

# DE-SHIFTING TO SINGLE SESSION SCHOOLS: PROSPECTS AND PROBLEMS IN SCHOOLS OF MALDIVES

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## ABSTRACT

*Schools offer a variety of programs to help out students grow holistically. Double session schools transformed to single session claim to provide holistic education and a conducive environment for the students. This study explores how holistic educational programs are facilitated in context of single session schools. It also attempts to examine the programs offered, conditions enable or hinder in facilitating these programs, and the role of school principals in the implementation of holistic education. Semi-structured interview was employed on six principals from small, medium, and large single session schools in terms of students' enrolment. The data obtained from the interviews were coded and organized according to the research questions. The research revealed that reforms were not incorporated into the curriculum and educational programs in the schools, except few schools brought restructuring to co-curricular activities. The findings revealed that principal's leadership, namely transformational leadership played a vital role in facilitating holistic educational programs in single session schools. The findings provide insight into lack of space, limited human resource capacity, inadequate need-based resourcing, and rapid change in government policies which hinder implementation of holistic education. The study concluded that transforming all schools as single session schools alone, do not provide holistic education unless educational programs balance knowledge with skills and values. Implications of the findings were discussed in the context of educational leadership and holistic education. Consequently, suggestions for future research were also explored.*

**Keywords:** *holistic education, co-curricular activities, transformational leadership*

## INTRODUCTION

School education plays a key role in every nation to build responsible and productive citizens. Schooling must provide holistic educational programs based on body-physical, mind-cognitive, and character-social and spiritual development. Similarly, types of schools have their own definite need along with various dynamics. The types of schools such as single shift schools and double shift schools has its own specific necessitate (Dash & Dash, 2008). Double session is an arrangement used where the supply of schools is inadequate to provide single shift schools for all students (Linden, 2001). It is difficult to organize educational programs after school hours and co-curricular activities are stifled for lack of time in double session schools (Yadav, 2005). On the other hand, schools run in single session enables to cater quality

education. Thus, de-shifting to single session is to provide holistic education for a child's growth and a conducive environment for teaching and learning.

In past time, some schools had been operating on triple or multi sessions, mainly to educate all. Most schools in the Maldives have been operating as two-session (double shift) schools, since formal schooling began in the Maldives (Project Profile, 2009). For economic and political feasibility, the existence of shifts in schools has been implemented in Maldives. A recent reform agenda on education system gives priority to shift double session schools to single session schools as a measure to ensure students expend most of their day in the school participating in extracurricular activities (First 100 days of democratic government, 2009).

From past decades, the focus on education sector of Maldives has been to increase access to education, and now there is an urgent need to improve the quality of primary and secondary education (PO, 2009). The goal of universal primary education was achieved in the Maldives by 2002 (MPND, 2007b). Governing policy document on 'Holistic Education' states that in order to provide holistic education, all the schools in Maldives will be transformed to single-session schools by accommodating extra space to instil capacity, characteristics, and skills mentioned in the curriculum, as well as conducting extracurricular activities and training programs (MoE, 2011). The goal is comprehensible enough to change all the schools to single shift. Moreover, in the current policy environment of education, goals are reflected in judging the quality and quantity of school outcome (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Thus, implementation of the policy requires providing well-rounded education with diverse activities in the schools rather operating schools in simply one shift.

The quality of school outcome considers producing religious (spiritual), intellectually capable, physically skilled, emotionally competent, socially active and responsible citizens. Therefore, school management plays essential role in planning and conducting instructional activities and other programs in school to meet the objectives of holistic education. School principal ensures the efficiency of school programs. The principal's key role as manager is in organizing, functioning, and execution of numerous processes and tasks that permit a school to accomplish its goals (Konok, 2006). Though, intend of the transformation from double session to single session is providing holistic education, several factors would lead to enable or hinder facilitation of such programs.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The government education policy for transforming all the schools into single session schools is to provide holistic education and conducive learning environment by 2013 (PO, 2009). The government believes that more than 200 schools will be transformed to single session schools within 5 years to provide best environment for students' development in schools. Providing a conducive learning environment and holistic education focuses on excellence in education through various activities. Under the

policy on providing holistic education to students, changes mandatory to single session school include;

“...school operating in one shift, extended session hours for both teachers and students, conduct extra and co curricular activities required for holistic education, organize school session in a way to provide both curricular and extracurricular activities, teachers act as facilitators to conduct extracurricular activities apart from their teaching subjects, and also exertion in providing holistic education in its broadest means.” (MoE, 2011)

So far, it is questionable whether; single session schools are providing an environment for holistic education, students are given opportunities to interact in a more relaxed social environment, and teachers’ capacity and physical resources are aligned with the school needs to manage various activities mentioned in the policy. The general population concur that schools should attend to the personal, social, vocational and academic development of young people (Bellamy & Goodlad, 2008). School principal is the manager who shoulders responsibilities in administering the activities. Thus, principals are to lead the changes in schools, coordinate the services offered to their students, and to ensure that these services reach those with the greatest needs (Victor, 2009). Student achievement in single session schools is not aimed to measure academic performance only, rather with respect to all the domains. Probably, educational programs in schools, administration of these programs, principal’s leadership and management practices, and resources in broad terms might impact the provision of holistic education.

## RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTIONS

Perceptions of school leaders are important to understand the nature of de-shifting to single session school. Hence, this study is broadly aimed to explore how holistic educational programs are facilitated in context of single session schools in Maldives, by examining the programs offered, conditions enable or hinder in facilitating these programs, and the role of school principals in the implementation of holistic education. To achieve this aim, the researcher has used the following research questions:

1. What programs are offered in single session schools to provide holistic education?
2. What conditions enable/hinder in facilitating holistic educational programs in single session schools?
3. How do principals perceive their role in providing holistic education in single session schools?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Schools for Holistic Education

The word holistic which is sometimes spelled as 'wholistic', comes from the Greek word 'holon', is referring to a universe made up of integrated wholes that cannot simply be reduced to the sum of its parts (Miller J. P., 2007). The word meaning of holistic, itself makes clear that education should not cater for only one dimension. According to the New Zealand's Ministry of Education, holistic education is defined as an approach of teaching which includes the physical, social, emotional, cultural, and cognitive dimensions of a person's growth (Chiu, 2009). This definition encompasses major areas required for child development, indicating that education is about nurturing the whole person, his moral, cognitive, physical, social, aesthetic and spiritual development. Regarding the notion of spirituality as one aspect in holistic education, Ismail and Hassan (2009) asserts that spirituality in the Malaysian holistic educational context first and foremost rests upon the belief of God the Almighty (Allah) and the revelation as the greatest source of truth.

School is the place for harnessing and training students for the personnel as well as social needs. Hence, it is the roles of the educational institution to inculcate the morals, values, skills, physical development and providing knowledge for the students to face life's challenges. The schooling usually involves people working with and through other people to influence students, parents, teachers, principals and authorities (Moos, 2010). These influences need to be based on a philosophical foundation to develop citizens in all domains. According to some individuals, the purpose of schooling differs as it attempts to focus on citizenship in democratic societies, coping with economic and technological advances and also contributing to common benefits. Parents recognized that schooling must reflect the real world and provide life-work skills (Warner, 2006). Therefore, school has always been and today is more obviously than ever, a multifaceted and complex organization (Mitakidou, Tressou, & Daniilidou, 2009).

More or less, schools are not positioned to feed information, but rather let students learn several lessons and also form several moral characters. This requires a well-developed curriculum, competent teachers and capable school managers and leaders to implement and monitor the internal structure of the school. The curriculum, pedagogical activities and co-curricular activities need to be planned and implemented in such a way to socialization, inculcation, spiritual and physical well being along with academic results. The instructional activities need to develop basic competencies and promote holistic development. A "co-curricular activity is defined as a program or out-of-class activity, supervised and/or financed by the school, which provides curriculum-related learning and character building experiences" (Deering High School Student Handbook, 2005 – 2006; p.29). Therefore, 21<sup>st</sup> century school recognizes the multiplicity of talents that young individuals bring to schooling and, its commitment to release and enhance these talents resulted in the school to create opportunities for all the young people (Warner, 2006).



## Multiple Shifts as an Alternative Way

Demanding population and lack of physical and intellectual resources initiated the double session schools (DSS). First and most, shift system was adopted as a means to meet the increased demand for the enrolment (Aggarwal, 2007). Overcrowding of classrooms has led the operation of double-shift school system in many countries (Bray, 2008; UNESCO, 2010). Thus, beginning of DSS schools actually came in the last century, but varies according to the countries. In 1982, Education Ministry of Senegal launched a pilot double-shift system at the primary level and expanded later (Bray, 2008). Much later, double-shift schooling was introduced in Gambia in 1990 (Orkodashvili M. , 2009).

In Sierra Leone, the government introduced a double-shift system in urban areas as a temporary measure to address the rural-to-urban migration of school-aged children (Wang, 2007). In Chile, many schools have long traditions of double session and have had triple sessions (Bray, 2008). In Malawi, by 2004, 713 schools (around 14%) operated as double session schools while 4390 schools operated as single session schools, and two shifts were taught as a measure to tackle a shortage of classrooms rather than a shortage of teachers (Mulkeen & Chen, 2008). In Ethiopia, 44 percent of government schools operate in two shifts (World Bank 2004, as cited in Theunynck, 2009). In Brazil, schools operated three shifts and had one shift in the evening (Bray, 2008). In Zambia, during 1980s a specially-appointed team considered the use of multiple shifts as an alternative to reach the goal of universal primary education, because it was obvious that the nation could not afford single session schools throughout the country (Aggarwal, 2007).

Double session schools have not been only confined to under-developed or least developed countries. Although double session schooling is most common in poor countries (Orkodashvili, 2009), such a school is also found in the urban areas of developing and developed countries. Many urban with over populated areas must operate schools in double session to provide education to every individual. In urban areas, many schools have been required to run double shift, on account of accurate shortage of accommodation (Sidhu, 1996; Bray, 2008). Thus, one of the reasons for moving to a double-shift model is the potential savings resulted from not having to build more schools to accommodate increased numbers of pupils (Linden, 2001).

Double-session schools are restricted with time and space to provide curricular and co-curricular activities to the students. In double-session arrangement, the duration of each teaching period will have to be kept shorter as compared to single shift schools (Sidhu, 1996). Hours of work are shorter in double shift schools than in single shift schools though the curriculum and the syllabi to be covered are the same for both (Yadav, 2005). In Ethiopia, schools operate in one or more shifts, where one session schools are expected to provide 1,100 instructional hours a year, while those on double shift typically fit in 840 hours for each shift of students (World Bank, 2005).

The double session model is mainly due to lack of infrastructure and finance. To address the problem of overcrowding when resources are limited, economists and planners often advise the use of many shifts, so as to more fully use the existing infrastructure, rather than investing in new schools or expending existing ones (Theunynck, 2009). This was the case in Maldives, where half of the schools in the country has been running in double-session. Thus, meetings such as coordination and subject meetings and extracurricular activities such as remedial classes and sports have to take place in the evenings and even during weekends (Wheatcroft, 2005). Other limitations include; getting classrooms cleaned before the second shift commences, seating arrangements require adjustments every day before each shift begins due to the different number of children in various classes, and giving rooms for teachers pose quite a big problem in school buildings which was not constructed for two shifts system in mind (Yadav, 2005).

### **Transition to Single Session Schools**

Single session schools were the traditional norms of schooling. Today, the education systems in countries focus on providing broad-based education to make children ready for global life challenges. Accordingly, developing and developed countries with loads of double session school started to transform all double session schools to single session schools. For example, Ministry of Education, Singapore, “is currently exploring measures to enhance holistic learning, in particular, seek to strike a better balance between equipping our pupils with foundational knowledge and developing in them the skills and values that will prepare them for life” (MoE-Singapore, 2008c ). Moreover, moving all the primary schools in Singapore to single session model will be an important structural change to increase the capacity of the system to serve pupils better, and provide a more favourable school environment that is well-balanced and holistic (MoE-Singapore, 2009d). Hence, this transition from double to single session model is one of the spines of the backbone of holistic education. This model would provide teachers with supplementary time and space to deliver a more holistic education as well as to let pupils benefit from range of both academic and non-academic activities.

Among Asian countries, Singapore and Malaysia have been transforming schools to be single session, which is also recently followed by Maldives. In Singapore, both primary and high schools operated on double sessions and in the 1990’s secondary schools were converted to single session schools (Singapore-Detailed Paper, 2006; Bray, 2008), requiring the construction of fifty new high schools (Singapore-DetailedPaper, 2006). Primary schools possess a key feature of students attending either morning or afternoon session (MoE-Singapore, 2008). The MoE of Singapore has been transforming double session model to a partial single-session model since 2004, and is targeting to facilitate the transition of all government primary schools to a single-session model by 2016 (MoE-Singapore, 2009d). The government of Malaysia is also pushing for a single session nationwide for all primary and secondary schools, though no deadline is set for its total implementation due to huge costs and extra teaching staffs involved (Jamaludin, Abdullah, & Alagesh, , 2011).

Schooling for Maldivian generations started traditionally as the home-based learning in the 'edhurge' or 'kiyavaage'. Later on, 'Makthab' and 'Madhrasa' were operated by a pious person or by a group of learnt people of the community. The establishment of the first government school in Male' in 1927 initiated several challenges to the traditional system. Initially the school was limited to the education of boys, but later in 1944 a section was opened for girls and young women (Azza, 2008). This was the time schools ran in single session. However, double-shift model is the norm in all schools which limits the providing of the full curriculum for the primary and secondary cohorts (MoPND, 2007). The seventh policy in the National Framework for Development 2009-2013 is to transform all the schools to single session schools for the purpose of providing holistic education and conducive learning environment (PO, 2009). Hence, Ministry of Education started to implement the policy in 2009 where 48 schools were converted to single sessions. In 2010 the number has been increased to 101 single-session schools. Most of the schools in less populated islands were changed to single session in the first year of the policy implementation.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

School is the place where much interaction occurs and children involved in activities formulated to provide academic, physical, moral, and social development. In order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning for a well-balanced primary education, a balance between the acquisition of knowledge with the development of skills and values is proposed through the increased use of engaging and effective teaching methods, more holistic assessment, and a stronger emphasis on non-academic aspects within the curriculum (MoE-Singapore, 2009d). "Holistic education is a popular trend in the midst of various educational reforms" (Chiu, 2009 p.261). The transition to single session schools is to provide a conducive learning environment in the schools. Several countries have been implementing a nationwide reform in education by transforming all double-session schools to single-session, like in Singapore (MoE-Singapore, 2010b), Malaysia (Jamaludin, Abdullah, & Alagesh, 2011), and now in Maldives (PO, 2009).

However, additional infrastructural is required in line with the move towards a more holistic education. Facilities that would support the new emphases in curriculum, exposing students to a broad range of non-academic activities, more time and space to interact meaningfully, and a favourable school environment are aspects of single session schools (MoE-Singapore(d), 2009). Additionally, introducing a more holistic curriculum, CCA (Co-Curricular Activities) and making use of outdoor learning are an important platform for engaging students in holistic development (MoE-Singapore(e), 2010). The responsibility for managing teaching and learning is shared amongst principals, school management teams (SMTs), heads of departments, and classroom educators (Bush, Joubert, Kiggundu, & Rooyen, 2010). Nevertheless, in the single-session model, school principals play an important role in school operation and developing the conditions in the school organization. Single session

schools necessitate more resources in the areas of manpower, funding and infrastructure be provided to support the proposed changes (MoE-Singapore, 2009d).

## **METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

### **Research Design**

The research design was developed to address the research questions of the study with both qualitative methods. The principals/school heads represented a purposive sample of the principals in the single-session schools. Maldives has 208 schools of which 198 are public schools. Among these 198 public schools, 92 schools are operating in single session/shift during the academic year 2011. Therefore, the original population is 92 principals of public single session schools. Six single session schools were purposefully selected on the basis of students' population (large, medium, and small). The large population refers to the student population more than 700 (seven hundred), medium refers to more than 350 (three hundred and fifty), and small refers to student population between 51 (fifty one) to 349 (three hundred and forty nine). The interviewees were the sample respondents in the qualitative sample, as an identical sampling (Mertens, 2010).

An interview guide was developed by the researcher, and six principals of SSS were interviewed on the qualitative portion of the study. The profile of the principals participated and their schools are described in the Table 1. The selected participants were contacted through telephone to request for an interview and explained the study objectives. Semi-structured questions were mainly used, since most interviews employ a combination of structured and semi-structured questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Semi-structured questions enabled the interviewee to express how they regarded situations from their own point of view. Interview also sees as an encounter necessarily sharing many aspects of everyday life (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The interviews were recorded by using a digital audio recorder, irrespective of face-to-face or phone interviews. Finally, all the interviews were later transcribed by the researcher for data analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

After completion of the transcribing interviews, each interview was read and corrected against the audio recording. Then, researcher started with limited coding by categorizing the responses into the general discussion topics. Interview transcripts were renamed with the anonymous names. Then the researcher read and familiarized with the data and made notes by referring to the research questions. After reviewing the data, they were sorted to find connection with the themes and categories. Then, coding was done to bring meaning and categorize the interviewee's comments into six discussion areas. In the findings and discussion of this paper, the six respondents will be referred to as A, B, C, D, E and F.

Table 1: Profiles of the participating principals and their schools

Respondents	Years of Experience (principal)	School enrolment	School Category	No. Of Years after de-shifting	Location
Principal A	12 years	700 students	Large	1 <sup>st</sup> year	urban
Principal B	3 years	1000 students	Large	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	urban
Principal C	4 years	200 students	Small	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	rural
Principal D	7 years	450 students	medium	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	rural
Principal E	2 years	500 students	medium	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	rural
Principal F	3 years	150 students	small	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	rural

## FINDINGS

### Educational Programs Offered

Co-curricular activities are apparent when these schools were in double session. However, co-curricular activities are given much emphasis in single session schools, together with classroom teaching. The principal Mrs B described in detail,

“Before, we didn’t give much emphasize on outside the classroom activities. But when it comes for holistic education, we decided to give certain number of sport activities to all the students. Every child in the school is involved in some kind of club activity. Now we are 100% sure that all the children will be involved in some kind of sport (all the students unless otherwise they have any disabilities or such).”

Mr E further elaborated,

“We have one day for extra classes for all focal students, two days for activities during the session, and in addition to these sports activities will conducted later in the day”.

Principal A viewed those co-curricular activities like clubs and sports activities are more organised in SSS.

“we use to have these activities as well but this year we were more organized in getting the teachers involved because of the availability of more classrooms in the afternoon and this has become easier so they have done various other clubs like English, Dhivehi, Islam club, and also some sport activities”.

Similarly, another principal Mr E, also ensured students are getting holistic education:

“Now every student in the school would be engaged in at least one sport activity and one academic activity, like clubs”.

Mr F affirmed that uniformed body activities such as scout and guide will provide opportunity to learn new skills and values,

“As far as I have experienced, the children are taking enough time not only for studies; but also to exhibit their talent, to show their skills that they are capable of doing other things like guide or scout or even all sorts of programs”.

Mrs B detailed how she ensured these programs balance knowledge with skills,

“We check the students taking part in sports, life skill clubs. Clubs are run in a manner that they learn some kind of skills. We don’t just teach them”.

One principal, Mr D indicated how he organized school session time with regard to spiritual development of children;

“At the moment we are starting first period at 6:15, students are reporting at 6 o’clock. When we follow this system they will get up early in the morning and go for prayer after that they will get ready for the school and come to school”.

On the other hand, de-shifting all schools as single session schools alone, do not provide holistic education unless educational programs are focused. Some schools are behind the lag:

“We haven’t started any new programs yet. But we conduct small programs like literary activities, sports, home side life skills”.

### **Lack of Infrastructure and Space**

Most of the schools got couples of classrooms during the process of transition to Single Session. This finding showed that ministry wanted to change as many schools by providing just classrooms or changing some rooms into classrooms. Mr E confirmed this,

“School got few classrooms in the process of changing from double to SSS. So now we have enough classrooms. However, I would really like to have a sports complex and vocational lab, at the moment we do not have vocational facilities”.

Some schools changed important rooms and halls to classrooms by partitioning and modifying. SSS demanded infrastructure to provide all necessary activities. One of the principal Mrs B stated on this regard,



“we are still running out of space, we have no proper music rooms, we have not enough labs that we require but instead of all these things we are occupying rooms as classrooms”.

Others have used buildings outside the school. Mr F described how he managed infrastructure in de-shifting process,

“Actually there is lack of facilities. That’s why I have taken two classrooms from the pre-school. For extracurricular activities, I use not only the school premises; but also make use of other places”.

Principal Mr C also revealed similar narrative to explain lack of infrastructure,

“..though we have science stream we do not have laboratories and we are lacking classrooms”.

The environment is not conducive to students as well as teachers in many schools due to lack of space and resources. Mrs B assured,

“It’s really difficult not having kind of space that we require. We don’t have extra rooms for carrying or conducting remedial classes during our session time which actually we need to teach very week ones during session time”.

The findings revealed that SSS demand more space and infrastructure to provide academic classroom activities, sports, and other co curricular activities. Mr E stated that, “if we have a sports complex within the school. Then it would be possible for us to conduct more activities”. Mr C also affirmed this:

“We don’t have proper play areas and at the same time when a group of students are playing in the school compound that we have, I think the other classes are distracted very badly”.

Principal, Mr A further mentioned the difficulties arise due to lack of sufficient infrastructure:

“We have an AV room which all the teachers use if all of them are there to use it, all at the same time that makes it longer and demanding”.

Moreover, it is found that school library, labs, room for vocational activities, staff room, prayer room, AV room, and indoor sports hall or at least a normal room are lacking in schools apart from classrooms.

## **Financial Limitations**

Financial constraints affect the availability of resources to provide activities for holistic development of students. Difficulty in managing school activities especially for holistic development of children were elaborated by Mr A,

“We are unable to conduct many of these activities because of the difficulties in the budget so just by bringing all of the students in one session does not mean we are able to do everything we want”.

Mrs B confirmed the same narrative with her perception:

“Actually the budget is not allocated for holistic education. The policy has changed this way but nothing has changed in the budget”.

Some activities need to be extended after official working hours which require overtime pay. However, the limitations on overtime pay restrict holistic educational programs. Mr D confirmed this;

“There isn’t enough money in the budget to pay overtime work for teacher in the education sector, compared to others”.

Even though, the budget is not allocated as intended to provide in schools, more critically there are several factors which make more difficult to manage the school budget. Principal C also affirmed the view that, “We don’t know the allocated budget for this school. Since, we have to spend we are spending without knowing how much is allocated for such and such activities”.

Principal Mr E from a large school also commented that,

“Budget is a whole different thing altogether what we get and what we prepare is different”.

## **Lack of Human Resource Capacity**

Lack of human resource hinders holistic educational programs in Single Session Schools. Principal Mr C is also facing lack of expertise; where he mentioned:

“I have only two leading teachers, but the number is not enough for such a school. However, I selected some senior staffs and delegated responsibilities to them to head the departments. Some large schools have sports supervisors, but we don’t get. Number figures are there, but still we don’t get that specific staff”.

Teachers are also lacking knowledge and skills in facilitating extracurricular activities as well as vocational activities. All the interviewees mentioned about lack of human

capacity in providing vocational activities in the schools as well as in the islands. Mr. A stated that, “teacher should have the training to teach the subject and they are not equipped in other skills required for these kinds of activities”. There are several reasons for lack of vocational activities in school. Principal Mr A, claimed that,

“The school does not have resources to do these vocational activities and we do not have trained people here”.

Mrs B confirmed the same portrayal with her perception.

“This is one complain I always keep on making. We don’t have enough technical people as I say, we have to hire them”.

All other respondents, Mrs B, Mr C, Mr D, Mr E, and Mr F also confirmed this claim. However, the findings revealed that sometimes they use physics teachers or power house people to teach electrical wiring classes, to enable TVET programs to be conducted. However, they believed that they cannot rely on volunteers and need trained teachers in these areas to fully implement the aim of SSS.

### **Lack of Holistic Assessment**

The findings indicate that still students are assessed in terms of academic achievement only, rather inculcating all the domains in holistic education. The school awards from the ministry of education is solely from academic achievements in O’ level and A’ level exams. Mr A mentioned this:

“Policy makers are talking about holistic education and we have policies for holistic education, but the way they judge the school is not adequate. The way they are judging the school is how well the school is doing in O’ level examination is not enough. And this is the only aspect used by the ministry to say which school is the best or which school is a good school. And there is no other criterion for this. So talking about holistic education and checking the schools by totally different criteria, it’s really a challenge”.

### **More time for the activities**

School principals reflected the availability of more time in assisting students’ holistic development by organising activities in a meaningful ways. Mr F also mentioned that, “SSS is much easier to manage and organize things”. Allocation of time helps in organising various activities without any clash. The principal F also stated that,

“the amount of time allotted for studies and extra activities and uniform bodies, clubs and associations are very much”.

Teachers get more time with extended instructional time to help children academically. Mr F detailed:

“People only focus about the result of the children. Here (in single session) we have a little more time. Time is there, so the teachers can clearly analyze the progress of the children”.

In support of this, Principal Mrs B said that “in a way it’s easier, we all work together at the same time. We all will be available for a meeting”. This would provide room for collegiality, where teachers get professional assistance from others as staffs working in the same session. Principal Mr E supported this SSS model by stating that,

“With the SSS we get to being in the school during the entire school session, which is an advantage for coordination and most of the management functions. Also we get to one sit for professional assistance from other senior teachers”.

The territory of using own initiatives of staffs are also evident. Mr F mentioned the space for instructional supervision and professional development:

“When it comes to single session, we can observe each and every class and we can see them, the HODs and leading teachers will focus on these areas and in the coordination meeting, the delegation of work becomes very easy in single session because all the leading teachers and HODs come together”.

Single session schools facilitate to conduct staff meetings and common meetings during day time or session time. Mr D elaborated this;

“All are coming together, and all are leaving the school almost same time. So administration wise single session schools are better, convenient, than double session schools”.

### **Planning as a Tool**

Principals agreed that planning is easy in SSS. One of the principal, Mr F assured that,

“Planning also becomes quite easy because we have enough time to sit together and plan the academic calendar. Everybody has a chance to sit together”.

According to the principal Mr C stated that, “I do involve all stakeholders of the school in the planning”. Additionally, the following response by Mr A supported this:

“Planning of course has to be done in consultation with the stake holders of the school that is specially the teachers and parents. I consulted with the teachers to set up clubs especially in various areas”.

Almost all the respondents in the interview made emphasis on importance of planning. Similarly, Mrs B indicated that, “of course when we start with a new project or new theme or something new, planning is the first thing. We need to do a lot of planning. In that case, we did a lot of planning”. Initially she was not discussing the matter with teachers due to time constraints, but she discussed with school board and PTA. Mr A viewed that role of principal does not change at all with this change. However, He mentioned that, “it’s the vision and setting goals to meet this and planning is the key role in SSS”.

### **Leadership role of the principal**

Not all but some principals claimed that they have put the objectives of the school known to every member of the staff. The following response by Mrs B detailed about her school mission and vision:

“I began with the new vision in the school, I joined here in 2009 and they didn’t have a vision as such but they had a mission what they are doing actually. I clearly always talk about my vision. I always tell my management that this is what I want. I want this school to be the best because this school is out of people’s mind”.

Moreover, principals mentioned that they direct and ensure staff are working towards the school’s educational goals. One of the principal, Mr E stated that, “It is easier to pass common direction and guidance”. In further, Mr A mentioned as,

“....to set a goal we consult the staff specially the teachers and the leading teachers so they are involved in setting the task and it is in consultation with the teachers. And I need to come up to make a whole school achieve the target in certain area”.

Apart from directing, principals claimed that they frequently motivate teachers by accomplishing their effort and reward special efforts by teachers. Principal Mrs B detailed briefly the leadership role in achieving the targets. She assured that,

“So principal become the guider, become the director, become the motivator and principal is the counsellor as well. So we should have a vision of ourselves. Then we become the director, become the motivator, become the leader, just stay in front and ask them to follow us. Actually it’s the inspiration part that would be and not giving up”.

However, only three principals mentioned about their leadership in operating the school.

## **Principal as an Income Generator**

From this point, it is amazing how principals manage school finance in conducting school activities. Mr E mentioned that,

“we have to change money from one budget code to another and manage the activities as we plan. It is never provided to according to what we propose”.

Furthermore, all the principals stated that they get financial assistance from the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and from the community. Principals play an important role in generating these financial inputs. Mr C stated:

“We use PTA and conduct fund rising programs with the involvement of students and also parents. And get some donations from others”.

Mr D also mentioned:

“PTA is very active in this school, Parents brought some materials from PTA fund and they made shelves of the Science Lab”.

Mr F also confirmed the financial input from PTA as:

“Budget is very low but still we are managing and here I really get the help of the community. The community really contributes for this holistic education”.

Principals use different modes to manage school finance in order to provide holistic education along with the constraints of the budget. Mrs B, detailed that,

“courses like cake decoration; some are freely and some are paid. For some courses children have to pay like dress making. Parents are very helpful. They know that all these efforts we take or we put in for their children. So they are willing to pay. Some of the parents are paying for the coaches now”.

## **DISCUSSION**

Implementing the holistic education policy via de-shifting double session schools to single sessions unmask imperative areas; importance of educational programs focused on overall development of children, and the role of principals in managing the SSS mode. These side street areas enable to provide holistic education, with providing more time for curricular and co-curricular activities, and professional development of staff. Principals’ transformational leadership, appropriate planning for change and principal become an income generator contributes in booming schools events in the context of Maldives. However, lack of infrastructure and space, lack of



human resource capacity, financial limitations, lack of holistic assessment is viewed as challenges to provide holistic education, whereby it requires sizeable or need-based resources, developing human resource capacity, and change in assessment for successful policy implementation. Principals in SSS are grappled with difficult issues arising from unpromising school contexts, weak/lack of inherited infrastructure and under-qualified educators (Bush, Joubert, Kiggundu, & Rooyen, 2010). Moreover, low remuneration for teachers dissatisfies them and shortening of official working hours has become an emerging challenge.

### **SSS Model Requires Well-designed and Adequate Infrastructure**

Single session schools require more infrastructures to provide an environment for holistic education. From the literature, it was found that DSS model was emerged due to lack of infrastructure to accommodate increase in school age population (Aggarwal, 2007; Wang, 2007; Bray, 2008; Sidhu, 2008; UNESCO, 2010). Thus, transition from DSS to SSS with lack of infrastructure is incompatible to provide a conducive environment. The study found that lack of infrastructure makes difficulty in managing and organizing school activities in an effective way. Additionally, principals perceive to have adequate infrastructure in SSS to operate efficiently. Daily interactions in schools are affected by conditions of the school, as a result role of the quality physical environment is decisive to children's development (Duran-Narucki, 2008). Although, infrastructure and facilities do not constitute to students achievement, infrastructure provides a conducive learning environment in the schools.

It was also found that principals were unable to provide some co-curricular activities and sports during the session. However, some principals did not find it impossible to conduct those activities. These principals tried to utilize every available infrastructure. However, principals urged to have infrastructure for PAL, sports and vocational activities. In the literature, it was found that MoE has carefully invested in infrastructure, providing indoor and outdoor sports facilities, such as Multi-purpose Hall, school field, games courts and the new Indoor Sports Hall (ISH) (MoE-Singapore(d), 2009). Moreover, other facilities like staff room, prayer hall, science lab, school library, and other infrastructures need to meet the demand of the school.

### **Need-based Budget and Financial Resources**

All the government schools are free of charge and annual budgets are allocated by the MoE. The study found that financial limitations affect planning of vocational activities and other activities for well-rounded education in SSS. The findings match the findings of Kartal (2009) who reported difficulty caused by insufficient finances as a problem that principals complain related to planning. Vocational activities, life skill programs, sports, PAL, outdoor programs and many other activities come to the umbrella of holistic education. These programs require facilities and human resources to fulfill the purpose of transition to SSS. However, this study found that school

budget is very limited and nothing has changed to financial resources due to the policy.

### **Building Professional Capacity Becomes Obligatory**

Professional capacity of teachers and middle managers are really crucial for SSS model. This study found that teachers are not equipped with knowledge and skills required for several extra-curricular and life skill programs and principals from different schools manage the available teachers' capacity differently. Study of Khan (2011) found that human resources were adequate in the two schools they studied, but were difference in how they were utilized. Some, principals hired trainers, but which is only possible in urban areas. As indicated in researches, teacher growth must be integrated with school development (Dag & Gümüşeli, 2011). This reflects pre-service as well as in-service programs to be effective including cross-subject and activities related to holistic development of students.

### **Call for Transformative Leadership Towards the Goal Attainment**

In a general perspective, SSS principals' leadership role is considerably high, especially participatory leadership. Bearing a few, transformative leadership is low among the principals. The study found that principals direct teachers and staff towards desired goal. Effective leaders would motivate the staffs at highest level in order to achieve the desired objectives. The study found that principals have responsibility of providing an environment for holistic education in schools. This finding is supported by Jamelaa and Jainabee (2011) as school principals are responsible to provide a healthy environment, in accordance with the National Philosophy of Education. A recent study indicated that principal's transformative leadership significantly related to the effectiveness of a successful school practices (MuhammadFaizal, Saedah, Norfariza, & Faisal, 2011). A transformative leader is beyond daily businesses and motivating staffs, but provides individual support, and is an energetic visionary (Zembat, Koçyigit, Tugluk, & Dogan, 2010). Thus, SSS need to have an effective leader to administer changes at the school level properly (Jamelaa & Jainabee, 2011). Because, a manager who aspires to develop the school in accordance with its goals has to be a leader so as to ensure effective management (Zembat et al.,2010). School managers as transformative leaders would deploy efficient changes in management and productive use of resources.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE**

A number of implications for practice emerged from this research. Many of these suggestions came from the participants themselves as well as from the best practice for the implementation of such a policy.

1. Ministry of Education needs to have a meaningful time frame for the implementation of the SSS policy. It is needed to revise the time framework of five year plan from 2009-2013 and transform DSS to SSS systematically with minimum number of schools every year but providing full capacity. The time will be required to

make infrastructural enhancements to schools in implementing the single-session model.

2. Minimum number of classrooms alone would not assist to provide a conducive environment for holistic education and to facilitate the change. Thus, sufficient number of classrooms, indoor sports hall, vocational lab, more than one audio visual room, science labs, conducive staffroom with space for each teacher, and prayer hall need to be provided.

3. Schools must have flexibility to adjust their start and end times with careful consideration of their local conditions as well as the Islamic and cultural norms, and autonomy with guidelines and examples of good practices. The holistic education policy needs to be revised by ministry of education.

4. Teacher training institutions should equip teachers to assess and provide pupils with richer and more holistic teaching on their development and skills acquisition in academic and non-academic areas. Additionally, principals should be trained and exposed to gain knowledge on how to operate schools in line with providing holistic education through SSS model.

5. Ministry of education should assist schools to enhance the quality of co-curricular activities and vocational activities, optimal deployment of qualified teachers and funds for purchasing mandatory equipments and facilitating holistic programs. Moreover, irrespective of small schools (non-autonomous), they must know the budget allocated for different items and their school budget.

6. Principals should develop a system to assess the development of their pupils in academic and non-academic areas and to provide a more holistic education. They must also enhance student learning by increasing student participation in sports, enhancing opportunities for student development by introducing optional CCA units, and incorporating service learning and community involvement programme into CCA.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

A similar study may be done with a larger sample which would enhance the validity and reliability of the conclusions reached. Also, additional investigations can be conducted through a purposeful field observations and document review along with interviews. Further studies can be made by including perception of teachers, parents, students and superintendents. This study can be replicated by a larger sample from SSS abroad in order to be able to conduct a cross-country comparison, like with Singapore and Maldives.

## **CONCLUSION**

Investigation on determining principals' perception on condition facilitating holistic education represents a rich stratum of exploration. Based on the findings of the study conducted in Maldives, the researcher arrived at several conclusions. Firstly, reforms were not incorporated into the curriculum and educational programs in the schools, except few schools brought restructuring to co-curricular activities. Secondly, SSS setup in Maldives urgently requires more space and infrastructure to conduct

extracurricular and vocational activities to facilitate holistic educational programs. Additionally, teachers lack skills and knowledge needed to facilitate activities for holistic development of students, such as some sports, life skill programs, and vocational programs. Professional capacity of teachers and management staffs must be upgraded for implementing the SSS model for holistic education. Financial resources play a huge role in purchasing equipments and materials, and finding instructors for holistic development activities. The educational policies need to be revised to link holistic education policy where as students' assessment should not be solely on academic domain.

Finally, the roles and responsibilities of school principals should always be revisited to ensure that they are executing their responsibilities as expected. Effectiveness of reforms depends on principals' transformational leadership and planning in facilitating holistic educational programs in single session schools. Successful implementation of SSS model aimed for holistic education would never be achieved unless educational programs balance knowledge with skills and values; have adequate infrastructure; consistent financial resources; skilled professionals and rewiring of policies towards a specific objective.

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