society can function in isolation. In the study on the implementation of the secondary school curriculum, it was evident that in addition to the daily teaching process of the school, there is a greater desire among the students to participate in the community. There was also a desire among the students to obtain community contributions/participation to schools through various programmes. The students have also pointed out the need for practical training through community contributions. To this end, schools should identify specialized individuals in the surrounding community and organize a programme which connects them to the school as resource persons. Schools should also analyze the needs of their students. Getting community contributions to the school can also in turn create interest and student participation in the community. In conclusion, connecting the school and the community will enable the school to move towards being an effective school.

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