

An Investigation on the Implementation of the Right to Participation in the Teaching-Learning Process at the Senior Secondary School Level

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Abstract— The main objective of this study is to investigate the execution of the right to participation in the teaching-learning process in a few selected Senior Secondary schools in Sri Lanka. The study used a sequential descriptive survey design. The study was conducted with 692 students, 36 teachers, and 18 principals from the Western, North Central, and Central Provinces. Eighteen schools, representing 1AB, 1C, and Type 2 government schools located in the three selected provinces were in the sample. Several methods were employed for collecting data for the study, which included questionnaires for students and teachers, structured interviews for principals, observations of classrooms and focus group discussions with some selected students, and a documentary study. The study identified the extent to which the right to participation is implemented in the teaching-learning process in the selected senior secondary schools. The findings of this study indicated contradictory opinions. Students perceived that the implementation of the right to participate is not satisfactorily taking place in their schools whereas most of the teachers revealed that the implementation of the right to participation is functioning well within their classroom environment. The study concludes with a number of suggestions for principals and teachers to improve the right to participation of students during the teaching-learning process of Sri Lankan senior secondary schools.

Keywords— *implementation, right to participation, senior secondary level*

I. INTRODUCTION

Policies of childrens' rights have evolved over several decades. In 1924 (The Geneva Declaration on the Rights of the Child); 1959(the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child); the United Nations promulgated the Declaration of the Rights of the Child are some of the significant achievements. UN General Assembly

adopted the Convention and opened it for signature on 20th November 1989 (UNCRC-Convention on the Rights of the child -1989 UNICEF). Sri Lanka ratified the UNCRC on 12th July 1990 and signed the Global Plan of Action for Children in April 1991. The signing of these international instruments cleared the way for the introduction of further improvements in the sphere of Child Rights in Sri Lanka. The Convention had provided a new and dynamic framework for developing laws and policies to further strengthen the concept of rights for children. Lansdown (1994) pointed out that the UNCRC focuses on three fundamental rights namely the right to protection, the right to life, and the right to participation.

The UNCRC has now provided a framework that gives special significance to the idea that children have a right to participate in all matters that affect their lives. The participation rights appear in Article 12, the right to express an opinion in Article 13, the right to freedom of expression in Article 14, the right to freedom of thought, conscience & religion in Article 15, the right to freedom of association in Article 16, the right to protection of privacy in Article 31, the right of children to leisure, play and participation in cultural and artistic activities in Article 40, and the right to administration of juvenile justice. It seems that the above-mentioned Articles read together, accept the position of the child as a separate individual who is entitled to enjoy participation rights hitherto limited only to adults.

Participation leads to full human development, which includes cognitive, social, political, and moral development (Patmor and McIntyre, 1999). Hart (1992) defines participation as a process of sharing decisions that affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives.

Research has shown that student participation in decision-making has yielded immense benefits to the individual student, the school, and eventually, the community (Patmor and McIntyre, 1999; Walin,

2003 Whitty, and Wisby, 2007). Students who usually have the opportunity to participate in decision-making forums acquire skills for effective engagement with life issues become responsible and active with positive emotional well-being (Walin 2003). In addition, democratic participation offers students the opportunity to develop self-confidence thereby improving their conditions of learning and social life (Rudduck and Fielding 2006, Mncube, 2008).

In many countries around the world, some efforts are put in favor of children's participation; however, studies show that children's participation is not at the expected level. It has been observed that children do not participate adequately in the school environment and that school administrators do not provide children with adequate opportunities in making significant decisions related to school (Howe and Covell 2005). A classroom or a school culture in which children's right to participation is ensured is rarely observed across the world (Lansdowne, Jimerson, and Shashroozi, 2014).

Therefore, the aim of this study was to identify the extent of the expectation of a right to participation implemented in the teaching-learning process of the selected schools, to identify how far the teaching-learning process is implemented in the selected senior secondary classes, and to assess the suggestions of the teachers and principals that can be made to ensure students' right to participate in the teaching-learning process of the selected schools.

II. METHODOLOGY

A sequential descriptive survey design was conducted through questionnaires, observations, interviews, and Focus Group Discussions. The data collection instruments were developed by the researcher after conducting a thorough literature review and the opinion of two experts in the field of education was taken while performing the necessary revisions. The study sample consisted of 692 grade 10/11 students, 36 grade 10/11 class teachers, and 18 principals from the Western, North Central, and Central Provinces. Eighteen schools, representing 1AB, 1C, Type 2 government schools located in the three selected provinces. Data collection was conducted only on weekdays from 17th June 2019 to 31st July 2019 and again from 9th September to 24th September 2019. The descriptive statistical analyses were performed on the dataset using statistical procedures such as frequencies, means, and Kruskal-Wallis H test of Ranked. The qualitative data were

analyzed using thematic analysis. All descriptive statistical analyses were carried out using SPSS Ver. 20 (2018).

III. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The students' responses to the item related to the UNCRC Article 12 indicated that there was limited opportunity for expressing their ideas in the teaching-learning process (33.4%). However, teachers' responses indicate they have provided the opportunities to express students' ideas while teaching (63.9%). All the principals in the sample are of the opinion that the teachers should allow the student to express their ideas while teaching and the practice are taking place in the school (100%).

Eighteen-point four percent of the students had responded regarding the item related to UNCRC Article 13, that their ideas are not accepted, and they are not permitted to implement their decisions. The teachers' (61.1%) and principals' (100%) responses were higher than that of the students' ratings. Right to freedom of association, which is stated in UNCRC Article 15, received a low response from students (21.2%) and a high response rate received from teachers (55.6%) and principals (100%).

The frequency distribution of students' perceptions on the implementation of the right to participation during classroom activities in the schools is indicated in Table 01. According to the rating in the table, it is clear that students' ratings vary across the items and ratings fall from very low to a very high level.

Table 01: Students' Perceptions of Implementation of the Right to Participation in the Teaching-Learning Process

Item	Interpretation
Teachers do not respond to students' questions while teaching (79.0%).	The results indicated that the Article No. 12 of the UNCRC – Respect for the view of the child is not implemented in the in the classroom.
Teachers do not provide an opportunity for students to express ideas while teaching (57.9%). Teachers do not give students an opportunity to express their creative activities through arts, dramas, poems etc. (62.0%).	The students' responses reflect that Article No. 13 – Freedom of expression is not implant during teaching-learning process.

Teachers do not give students an opportunity to discuss ideas in the class (75.0%). Teachers do not appreciate students' ideas (83.5%).	Responses reflect that Article 14 – Freedom of thought is not implemented in the classroom.
Teachers promote students' participation in school development activities) (29.5%).	According to the responses, Article 15 – Freedom of association is poorly promoted by the teachers.
Teachers never ridicule or let down students (32.1%). Teachers motivate students about their achievement) (51.6%). Physically punishments are given (20.7%).	The students' responses imply that Article No. 16- Right to privacy is implemented in classroom situation satisfactorily.
Gives students health tips to lead a healthy life (41.9%).	Article No. 17- Access to information is implementing to a certain extent, however, need to be improved.

The findings of the student Focus Group Discussion on the teaching – learning process in the class indicated that the students agreed the statement *“When the teacher asks questions during a lesson or after a lesson, we answer. When we question about things unclear to us, teacher explains.”*

However, students in some of the 1AB schools have stated as follows:

“We can't ask questions all the time. Some teachers allow us to question and ask for clarification. Some scold us when we give answers” and “We speak during group activities. We resolve unclear things by asking questions from both the teachers and friends.” “In some subjects (like science) our ideas are not presented. We are scared to question about unclear areas in mathematics.”

Students in one Type 2 school stated the following:

“If our ideas are different from what teachers teach, we have opportunity to present our ideas to them.”

The students in one of the Type 1C – schools have noted that *“In relation to the teaching of a particular lesson, teachers ask whether we understood or not. When we have a doubt, we ask questions during the teaching. But not all the students ask questions. More than half do not speak.”*

The results of the Kruskal-Wallis H test results of the students' ratings on the implementation of the Right to participate in the teaching-learning process among the school types are presented in Table 02. According to the table, the items *‘Teacher responds to students' question while teaching’, ‘Teacher allows to discuss the students' ideas’, ‘Give students an opportunity to express their creative activities through arts, dramas, poems, etc’, and ‘Teacher responds to students' question while teaching’ vary significantly across the school types (p <= 0.05).*

Table 02: Kruskal-Wallis H test of Ranked Students' Responses in the Implementation of Right to Participation in the Teaching-learning among the School Types (N = 692)

Item	School type	N	Mean Rank
Teacher responds to students' question while teaching.	1AB	254	340.76a
	1C	236	340.22a
	Type 2	202	361.06a
Allows an opportunity for students to express ideas while teaching.	1AB	254	339.08a
	1C	236	338.13a
	Type 2	202	365.61a
Gives students an opportunity to discuss ideas in the classroom.	1AB	254	341.33a
	1C	236	330.76b
	Type 2	202	371.39a
Gives students an opportunity to express their creative activities through arts, dramas, poems etc.	1AB	254	344.02a
	1C	236	330.44a
	Type 2	202	368.38b
Appreciates students' ideas.	1AB	254	351.14a
	1C	236	350.41a
	Type 2	202	336.10a

The similar letters along the column indicate no any statistically significant difference at $p \leq 0.05$.

The teachers' responses to the items related to the implementation of the Right to Participation in the

teaching-learning process are presented in Table 03. The majority of the teachers positively (agree and strongly agree) responded to all the items indicating that implementation of the Right to Participation is functioning well within the school environment. The comparison of the students' ratings with teachers' responses reveals an inconsistency between the two response patterns. Further, the comparison of results indicates that teacher's responses are more or less consistent across the items.

Table 03: Teachers' Responses with respect to Implementation of the Right to participation in the Teaching-Learning Process

Item	Interpretation
Students were given opportunities to express ideas during teaching-learning process (63.9%). Allow the students to display their creative abilities through Art/ Drama/ Poems etc. (55.6%).	The teachers' responses reflect that Article No. 13 - Freedom of expression is implemented during teaching-learning process.
Appreciate students' ideas during teaching process (66.7%).	Responses reflect that Article 14 - Freedom of thought is implemented in the classroom.
Provide information for students' social, intellectual, mental, physical, and ethical development (52.8%).	Article No. 17- Access to information is implementing to a certain extent, however, need to be improved.

However, senior secondary students have stated that they have the opportunity to question the teacher about the problems related to the subject. Meanwhile, teachers who work in Grades 10 and 11 are attempting to deliver the theoretical knowledge to students during their lessons to fulfill the requirements of covering up the wider curriculum. Teachers have inquired and questioned the students only about subject-related facts while the majority of the students remain silent. For the teachers working in Grades 10/11, completion of the curriculum is a must and 94% of the teachers were seemed to be implementing a teacher-centered method.

The majority of interviewed principals made suggestions to improve teaching-learning in the classrooms to ensure senior secondary students'

right to participation. That is encouraging teachers to elicit ideas from students, motivating teachers towards student-centered teaching methodology, improving teachers' attitudes and skills, providing resources and facilities for student-centered education within the classroom, and along with teaching the subject, facilitating the teacher to recognize the students.

The majority of teachers made suggestions to improve teaching-learning in the classrooms to ensure senior secondary students' right to participation. They are giving active contribution or allowing the students to express their ideas, changing the teacher's attitudes, deviating from the traditional style and selecting a fresh attractive procedure, planning lessons properly to cater to student needs, conducting projects and practical work, maximizing group work discussing questions and answers with students, giving more and more opportunities for students for debating, working friendly and intimately with students following the concept of child-friendliness and giving students more opportunities to bear leaderships and responsibilities within the classroom.

As such it appears that still, the teaching-learning within the classroom is teacher-centered. Measures must be taken to implement a student-centered teaching-learning process in the senior secondary level in the Sri Lankan schools where the right to participation of students can be maximized.

The findings of the observations of the teaching-learning process in the 18 classrooms by the researcher also indicated that during teaching-learning in the classroom only the teacher talks (94.4%). Students listen (94.4%), students individually involved in decision making, collaboratively make decisions and divide responsibilities among themselves for making decisions (5.6%). Furthermore, the majority of observed classrooms (17) maintained teacher-centered education, with student expression and decision-making appearing to be quite low.

It was evident from the survey findings that the present education system is still teacher-centered and decisions are taken in most situations by principals and teachers (Rathnayaka, 2000). Most of the students at national schools nurture a very optimistic attitude towards student-centered education, some teachers do not follow the activity method even if the suggested activities are given in the teacher's guide, and teachers at provincial council

schools do not employ the student-centered teaching techniques in the teaching-learning process (Dahanayake, 2006). According to a study conducted by Udayakumari (2021), school-teachers should prepare their lesson plans meaningfully by using active teaching methods, appropriate teaching strategies, and teaching aids as well as mentoring and supporting students for academic success and student-centered education.

IV. CONCLUSION

The students' responses provide clear evidence that the implementation of the right to participate is not satisfactorily taking place in the teaching-learning process. Furthermore, depending on the school type the implementation of right to participation in the teaching-learning process at the senior secondary school level there was no evidence of significance. However, the majority of the teachers and the principals indicated that implementation of the Right to Participation is functioning well within their school environment.

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