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**School Improvement:  
The Route Taken by an Urban  
Primary School in the  
Republic of Maldives**

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy in Education at Massey University

Palmerston North

New Zealand

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2007

## **ABSTRACT**

The primary and secondary schools in the Maldives serve over one third of the total population. Having achieved universalization of primary education, one of the challenges of the education system now is to improve the quality of primary education. Studies done in the past, to explore quality in primary education, have been quantitative in nature, telling only part of the story when it comes to describing improvement efforts. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore in detail how a primary school in an urban setting of the Maldives deals with school improvement efforts.

A qualitative case study, informed by the interpretivist research paradigm, was used to explore this issue. One of the primary schools in Male' was purposefully selected for this study and 48 participants took part, of whom thirteen were students. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observations, document reviews and administering of questionnaires.

The findings of this study suggest that there were three major dimensions or three interrelated, key concepts that together undergirded the improvement efforts in the school. They are change, leadership and culture. In action-oriented terms, these dimensions or concepts translated into managing change, attending to specific leader actions and influencing the school's culture, respectively, reflecting six themes of school improvement. They are: a focus on change, a focus on students, a teaching learning focus, investing in staff, strong leadership by the head and school culture. In addition to these, it was noted that these themes emerged as having significance to the school's improvement efforts against the backdrop of many stakeholder influences and contextual factors. In essence, the findings of this study portray the micro-level realities of the working of a school that is consciously and continuously striving for improving educational practice.

In conclusion to the study, research implications and areas for further research have been identified that would inform educational policy and practice in the Republic of Maldives.

## Acknowledgement

First and foremost I thank Almighty Allah, for giving me the courage, strength and wisdom to complete this thesis. Next, I am indebted to various personnel whose support, assistance and guidance were critical in different ways to the completion of this thesis.

I thank the Maldivian Government for granting me paid leave and the Ministry of Education for granting permission to study one of their schools.

To the teachers, supervisors, assistant principals and the principal, I would like to express my sincere gratitude for letting me into your school and classrooms and for sharing your wealth of experiences, so critical to my study, with me so generously. I also thank the students who shared with me a glimpse of their school experiences and, to their parents, for granting me the permission to communicate with their children.

Thanks are due to the Villa Foundation, Maldives, for selecting me as one of the candidates to pursue higher studies. If not for their recent initiative to provide opportunities for further education for Maldivians, it would not have been possible for me to pursue this study.

I am indeed grateful to my Chief supervisor Prof. Wayne Edwards, who has been very helpful and supportive in every conceivable way throughout this long journey. His support and understanding, especially during times of downturn, will always be remembered. From the initial proposal writing stage through the data analysis and chapter writing stages to the final compilation of the entire thesis, his comments and suggestions have always indicated to me, the 'next steps', and thus provided invaluable guidance, inspiration and motivation to persevere through to the end. I am also thankful to my second supervisor Dr. Jenny Poskitt, whose insightful comments and suggestions especially on the literature review and methodology chapters provided the much needed strength to the 'backbone' of this study.

I am very grateful to Massey University for offering me one of its Doctoral Scholarship's funding for three years and also to the Graduate Research Funding Committee at the College of Education for their financial assistance in the data collection phase of my study.

I would also like to thank the various staff members of the School of Educational Studies, College of Education at Massey University, for the closeness they kept with me as a graduate student in their department. In particular, I thank Tracey and Jenny.

Assistance in various forms from Maldivian friends in Palmerston North deserves a special note of appreciation. To Fawaz, Faathi, Shujau, Arifa, Massood, Manik and Shakira, I thank you all for being so supportive and helpful for both my family and I, during our stay in New Zealand.

I am very grateful to *Vashafaru* Rasheed, for looking after my father in my long absence, for without his help I would not have been able to leave my home country to pursue this study.

Finally, my sincere and heartfelt thanks goes to my wife Naila, son Ismail and daughter Aminath, for their love, support and encouragement during the entire period of the study. Last, but not the least, I owe my very special thanks to my mother, Fathimath Khalid, and step father, Mohamed Ibrahim, for bearing my long absence and standing by me in every endeavour I ventured; this journey was no exception.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

**ABC Survey:** Assessment of basic competencies survey

**EDC:** Educational Development Centre

**ESQIS:** Educational Supervision and Quality Improvement Section

**MCHE:** Maldives College of Higher Education

**MLA Survey:** Monitoring learning achievement survey

**MUHEC:** Massey University Human Ethics Committee

**MOE:** Ministry of Education

**NASAL:** National assessment of student achievement level

**PTA:** Parent teacher association

**SAP:** Senior assistant principal

**SMT:** Senior management team

# CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND THESIS ORGANISATION

## 1.1 Background to the Study

The primary and secondary schools in the Maldives serve over one third of the total population, illustrating that a high proportion of Maldivians are school aged children. The proportionately high student population also signifies the importance of placing emphasis on improving education as a tool for socio-economic development. Having achieved universalization of primary education, the challenge faced now in the quest to improve the education system is concurrently meeting the dual needs of expanding secondary enrolment and improving the quality of both the primary and secondary education. Thus, the broad topic of my research relates to the latter, i.e. exploring how best to approach the challenge of improving the quality of education; specifically, that of primary education.

Studies done in the past have indicated that the quality of education is not up to the mark. For example, the MLA (Monitoring Learning Achievement) Survey, done in 1999, has concluded that there is “a sense of urgency to increase efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning ...” (p. 9). Furthermore, a consultancy report, National Assessment of Student Achievement Levels (NASAL) has stated that the graduates of primary schools do not meet the accepted academic levels of the receiving secondary schools (Baumgart, 2001). Reflecting on these studies, the *Sixth National Development Plan: 2001-2005*, (2002), states that the “overall learning achievement among primary students is very low...” (p. 60) and, therefore, the “strategic focus over the next five years will be on quality improvement of education at all levels...” (p. 60).

Regardless of these findings, showing that the levels of student achievement are below expectations, a recent study (see Maniku, Nadiya & Riyaz, 2000) of an urban primary school has indicated that it has made improvement gains<sup>1</sup>. They have further noted that “a number of separate activities that contribute to the school academic quality improvement are undertaken even now” (p. 26). The current study, therefore,

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<sup>1</sup> In comparison to the results of the MLA Survey

attempted to explore the issue of quality improvement in primary education from the perspective of school improvement and school change. Hence, the rationale for doing the study is presented next.

## **1.2 Rationale for the Study**

The last fifteen years has seen the emergence of a number of reports on various aspects of education:

- (i) The 1989 National Survey of basic education achievement of 14-year olds (Ministry of Education, 1995);
- (ii) The UNICEF sponsored ABC (assessment of basic competencies) Survey, 1995 (Ministry of Education, 1995);
- (iii) The Common Exams for grades four & five students (Ministry of Education, 1999a);
- (iv) The Monitoring Learning Achievement Project, supported by UNESCO & UNICEF (ibid; "Internal document", Ministry of Education (1999b);
- (v) National assessment of student achievement levels (NASAL) (Baumgart, 2001; 2004).

Many have delved into the area of quality in education. However, almost all of these reports are quantitatively oriented. That is, a sample of students has been tested in key curriculum areas and the results reported. The Common Exams and NASAL are, however, different in that they are not "one shot" activities but, rather, initiated as ongoing programmes to gauge improvements in schools.

In 1997, the MOE introduced common achievement tests for grades 4 and 5 to monitor student achievement in the main subjects taught in primary schools: Mathematics, Dhivehi (the local language) and English. These tests were more commonly known as the 'common exams'. According to Baumgart (2001), the common exam was abandoned because, "it was considered that the benefits of these examinations were not fully realized as a lack of adequately trained personnel in assessment and reporting meant that the tests themselves were not subjected to rigorous analysis and schools were not provided with feedback" (p. 1). This, along with the fact that these tests did not permit an evaluation of students' achievement at

the system level, provided, according to Baumgart (2001), the rationale for starting NASAL.

One of the purposes of NASAL is to bring about improvements over time. The report states: “if national assessment is conducted on a regular basis . . . , education managers are able to report on changes in outcomes overtime” (Baumgart, 2001, p. 4). In this regard, it presented a detailed (statistical) analysis of test scores and indicated to schools, for example, that achievement in certain areas was low, so emphasis should be laid on that area. However, it could be argued that individual classroom tests (the unit tests, described in later chapters), too, would provide this latter information, provided that the school does evaluations, as has been done in the case study school. This is not to say that NASAL did not have any benefits. On the contrary, the project did train a cadre of school personnel in the design, development and evaluation of tests and test items, who could carry on this type of assessment regularly; thus, attempting to address an issue noted by Hawes & Stephens (1990, p. 8): “at the national level one is struck by the very low volume of research even into conventional measures of achievement . . . [and, furthermore,] in most [developing] countries, . . . no standardised tests have been devised to measure and compare achievements in reading in the national language.”

Although NASAL is quite a departure from the above convention in that it incorporated a qualitative component (questionnaire to all respondents), the point here is, just to reiterate, school processes that made the results better (or worse) are minimally mentioned. For example, the study specifically stated that leadership is omitted, yet it is a factor, without doubt, that affects the outcomes of the school positively. Culture, another component, is addressed only minimally under the name of ‘school climate’. Aspects of culture, like ‘working relationships’, ‘norms’ and ‘structures’, are not explored; the closest components being ‘positive teacher attitudes’ and ‘having high expectations for students’, without much focus or attention on how these played out in the improvement process.

Furthermore, the above reports are mainly national level studies mostly sponsored by outside agencies, which means a follow up in the near future is hard to materialize such that findings can be confirmed (or alternatively refuted). At the school level,

however, the Educational Supervision and Quality Improvement Section (ESQIS) of the Ministry of Education, has recently restructured its supervision programme which now focuses on the whole school and is more qualitatively oriented (see Maniku et al., 2000; Mohamed, 2000). Yet, one of the first studies done in a primary school under this programme (Maniku et al, 2000) did not consider the change processes or the cultural aspects at play in improvement efforts although it highlighted the leadership aspect. Therefore, this study endeavoured to review a Maldivian urban primary school's work from a perspective that has not been taken previously: a process perspective. Thus, the purpose of this study was to answer the following research question:

*How does a primary school in an urban setting of the Maldives deal with school improvement efforts?*

Although school improvement has been criticized for looking into processes at the expense of outcomes, my purpose is to identify and explore effective processes precisely because of two things: (i) Even the studies of effectiveness, though they focused on outcomes, have been criticized for looking into too narrow outcomes except for a few studies (e.g. Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, Lewis, & Ecob, 1988); (ii) the above studies done in the Maldives have almost entirely given weight to outcomes, specifically test scores, and not processes. However, when processes are reported in narrative form, rather than statistical reports, they benefit teachers in that they are able to relate their work more closely to the former (Crossley, 1988, in Vulliamy, 1990a). And, because most of these studies have been done by external consultants, enough time is not spent in schools to see how processes unfold.

The next section outlines the research setting, one of the urban primary schools in Maldives, in which the researcher attempted to unveil the processes at work that enabled the school to make improvement gains.

## **1.3 The Research Setting**

### **1.3.1 An Introduction to the Republic of Maldives**

The Republic of Maldives is an archipelago of about 1190 small coral islands situated in the Indian Ocean about 400 miles south west of Sri Lanka and the Indian sub-continent. These islands are very low lying with no more than two to three metres above sea level. They cover a geographic area of 90,000 square Kilometers out of which the land area is only 300 square kilometers. However, only ten percent is arable land.

Fishing is the main occupation of the people of Maldives but it is the second most important source of foreign income. The biggest earner of foreign income, however, is tourism. It has been the fastest developing sector of the economy in the last two decades.

The islands of Maldives are grouped into 26 natural atolls but, for administrative purposes, they are divided into 20 administrative units called 'Atolls': a cluster of islands, with each Atoll having one island as its capital. Of the 1190 islands, people live only on 196 islands while another 88 islands are used as tourist resorts and still another 34 for industrial and other purposes (Ministry of Planning and National Development, 2007). The rest are uninhabited.

According to Census 2006, the population of Maldives is a little less than 300,000 of whom over one third live in Male' (ibid), the capital, an island no bigger than two square kilometers and yet it is the country's main hub for all political, social and commercial activities. As mentioned earlier, over 33 % of the total population falls within the school-aged population bracket (Census 2000), posing many challenges for the Ministry of Education, the Government Ministry responsible for all matters pertaining to both formal and non-formal education in the country.

### **1.3.2 The Educational Context of the Maldives**

The current formal education system of Maldives comprises primary school (grades 1 – 7), lower secondary school (grades 8 -10) and higher secondary school (grades 11 –

12). Students begin their schooling at the age of six. In Male', the primary level is preceded by a two-year cycle of formal, pre-primary education (LKG and UKG). In the atolls, this form of pre-primary education is becoming more common especially on highly populated islands.

At the primary level, the National Primary Education Curriculum is taught which consists of eight subjects for grades one through five and nine subjects for grades six and seven. Of these, Islam, Dhivehi, Mathematics and English are four compulsory subjects at all levels. Although a score of 40% is considered to be the pass mark in every subject, automatic promotion is practiced in the primary grades.

Between the years 1984 and 1988, there was a National Examination, Junior School Certificate (JSC) Examination which the students had to pass<sup>2</sup> in order to enrol in grade 8, lower secondary. But, due to a variety of reasons, this exam was abandoned (Ministry of Education, 1995). Then came a short period when automatic promotion was practiced for this transition. But lately this policy has been changed whereby students have to achieve a certain standard before enrolling into grade 8.

At the lower secondary level, the Cambridge IGCSE syllabus is taught and students have to choose Science, Arts or Commerce streams. Upon completion of grade 10, students sit the Cambridge IGCSE Examinations. Those who meet a certain criteria move on to the next level, higher secondary school. At this level, the London GCE Advanced Level syllabus is taught and the students sit this Examination upon completion of grade 12. Beyond this level, the Maldives College of Higher Education (MCHE) which is under the Ministry of Higher Education, Employment and Social Security, through its various faculties, provides many tertiary programmes, including a limited number of graduate programmes. But, generally, students have to go abroad, either on scholarship or on their own, to study for their first degree.

This form of western-model schooling has existed in Male' for nearly half a century, although in the atolls, it began in 1978. In 2005, there were nine primary schools, five secondary schools and one higher secondary school in Male' (Ministry of Education,

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<sup>2</sup> Students have to pass in the four compulsory and two other subjects.

2005). This study, using the case study methodology (explained below), describes how one of the primary schools dealt with the issue of school improvement. The next sub-section presents a description of the ‘case study school’ or the ‘research school’.

### 1.3.3 The Research School

The research school was opened in 1989. It is a fully state-funded school and has modern facilities. There are over 1600 students in the school who are enrolled in seven grades, distributed among 51 classes. It has a total of 76 full-time teachers, including 8 assistant teachers. The senior management team (SMT) of the school comprises the head, two assistants, nine supervisors and the senior administrator (see below).

The Head of the school is responsible for the overall running of the school and, therefore, is answerable to the Ministry of Education. The two assistants are each in charge of one of the sessions. Each supervisor handles either a grade or some aspect of academic work. The senior administrator, although not an academic person, performs the important function of providing the necessary resources in a timely manner and takes care of general administration and maintenance work. Further, the school has a Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) that supports the school in many ways.

The school follows the National Primary Curriculum. This involves the teaching of Dhivehi, Islamic Studies, English Language, Mathematics, Environmental Studies (ES), Practical Arts, Quran<sup>3</sup> and Physical Education for grades one through five and, in the case of grades 6 and 7, Science and Social Studies replace ES. All primary schools in Male’ operate in two shifts and this school is no exception. Table one, below, gives session details:

**Table 1: Sessions of the school**

Session	Grades	Periods	Time
Morning	Grades 6-7	8	7.05 – 12.00 am
Morning	Grades 4-5	7	7.05 – 11.25 am
Afternoon	Grades 1-3	6	1.05 - 4.50 pm

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<sup>3</sup> Recitation of The Holy *Quran*.

The school also follows the academic year, which now runs from mid January to mid November, which consists of three terms. At the end of each term, the students of grades four and above are given a formal exam, the 'term test', in addition to being assessed in class throughout the term. Also, they are given a report card at the end of the term that shows their performance in all the subjects and their involvement in other activities. Students in grades one to three are also given this report card, but only classroom-based assessments are used to assess their performances.

#### **1.4 An Overview of the Research Design**

A qualitative case study design, informed by the interpretive paradigm, suited this study most, because the purpose of the study was to gain in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of interest, 'school improvement', where people were the participants and their perspectives were paramount in gaining such an understanding. Further, the case study method enabled the researcher to study a single case in-depth, using a range of data collection methods.

For this study, a single site was purposefully selected to study the phenomenon in-depth and cases within the case were chosen by both random and purposeful sampling (Merriam, 1998). Data were collected over a period of nine weeks using interviews, participant observations, questionnaire administration and document reviews. Twenty teachers, eleven members from the school's senior management team, thirteen students, one parent (the only one who gave consent to be interviewed out of seven invitations) and three personnel from the education sector took part in the study.

All interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed for analysing, and detailed notes of all observations were kept in a field note book. During the early stages of data analysis, when codes, categories and themes were generated, an inductive approach was taken, while a deductive approach was taken for establishing the appropriateness and authenticity of these themes. The research design, data collection and analysis methods are fully described in chapter three on methodology.

## **1.5 Overview of the Thesis**

This thesis has six chapters. Chapter one sets the scene for the study by providing a background to the study, the rationale, the purpose of the study and a description of the research setting.

In chapter two, the researcher reviewed the relevant literature on school improvement and identified six specific questions to pursue in this study in order to answer the main research question outlined in chapter one.

In chapter three, the research methodology chosen to answer the above-mentioned questions is described. In this regard, the theoretical underpinning of the chosen methodology is described and justified followed by a description of the data collection and analysis methods used. Issues related to validity and reliability and ethical considerations are also discussed.

Next, the research findings are described in chapter four under six major themes followed by a discussion, in chapter five, of these findings in relation to the literature reviewed in chapter two.

The final chapter, chapter six, concludes the thesis by providing answers to the research questions, a reflective note about the research design, areas for further research and a concluding remark.

## **1.6 Chapter Summary**

This chapter outlined the scene for the study and provided, in brief, the contents of all the chapters. In the next chapter, a review of literature, related to the study's purpose, is presented.

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

The field of school improvement is vast; there is a huge body of literature on this topic. Although, the mass of it comes from the United Kingdom and the United States of America, there is a growing body of literature on this topic from some European countries, especially from the Netherlands, and some from Australia and New Zealand. Literature on this topic from the developing countries is on the increase, too. Five broad questions structure the discussion of the literature:

- What is school improvement?
- What has been done in the name of school improvement?
- What are the issues?
- What conditions promote improvement or inhibit it?
- What is the relationship between school improvement, school effectiveness and educational change?

Before addressing these questions, the following points should be noted: first, within the improvement paradigm, there are two sub-traditions: one that was dominant in the 1960's and 1970's and the other that has prevailed since the 1980's (Reynolds, Hopkins & Stoll, 1993). The school improvement tradition of the 1960's and 1970's, especially in the US and the UK, was characterized by changes to curriculum and school organization that were brought from outside of the school. The success of such changes was measured in terms of student outcomes, mainly test scores, by using quantitative methods (Gray, Hopkins, Reynolds, Wilcox, Farrell, 1999; Reynolds et al., 1993). In the other tradition, one that began in the 1980's, school-based processes were the targets for change and the impetus for change, for the most part, came from within. And, success of these initiatives was measured in terms of both processes and outcomes using qualitative methods (ibid). It is beyond the scope of this study to deal with both of these sub-traditions. However, it is the second sub-tradition, which covers the period from the 1980's and beyond that will be reviewed in this study.

Since this study is from a developing country, the Maldives, one other question warrants an answer in reviewing the literature on school improvement:

- What is school improvement like in developing countries?

## 2.2 What Is School Improvement?

Different authors have defined “improvement”, more specifically “school improvement”, in various ways. While some definitions reflect an outcome orientation, others reflect a process orientation and, still others, reflect both orientations. Furthermore, some are very elaborate while others are not so.

Gray et al (1999) define an improving school as: one which “increases in its effectiveness overtime, where ‘effectiveness’ is judged in value-added terms” (p. 5). For Mortimore (1998), school improvement is, “the process of ‘improving’ the way a school organizes, promotes and supports learning ... It includes changing aims, expectations, organizations (sometimes people), ways of learning, methods of teaching and organizational culture” (quoted in Hopkins, 2001, p. 12).

The former view reflects its focus on outcomes while the latter's focus is on the process. Others, for example, Barth (1990), Hopkins (2001), Miles and Ekholm (1985) Stoll and Fink (1996), to a greater extent, have reflected both outcomes and process in their definitions. Barth (1990) defines school improvement as: “an effort to determine and provide, from without and within, conditions under which the adults and youngsters who inhabit schools will promote and sustain learning among them” (p. 45).

In addition to providing a definition that has both orientations, Stoll and Fink’s (1996) definition is multi-faceted, too. They define school improvement as:

- a series of concurrent and recurring processes in which a school:
  - enhances pupil outcomes
  - focuses on teaching and learning
  - builds the capacity to take charge regardless of its source
  - defines its own direction
  - assesses its current culture and works to develop positive cultural norms

- has strategies to achieve its goals
- addresses the internal conditions that enhance change
- maintains momentum during periods of turbulence
- monitors and evaluates its process, progress, achievement and development. (p. 43)

A much used definition in the school improvement field is the one used in the International Schools Improvement Project, which also provides both orientations:

“A systematic, sustained effort aimed at change in learning conditions and other related internal conditions in one or more schools, with the ultimate aim of accomplishing educational goals more effectively” (Miles & Ekholm, 1985, p. 48).

This definition depicts a system-level orientation while the definition provided by Hopkins (2001) is more school-focused:

A distinct approach to educational change that aims to enhance student outcomes as well as strengthening the school's capacity for managing change. It is concerned with raising student achievement through focusing on the teaching-learning process and the conditions that support it. (p. 13)

For the purpose of this study, Hopkins’ definition of school improvement has been chosen for it is both outcome and process oriented and highlights three elements key to this study: student outcomes or student learning, the teaching and learning process that makes student learning or outcomes possible and the conditions within the school that support the teaching and learning process.

Having defined school improvement, the next section discusses what is involved in school improvement.

### **2.3 What Has Been Done in the Name of School Improvement?**

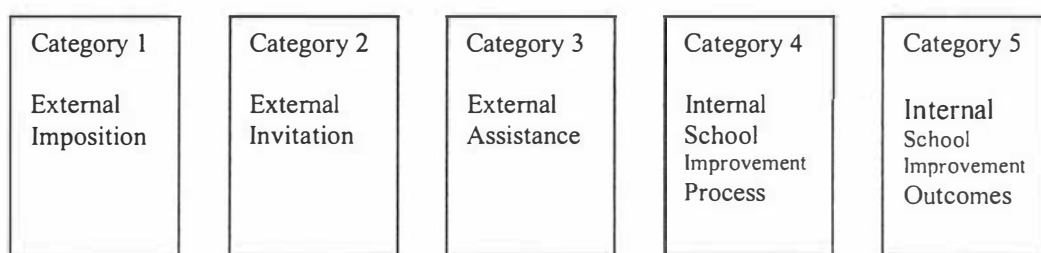
A wide variety of initiatives by schools or school systems, regardless of what they entail, can be termed school improvement<sup>4</sup> (Gray et al., 1999; Hopkins and Wideen, 1984; Miles and Ekholm, 1985). In the U.S. and the U.K., for example, countries from which the bulk of school improvement literature comes, a widely used approach to school improvement has been school-based management (Murphy & Beck, 1995)

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<sup>4</sup> In the U.S., this phenomenon, ‘school improvement’, is known as ‘restructuring’ (see, for example, Murphy, 1991).

and school development planning (D. Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1991), respectively. In fact, Miles and Ekholm (1985) assert: “almost anything ... can be called ‘school improvement’” (p. 34): be it a change in curriculum, introducing a new teaching and learning approach, seeking community participation in school activities, measures to improve attendance, providing extra classroom space or even distributing meals to school children. Further, Office for Standards in Education [Ofsted] (1994) asserts: “there is no single route to improvement of schools” (p. 5). Given this wide variation in scope and depth of school improvement initiatives, many scholars have tried painstakingly to categorise and filter out the important aspects or features or key issues of such a fast growing body of literature so that others, like myself, embarking on projects related to school improvement, could gain insights from them. Fidler (2001), for example, using locus of control as the main criteria, has identified five categories of school improvement programmes which he places on a continuum, starting from ‘external imposition’ (category 1) at one extreme, through ‘external invitation’ or ‘external assistance’, to ‘internal school improvement process’ and ‘internal school outcomes’ (category 5) at the other extreme. Figure one graphically shows this categorisation.

**Figure 1: Fidler's categorisation of school improvement programmes**



Source: Fidler, 2001

Programmes that are ‘externally imposed’ are almost always mandated ones while those that fall under ‘external invitation’ are voluntary although they are externally financed (Fidler, 2001, p. 57). However, Fidler notes that no distinctive line exists between these two types because, in the case of the former, the expectation is that some types of schools will be involved while, in the latter case, financial incentives are such that refusal is hard to come by! In the ‘Internal School Improvement Process’

category, schools take part in a common planning process but, during implementation, both content and process tend to vary widely (MacGilchrist, Mortimore, Savage & Beresford, 1995, in Fidler, 2001, p. 59). Projects that come under the intermediate category, 'External Assistance', are those ones where a school uses external assistance to support school-initiated improvement activities (p. 60). In the 'Internal School Outcomes' category, there is a wide range of activities targeted at a particular outcome using whatever appropriate means available and, as such, these activities differ widely in scope and scale (p. 59), for example, the way in which teachers are hired or a change in curriculum. The current study falls into this category.

Hopkins, Ainscow and West (1994) have classified improvement efforts into two broad categories: 'ingredients' and 'recipe'. They used the nature of the programme, or, more specifically, its content or main features or what it offers, as the main criteria in arriving at this classification. The 'ingredients' lets us know the important elements of improvement and, the 'recipe', the process involved in bringing about improvement (Hopkins, et al., 1994). They further sub-divide each category into two: *Ingredients* as being either a list of improvement characteristics obtained from research findings or a compilation of improvement strategies; and, *recipe*, which they say is a more strategic approach to improvement, that is divided into two categories which resembles more of a continuum rather than two discrete categories: the mechanistic approach and the organic approach: the mechanistic approach provides direct guidelines in a step by step form while the organic approach provides broad guidelines or basic principles as the basis for improvement efforts (ibid). After reviewing the most prominent and well-known school improvement programmes, Harris (2000, 2002) too, classified them into mechanistic and organic approaches.

According to Burns and Stalker (1961), cited in Hopkins et al (1994), the mechanistic approach is less able to adapt to change while the organic approach provides more flexibility. In an era where schools are faced with a lot of pressure for change, especially external ones, the most suitable approach seems to be the organic approach because it offers more flexibility to deal with pressures for change (Hopkins et al., 1994). I would, however, argue that both approaches could be used simultaneously, because in the case study school, elements from both approaches were used.

Before moving on to the key features of these most influential school improvement projects, some of the issues with regard to school improvement work need mentioning.

## **2.4 What Are The Issues?**

Although the school improvement field has developed at a fast pace, especially during the last decade or so, many criticisms and weaknesses still persist. Major criticisms of the improvement field include the following.

First, there is a tendency in the school improvement field to treat all schools as the same; that is, taking the 'one-size-fits-all' approach. This implies that contextual factors, such as school culture, socio-economic status (SES), improvement trajectory, catchment area, etc., are not taken into consideration when mounting improvement projects (Fidler, 2001; Gray et al., 1999. See also Bernardo & Garcia, 2006). Second, school improvement initiatives have emphasized school level variables, sometimes to the exclusion of classroom variables, when the classroom has more effect on students (Fidler, 2001; Harris, 2000, 2001; Reynolds, 2001; Wallace & Pocklington, 1998). Third, there is a bias towards processes and, therefore, without evaluative evidence, it is hard to know which processes produced which effects; thus, the field is still weak in its theoretical base (Bollen, 1996; Fidler, 2001; Gray et al., 1999; Harris 2000). Fourth, although school improvement and school effectiveness fields are related (see sections 2.6 and 2.7) school improvement researchers have not utilized much from the school effectiveness knowledgebase; in other words, the link between school improvement and school effectiveness is weak. This has hindered development in schools (Harris, 2001; Reynolds 2001; Reynolds, Hopkins & Stoll, 1993). Fifth, outcomes are defined too narrowly and mostly in cognitive terms; almost always test scores have been used, especially in the USA. Affective and social outcomes are rarely included (See also MacGilchrist, 2003, in Gopinathan, 2006). Finally, very little has been done to evaluate the effectiveness of school improvement initiatives (Hopkins et al., 1994).

Regardless of these issues, 'school improvement' work has continued its journey at a fast pace, especially in the last two decades, providing researchers, policy makers and practitioners with informative lessons. The improvement efforts made by the case study school addressed these criticisms even though to a little extent. For example, both classroom and school levels were targeted in their improvement strategies.

## **2.5 Conditions for School Improvement: Some Lessons From the Field.**

Harris' (2000, 2002) analysis of the thirteen most influential school improvement projects, nine reflecting the 'organic' approach and four reflecting the 'mechanistic' approach, revealed a number of common themes that undergird the principles and practices involved in these projects. They are: vision-building; extended leadership; matching programmes to context; focus on students; taking a multi-level approach; investing in teachers or staff development; ensuring systematic programme evaluation; and, building professional communities. A discussion of these themes follows:

*Vision-building:* Schools are expected to generate a vision either on their own or with external assistance. When external help is sought in this regard, it paves way to translate policy objectives into school-related improvement. Vision should be shared and reconfirmed as the change process unfolds. The generation of vision should include accurate diagnosis, feedback and planning as these are vital aspects of school improvement efforts.

*Extended leadership:* Teachers and senior management team (SMT) work together and they engage in shared decision-making and risk-taking. An active, participatory approach to leadership is taken instead of a top-down one.

*Matching programmes to context:* Every school is different in terms of its history, environment, leadership, staffing, roles and relationships, incentives and the like, and all these factors come into play in significant ways as the improvement process unfolds. These highlight the importance of choosing the programme that best fits the school's situation.

*Focus on students and taking a multi-level approach:* An emphasis is placed on student outcomes, both in terms of academic and non-academic performances, as the key success criteria. To sustain positive outcomes in student learning, uniform application of strategies, reinforcement of teaching practices, providing high quality training and conducting regular checks are essential. Factors at the classroom-level account for greater variation in student outcomes than do school-level factors and, therefore, emphasis is now placed upon the classroom-level, but without de-emphasising the multi-level nature of the school. Taking a multi-level approach necessitates schools to involve all stake holders, both internal and external, in the improvement process.

*Investing in teachers or staff development:* Teacher development is a key component in all successful school improvement programmes. The sole aim of teacher development is “to equip them to manage classroom change, development and improvement” (Harris, 2002, p. 32). School based staff development rather than external ones coupled with collaborative work seemed to benefit schools most.

*Ensuring systematic programme evaluation:* Continuous inquiry and reflection have been found to be a consistent feature of highly effective schools. When teachers are given the opportunity to analyse and use research findings routinely in their professional activity, and time to reflect and inquire into their practice, these have shown positive effects on teachers attitudes, beliefs and behaviours, together with improved learning outcomes for students. Collecting systematic evaluative evidence about the impact of an improvement initiative upon classrooms and the school help to establish links between strategy and practice.

*Building professional communities:* Professional development communities help the school to sustain and maintain development. Therefore, there is an emphasis on building networks within and outside school and working collaboratively.

David Hopkins has done extensive work in this field (see, for example, Hopkins, 1984, 1987, 1990, 2001, 2002; Hopkins, Ainscow & West, 1997; Hopkins et al., 1994; Hopkins & Harris, 1997; Hopkins & Lagerwiej, 1996; Hopkins & Reynolds, 2001, among others). Drawing on these studies, especially his work on Improving the

Quality of Education for All (IQEA) Project, Hopkins has identified some 'internal conditions' that lead to improvement. These internal conditions map fairly well with the above-mentioned themes and they are: staff development; involvement of staff, students and the community in school policies and decisions; transformational leadership approaches; effective co-ordination; inquiry and reflection; and collaborative planning (Hopkins et al., 1994; Hopkins, 2001). A discussion of these internal conditions follows:

*Staff Development:* The assumption underlying staff development as the main strategy for supporting teachers is that "attention to teacher learning is likely to have direct spin-offs in terms of pupils learning" (Hopkins et al., 1994, p. 115). Staff development strategies should be on-going and linked to school improvement initiatives. In addition to providing training, teachers should be helped in the classroom when trying new skills, especially through various forms of partnership or coaching arrangements.

*Involvement:* Pupil involvement is an important factor in school improvement and it is in the classroom that pupil attitudes have the greatest impact. Therefore, it is important for teachers to plan their lessons and organize their classrooms in a way that promote student involvement. Various forms of group work encourage pupil participation. In particular, cooperative learning is emphasized as a way of facilitating pupil involvement. In addition to pupil participation, schools should encourage parents and members of the local community to support school activities.

*Inquiry and Reflection:* When schools are bombarded with pressure for change, a strategy for tackling this issue is to concentrate improvement efforts around key areas. To this end, the process of inquiry and reflection become very important. Hence, the following developmental tools are used to reinforce the use of inquiry and reflection: systematic data collection and interpretation of data at school level for decision-making; the use of systematic strategies for reviewing progress; and involvement of as many staff as possible in the data collection and analysis process. Finally, care is taken to see that the review methods selected match the needs of the inquiry because each approach is going to have strengths and weaknesses.

*Leadership:* Both school effectiveness and school improvement literature point to the importance of leadership for school development. As such, key aspects of leadership are to establish and communicate a clear vision for the school, work towards building a positive relationship among staff and empower others to take lead roles. Finally, in an era of change, school heads should be able to lead and manage change. In short, "leadership must function at technical, human and educational levels as well as the cultural level" (Hopkins et al., 1994, p. 160). A fuller description of each of these levels is given in the section on 'leadership, for managing change' (section 2.8.1)

*Coordination:* Schools comprise relationships and interactions among people who have very different values and beliefs about the purpose of schooling. The way in which these interpersonal interactions are carried out, largely determines the extent to which a school achieves its purpose. Therefore, what is needed is, "a well-coordinated, cooperative style of working that gives individual teachers the confidence to improvise in search for the most appropriate response to the situation they meet" (Hopkins et al., p. 167). Hence, the following strategies have been suggested: establishing staff working groups to provide teachers the opportunity to share ideas and support each other; establishing task groups to address school-wide issues that need careful reviewing before a decision is made; and, establish sound procedures for effective communication.

*Collaborative Planning:* School-level planning and goal setting are major factors of school effectiveness. "The aim of planning is, then, to secure improvements in the quality of teaching and learning by identifying appropriate educational and organizational goals, and improving the way the necessary activities (and changes) are managed to achieve these goals" (p. 180). Important aspects of the planning process are to: link vision building to planning; obtain the contribution of as many staff as possible for the planning process; select a few priorities on the basis of manageability; coherence and consonance; allocate resources specifically for the purpose of improvement; and communicate the deliberations of planning to all staff on a regular basis.

Drawing from their work in Canada, Stoll and Fink (1996) advocate a set of 'climate setting conditions' that support improvement efforts: vision building; joint planning;

leadership; involvement and empowerment; the need for partnerships; monitoring and evaluation; problem seeking and problem solving; staff development and resource assistance; adapting management structures; and, creativity. Key points of each of these climate setting conditions, as mentioned by these authors, are given below:

*Climate setting:* Successful schools spent time to establish trust and openness among staff, pupils and the community before embarking on any improvement activity because, such a climate can be considered as being conducive for teaching and learning. Further, realizing that successful implementation of improvement efforts to a greater extent depends on teachers, their success is celebrated. Paying attention to student behaviour and attendance is also part of the climate setting process.

*Vision building:* A vision is the shared values and beliefs a group of people have and it helps schools to chart their own direction. It is better to start the process of vision-building with a small group of people and then spread throughout the school. Further, teachers should be helped to articulate their individual visions because other pressures and demands often keep their visions unarticulated.

*Joint Planning:* Evolutionary planning (that is, a detail plan for the first year and a sketch of long-term priorities for the next few years) is emphasized because there are always external pressures to change or amend initially agreed priorities. Further, time is allocated for staff to spend together in planning.

*Leadership:* Leadership is vital for school improvement. Successful leaders have a clear vision that they articulate and, at the same time, they help others to do similarly. They are determined to grow professionally and, thereby, help promote organisational learning. They build networks for information sharing and continuously monitor the school context. Finally they share power and are not afraid to take risks.

*Involvement and empowerment:* Feeling of involvement creates commitment and, therefore, those who are involved in the implementation are consulted and involved in the decision-making. Further, students are also involved in decision making if such decisions affect them.

*The need for partnership:* To meet the diverse needs of pupils in today's complex world, schools need to work in harmony with various stakeholders: parents, various organisations, including the central office and community members. Working in partnership with these stakeholders, enables a school to bring about more cohesion to the mixed messages in the lives of students. A partnership also enables a school to have reality checks every now and then.

*Monitoring and evaluation:* Systematically planned monitoring and evaluation of processes and outcomes are necessary if success is desired of improvement efforts. Such an exercise is needed to see if school personnel make a difference, to find out what works best and allow reflecting on things that didn't work, to maintain equity and to lead to further developments.

*Problem seeking and problem solving:* Dealing with problems actively, promptly and in some depth has been found to be a key determinant of success. Proactive search for problems is considered important for problem solving and it is encouraged in successful schools.

*Staff development and resource assistance:* Professional development of staff is important for both student learning and school improvement. In terms of staff development, what is emphasized now is ongoing training, instead of one-off in-service sessions, that is linked to both staff and school needs. Schools need to ensure that appropriate resources and support are provided for staff development.

*Adapting management structures:* Improvement efforts frequently necessitate restructuring of existing arrangements, especially when existing arrangements hinder change efforts. This might mean, for example, creating new policies, amending roles and responsibilities, hiring new staff and the like.

*Creativity:* Schools always have to face the issue of incorporating external ideas into their development agenda. Thus, they need to be flexible in this regard. Schools that give heed to creating a shared vision and then set their own direction stand a better chance to deal with external pressures.

How the above three sets of improvement contributing factors (from Harris, 2000, 2002; Hopkins et al, 1994; Hopkins, 2001; and, Stoll & Fink, 1996) relate to each other and how some factors within two of the sets (Harris' and Stoll and Fink's) overlap, are shown in table two, below.

**Table 2: School Improvement: Key contributing factors**

<b>Harris, 2000; 2002 (themes; key components)</b>	<b>Stoll &amp; Fink, 1996 (Climate setting conditions)</b>	<b>Hopkins et al., 1994, 2001 (Internal conditions)</b>
Vision-building and planning / Matching programme to context***	Vision-building / joint planning / problem seeking and problem solving / creativity / adapting management structures	Collaborative planning
Extended leadership	Leadership	Transformational leadership
Focus on students	Climate setting*	(Classroom conditions)**
Taking a multi-level approach	Involvement and empowerment	Involvement
Investing in teachers	Staff development & resource assistance	Staff development
Ensuring systematic evaluation	Monitoring and evaluation	Enquiry and reflection
Building professional communities	Partnership	Coordination

\* Although the name (climate setting) does not suggest any direct relation to students, this condition has elements that are student-related; see the description above.

\*\* Hopkins considers this as a separate set of conditions. However, I (the researcher) have placed it here because of its appropriateness, given the discussion at hand. These conditions are given in Appendix 23.

\*\*\* Although these authors have considered this theme as a separate one, I have aligned it with vision-building and planning because it has elements of planning.

Drawing from the works of the above authors (Harris, 2000, 2002; Hopkins 2001; Hopkins et al., 1994; Stoll & Fink, 1996), I have identified seven major themes of improvement common across all three sets of factors of which some had more relevance than others, to my study. The seven themes of improvement are: vision-building and planning, extended leadership, A focus on students, involvement or taking a multi-level approach, staff development, systematic evaluation and partnership. From here on I shall call these, 'themes of school improvement'. Figure two highlights key aspects of these themes.

**Figure 2: Key aspects of the major themes of school improvement**

**1. Vision building and planning**

- Generating a vision is essential and, if necessary, with external assistance. Such assistance paves way to translate policy objectives into school-related improvement
- Vision is shared and reconfirmed as the change process unfolds. Included in this process are accurate diagnosis, feedback and planning as these are vital aspects of school improvement efforts.
- Start the process of vision-building with a small group of people and then spread throughout the school
- Evolutionary planning (that is, a detail plan for the first year and a sketch of long-term priorities for the next few years) is emphasized because there are always external pressures to change or amend initially agreed priorities
- Time is allocated for staff to spend together in planning

**2. Leadership**

- School effectiveness and school improvement literature point to the importance of leadership for school development.
- Key aspects of leadership are to: establish and communicate a clear vision for the school, work toward building a positive relationship among staff and empower others to take lead roles, grow professionally and thereby help promote organisational learning, build networks for information sharing and continuously monitor the school context.
- In schools, an active, participatory approach to leadership is taken instead of a top-down. That is, teachers and members of the senior management team (SMT) work together, get engaged in shared decision-making and risk-taking and also function as leaders.

**3. Staff development**

- In terms of staff development, what is emphasized now is ongoing training, instead of one-off in-service sessions, that is linked to both staff and school needs. Schools need to ensure that appropriate resources and support are provided for staff development
- All successful school improvement programmes address teacher development as a key component.
- In-school, professional development activities that emphasise collaborative working, including discussion, demonstration, practice in simulated settings and feedback, are among the most successful strategies that equip teachers to manage change at the classroom-level.

**4. Systematic evaluation**

- Continuous inquiry and reflection have been found to be a consistent feature of highly effective schools.
- When teachers are given the opportunity to analyse and use research findings routinely in their professional activity and time to reflect and inquire into their practice, these have shown positive effects on teachers attitudes, beliefs and behaviours, together with improved learning outcomes for students.
- Collecting systematic, evaluative evidence about the impact of the project upon classrooms and the school helps to establish links between strategy and practice.
- A strategy for tackling change overload is to concentrate improvement efforts around key areas. To this end, the process of inquiry and reflection becomes very important.
- Care should be taken to see that the review methods selected match the needs of the inquiry because each approach is going to have strengths and weaknesses.

**Figure 2 (continued)**

**5. A focus on students**

- An emphasis is placed on student outcomes in terms of academic performances as the key success criteria
- To guarantee any positive effects on student learning is sustained, uniform application of strategies is ensured by seeing that the project's principles is adhered to, teaching practices is reinforced, high quality training is provided and regular checks are consulted.
- Factors at the classroom-level accounts for greater variation in student outcomes than do school-level factors and, therefore, more emphasis is now placed upon the classroom-level, but without de-emphasising the multi-level nature of the school.
- Student involvement is encouraged through various forms of group work, in particular, cooperative learning.
- Attention is paid to conditions for classroom development which are: having 'authentic relationships', establishing 'rules and boundaries', matching lessons to student level, utilizing a variety of teaching strategies, forming 'pedagogic partnerships' and teachers reflecting on teaching
- Attention is also paid to student behaviour and attendance.

**6. Taking a multi-level approach**

- Recognizing that a school has multi levels, school-level, teacher-level and classroom-level, school improvement programmes now take a multi-level approach and this necessitate schools to involve all stake holders, both internal and external, in the improvement process.
- Feeling of involvement creates commitment and, therefore, those who are involved in the implementation are consulted and involved in the decision-making.

**7. Building professional communities**

- It is the quality of interactions among quite a large group of diverse people (teachers, school administrators, central office personnel, community members and personnel from professional institutions) that determine the extent to which school goals are achieved.
- In the most successful school improvement projects, teachers are encouraged to build networks within and outside school and to work collaboratively.
- Professional development communities help the school to share good practice and to sustain and maintain development.

*Adapted from Harris (2000, 2002); Hopkins (2001); Hopkins et al (1994); Stoll & Fink (1996).*

Many studies, including a few reviews, of improvement programmes, to a greater extent, have converged on these themes. For example, Hopkins et al (1994) reviewed the work of Stringfield et al (1993) and presented ten insights most of which closely associate with a number of above themes, either as its presence has aided the improvement efforts or its absence has constrained such efforts. Those themes that aided improvement efforts include: refocusing on the classroom-level; taking a multi-level approach; and, active leadership. Those themes, the absence of which, constrained improvement efforts include: providing differential improvement strategies and accurate diagnosing, an important groundwork for fostering school improvement. Providing differential improvement strategies involves the identification of a strategy that best fits the school context (Harris, 2002) and, to do so,

some form of review or need assessment (i.e. accurate diagnosing) should be done to provide the basis for selecting the improvement strategy (ibid).

Studies that have converged on the above themes include, among others: the study done by Gray et al (1999) in the UK; the “Sustaining school improvement: ten primary schools, journeys” (Mitchell, Cameron, & Wylie, 2002), a New Zealand study; the Barclay-Calvert Project (Stringfield, Bedinger & Herman, 1995, in Stoll, Reynolds, Creemers & Hopkins 1996) and Milwaukee’s Project RISE (McCormack-Larkin, 1985), two US studies; and, the National School Improvement Project (Houtveen & Osinga, 1995, in Stoll et al (1996), a Dutch study. Each of these studies is now discussed more fully.

Gray et al (1999) studied twelve schools from three LEAs in England. The main purpose of the study was to identify factors associated with school improvement, with a special emphasis on how schools attempt to sustain improvement over time.

The study’s findings suggest that there were three broad approaches these schools took which the authors characterized as ‘tactics’, ‘strategies’ and ‘capacity-building’ (pp. 144-5). ‘Tactics’ included activities like monitoring of pupils’ work, supporting borderline cases, entering some pupils for an extra exam and revising codes of classroom conduct and homework policy, which according to these authors were “some ‘obvious, things ... needed ... to improve ... pupils’ performance” (p. 145). It should be noted that these relate to only one of the themes stated above: ‘focusing on students’ outcomes’. ‘Strategies’, however, included a number of these themes: ‘accurate diagnosis and planning’, ‘refocusing on the classroom’, ‘systematic inquiry’, ‘utilising differential strategies’, ‘targeting the different levels’ and ‘extended view of leadership’. Those schools which used the ‘strategies’ also employed all the ‘tactics’ as well, realizing that the tactical levers alone would not help sustain the improvement (p. 145). The study found that only two schools were able to go beyond ‘strategies’ to the ‘capacity-building level’. What differentiated the ‘capacity-building’ approach from ‘strategies’ approach was the former’s focus on creating a learning organization and influencing to change the school’s culture (p. 146).

Reflecting on a decade of school-self management, Mitchell et al. (2002) have noted that the case about New Zealand schools was not the same: under self-management of schools, schools in New Zealand were treated as stand alone units without much external support. Hence, one of the aims of Mitchell et al's study was "to expand the understanding of factors involved in sustainable school improvement in New Zealand" (p. xv).

The findings of Mitchell et al's study to a greater extent resonate with the above themes (Mitchell et al., 2002): vision and student focus: all ten schools had a clear understanding of the goals and they were focused on student learning; all schools used assessment data for diagnostic purposes, although different approaches were taken; professional development was considered as crucial to work; leadership was a very strong feature in all schools as was evident by the " 'iron will' of the principal[s] to build an effective school" although the style of leadership was different in different schools (p. 25); involvement of parents and outside agencies: no school worked in isolation, all sought support from external sources: professional developers and advisors, networks of principals and teachers, various national organizations etc; different schools took different approaches to improvement depending on their context; staff worked collaboratively and supportively to create a 'culture of development' (p. 5); and, establishing a positive image: this was specially the case with schools recovering from a negative image. To gain ground, these schools had to do certain "'obvious' things" (Gray et al., 1999, p. 145) and these could, either directly or indirectly, relate to student learning outcomes, such as offering an extra exam (ibid) or developing a sports team with uniforms (Mitchell et al., 2002, p. 4), respectively. One finding, which is not consistent with these themes but echoes findings from some other studies, (Stringfield, 1993, in Hopkins et al., 1994, for example) is that all ten schools sought additional funding as they believed that allocated funding levels were not adequate.

Barclay, an inner-city school in Baltimore, USA, realized in the late 80's that its students' achievement levels were falling far below the expected level and there were problems with attendance and discipline. The school then decided to use a curricular and an instructional package that was implemented successfully in Calvert, another school in the same city. After four years of evaluation, it was found that students'

academic achievement increased significantly compared to their pre-programme Barclay School peers and both attendance and discipline improved, too (Stoll et al., 1996). Success of this programme was attributed to: external support including that of parents; discrete instructional strategies which focused on student outcomes, teachers had high expectations of students and, hence were classroom-focused; an achievable plan that gradually targeted one grade per year: the 'think big, start small' concept; high quality fidelity implementation; systematic programme evaluation; ongoing staff development and support; and additional funding.

Another US study that showed a similar set of findings to the above studies is Milwaukee's Project RISE: A US project that helped to raise the achievement levels of 18 elementary schools in reading, math and language (McCormack-Larkin, 1985). In 1979, the school board identified 18 elementary (primary) schools as the lowest achieving schools in the system and directed them to improve their achievement level in math, reading and language to correspond to national norms. No change was made to student or teacher composition and nor was there additional funding. Yet, within five years, all 18 schools increased their achievement levels significantly by utilizing the key elements of effective schooling (ibid). Four levers were "pulled" simultaneously to bring about this change: changes that would affect staff attitudes; changes in management and organization; changes in school policies and practices and changes in classroom practices (ibid). Within these four levers, almost all the themes mentioned above are evident.

In the Dutch study, The National School Improvement Project, twenty nine schools took part of which 16 were the 'experimental' group and the rest were the 'control' group. A major goal of this project was to reduce, if not prevent, educational disadvantage, in reading, specifically. The study concluded that there was "a considerable growth in the experimental group over a period of two-and-a-half years" (Houtveen & Osinga, 1995, in Stoll et al., 1996, p. 135). Success was attributed to the following: use was made of school effectiveness research; a multi-level approach was taken; discrete teaching strategies were used, class rooms were made conducive to learning and, hence, the main focus was on the classroom level; students' progress was monitored rigorously; practice-oriented staff development was conducted;

systematic programme evaluation was done; and, leadership, provided by the coordinator of the project.

The findings from the above studies clearly indicate that, to a greater extent, most of the improvement themes (vision-building and planning, extended leadership, staff development, systematic evaluation, a focus on students, taking a multi-level approach and building professional communities) contributed to their success. However, some exceptions need mentioning: first, although vision building, per se, was not evident, in all of the five studies mentioned above, goal development and planning were found to be associated with success and, second, in the Milwaukee Study, it was not clear whether systematic evaluation was carried out although teachers reporting on students' progress was mentioned.

At this point, it is worth taking a closer look at the concept of 'effectiveness', because 'using school effectiveness research' is a theme considered in the school improvement field (see Harris, 2000, 2002).

## **2.6 School improvement and school effectiveness**

Any discussion on 'improvement' should not neglect the concept of 'effectiveness' because they are both conceptually related: effectiveness and improvement are similar concepts in the sense that those who talk about both of these concepts also talk about 'quality' (Creemers, 1996). Bollen (1996) has shown this relation in another way by stating that they both (effectiveness and improvement) are linked to outcomes. This relationship has been shown even at a more practical level: the knowledge, about which factors could be changed or manipulated to produce better pupil outcomes, needed for school improvement researchers, could be provided by school effectiveness researchers and, in a similar way, theories developed by school effectiveness researchers can be tested for any links between what theory states would be outcomes and the real outcomes produced by school improvement initiatives (Bollen, 1996; Creemers, 1996, 2002; Reynolds, 1992, 1997; Reynolds et al; 1993). A further relationship is implicit in the view that school effectiveness can inform school improvement (Scheerens, 1992; Stoll & Fink, 1996). In this regard, it is instructive to see some of the findings of school effectiveness research which further

strengthen the themes mentioned earlier. UNESCO (2005, p. 66) gives a compilation of findings from five well-known reviews under the title, “effectiveness-enhancing conditions of schooling: results of five review studies” (see Table three).

**Table 3: Effectiveness-enhancing conditions of schooling: results of five review studies**

Purkey & Smith, 1983	Levin & Lezotte, 1990	Scheerens, 1992	Cotton, 1995	Sammons et al., 1995
Strong leadership	Outstanding leadership	Educational leadership	School management & organization; leadership and school improvement; leadership & planning	Professional leadership
Clear goals on basic skills	Focus on central learning skills		Planning & learning goals and school-wide emphasis on learning	Concentration on learning
Orderly climate; achievement-oriented policy; cooperative atmosphere	Productive climate & culture	Pressure to achieve consensus; cooperative planning; orderly atmosphere	Planning & learning goals; curriculum planning & development	Shared vision and goals; a learning environment; positive reinforcement
High expectations	High expectations		Strong teacher-student interaction	High expectations
Frequent evaluation	Appropriate monitoring	Evaluative potential of the school; monitoring of pupils progress	Assessment at district, school & classroom levels	Monitoring progress
In-service training / staff development	Practice-oriented staff development		Professional development & collegial learning	A learning organization
	Salient parental involvement	Parent support	Parent-community involvement	Home-school partnership
		External stimuli to make schools effective; Physical & material school characteristics; teacher experience; school context characteristics	Distinct school interactions; equity; special programmes	Pupil rights and responsibilities

Source: UNESCO (2005).

This comparison across five studies points to four aspects or features common to all five reviews: strong leadership; a focus on teaching and learning; evaluation; and shared vision and planning and culture and orderly climate lumped together as one aspect. High expectation, staff development and home-school partnership occur in four of the five reviews.

One of the landmark studies in school effectiveness is the study done by Mortimore and his colleagues entitled, School matters: the junior years, which has been considered by many scholars (see, for example, Gray et al., 1999; Hopkins, et al.,

1994; Scheerens, 1992) as the most comprehensive study of junior schools ever undertaken. This study was conducted in 50 randomly selected schools from among 636 schools in the Inner London area and documented the progress and development of nearly 2000 students over a period of four years (Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, Lewis & Ecob, 1988). The overarching question in this study was, “Are some schools more effective than others in producing better student outcomes, after having taken into account student background factors and, if so, what factors contribute toward this end?” (ibid). To address many of the shortcomings of previous research, this study collected data on a wide range of outcomes using multiple instruments and on classroom processes. The authors concluded that some schools were more effective than others in producing better student outcomes after having considered student background characteristics and they identified twelve effectiveness factors that contributed to this end (ibid). These factors relate to six of the school improvement themes (see figure two) in the following ways: three factors relate to leadership and, of these three, one also relates to establishing a vision; six factors relate to classroom and student focus; and, one each relates to systematic evaluation, consistency in teaching practices and the involvement of parents.

In Mortimore et al’s (1988) study, the deputy head’s leadership, in addition to the school head’s leadership, was particularly notable because it was found to have been associated with pupil progress. In the school improvement themes (see figure two) this particular aspect (deputy’s leadership per se) is not a prominent factor although in its place there is ‘extended leadership’. Further, although there was wide consultation among staff on curriculum matters, no mention was made of any consultation outside of the school. Thus, partnership was limited to only individual schools.

The research design involving the use of many outcome measures and more than one way of data collecting in the above study (Mortimore et al., 1988) was useful to the current study because these approaches helped the researcher to increase the credibility of the research findings, an issue discussed more fully in chapter three on methodology.

Another study of a similar standing is the decade-long study done by Teddlie and Stringfield (1993), known as the Louisiana School Effectiveness Study (LSES). This

study had four phases of which the third and the fourth phases have relevance to my study and, hence, a brief description and key findings are given below.

One of the purposes of these two phases was to find out how the schools sustained improvement over time (ibid). Sixteen schools were purposefully selected to study in detail using the case study approach. These two phases of LSES had over 1300 hours of classroom observations and nearly 2000 hours of on-site data collection. According to these authors, the lessons learned from this decade-long study that would inform school improvement were: districts should work closely with schools; leadership was critical for diagnosis and planning; improvement efforts should target both the school-level and classroom-level; staff should have opportunities to work collaboratively; systematic evaluation of students' progress needs to be done; staff development should be conducted, especially to novices, and efforts made to involve them in decision-making; and, the importance of contextual factors in shaping improvement initiatives (ibid, pp. 217-227). In the LSES, students socio-economic status, urbanicity and grade level configuration were found to have an effect on success. However, the authors have noted that these factors provided rather a narrow conception of school context. Harris (2002), among others, has provided a wider conception of contextual factors (see section 2.5, above).

School improvement is also related to another concept: 'change'. This relationship is explained in the next section.

## **2.7 School Improvement and Change: Some Theoretical Underpinnings**

Many scholars have shown, in different ways, how school improvement relates to change. For example, Fullan (1992) reveals this relationship as follows: "successful school improvement... depends on an understanding of the problem of change at the level of practice..." (p. 27); while, for Prosser (1999), "school improvement is concerned with the management of innovation[s] that accomplish targeted educational goals" (p. 12). Further, Bollen (1996) and Fullan (1991, 2001a) concur that school improvement and change are processes, not events. And, to Harris (2002) and Stoll

and Fink (1996), all improvement entails change. Therefore, it is instructive to consider improvement from the perspective of change.

On reviewing the literature on change, two key messages have surfaced and the most important one seemed to be that change is complex (Fullan, 1993; Harris, 2002)! “Change is to do with people” (Neville, 1992, p. 110) and, therefore, the meaning of change for each individual becomes very important; ultimately change is an individual achievement (Fullan, 2001a; Harris, 2002). Further, change is, in actual sense, about changing culture (Fullan, 2001a; A. Hargreaves, Lorna, Shawn & Manning, 2001; Harris 2002). All these imply the complexity of change. Second, change is a process and not an event and, therefore, it takes time (Fullan 2001a). This means that change works better when it is planned and managed (Edwards, 1990; Harris, 2002).

### **2.7.1 Complexity of Change**

One of the main reasons why change becomes complex is that it is not linear (Fullan, 2001a; 2005; A. Hargreaves et al., 2001; Harris, 2002). Fullan argues that, in the face of non-linearity, “everything exists only in relationship to everything else, and the interactions among agents in ... [a] system lead to complex, unpredictable outcomes” (2001a, p. 52). Consider the following example in which Fullan (1993) described how change becomes complex. If we took a single educational policy or problem and tried to list all the forces acting on this chosen issue for it to become a productive change, there would be many unplanned, inevitable factors that would intervene (Fullan, 1993; Harris, 2002); for example, a shift in policy, change of key personnel and the like. Each of these unplanned factors would produce another set of reactions that in turn would create still another set of reactions and on and on. In such circumstances, it would be impossible for anyone to figure out all the reactions that would bear upon the initial problem (Senge, 1990, in Fullan, 1993).

Educational change is mainly about schools and school systems. And, given that the ultimate goal of education is student learning, a change would be successful only if it affected students positively. In this regard, in a school situation, the person and place

most important in any change effort would be the teacher and the classroom, respectively.

“Teaching is a complex and often unpredictable business that requires a degree of improvisation” (Hopkins, et al., 1994, p. 167). Thus, teachers are very busy people; teaching their classes and attending to a wide range of activities during any school day or “just surviving day-to-day with school work” (Eltis, Braithwaite, Deer & Kensell, 1984, p. 137) or, as McLaughlin puts it, “struggl[ing] daily with the multiple and diverse demands on the classroom energy, expertise and capacity” (2005, p. 62). The complex nature of classroom life has been further illustrated by bringing in the concept of “the learning milieu” which represents a number of variables, cultural, social, institutional and psychological, that interact with each other in complicated ways to produce a unique environment within any classroom (Parlett & Hamilton, 1972, p. 11). Furthermore, the fast-paced, immediate-decision-making situations of classroom life affect teachers in a number of ways (Huberman, 1983, & Crandall & associates, 1982, in Fullan, 1991): they make teachers focus their attention on day-to-day activities, in other words, to have a short-term perspective; isolate them from others, especially teacher colleagues; exhaust them and limit opportunity for reflection. Still further, these situations would make teachers dependent on their experiential knowledge, that which would not go beyond their classrooms (ibid). Under these circumstances, it would be hard for them to respond to change proactively or even positively (ibid). This information about the complexities teachers face was useful for the researcher when observing teachers at work, especially, when observing their lessons and how they responded to various complexities in their classroom life.

Rosenholtz (1989), in Fullan (1991), found that, where teachers had shared consensus of goals, they were more likely to take on new ideas; whereas in schools where there was a low consensus about goals, teachers dealt with their concerns largely by themselves, leaving “very little room for other than individual interpretations of change” (Fullan, 1991, p. 34). The over rationalization of change (Wise, 1977, 1988, in Fullan, 1991) further exacerbates this situation. That is, the rational approach taken by many proposed changes do not seem to make sense in the subjective world of teachers (Fullan, 1991; A. Hargreaves et al., 2001). Quick-decision-making situations

often involve professional isolation, goal fuzziness, and other such within-school circumstances, showing complexities of change. There are outside circumstances, too, that impinge on schools: inadequate information about the implementation of a programme, information being supplied at very short notice or contradicting earlier information (see, for example, Wallace, 1991, in Fullan, 1993). These would be difficult-to-foresee experiences for school staff (ibid). This issue about outside circumstances impinging on school's improvement efforts was important for this study because, in a centralized system like ours, such forces are not uncommon. Hence, in this study, the researcher was able to look for similar circumstances because these were related to one of the sub questions of the investigation:

What is the role of the central office (the MOE in this case) and, what other parties, besides the MOE, influence the school's efforts to change and how do they influence?

Having discussed the complexity of change, the 'reality of change' is discussed next.

### ***2.7.1.1 Reality of Change***

Any change becomes successful only to the extent that people affected by it are identified and involved meaningfully (Sarason, 1982). This is "the subjective reality of change" (Fullan, 1991, p. 32) which addresses the concerns of the implementers, the teachers, but which is often overlooked when implementing changes (Fullan, 1991; Stoll & Fink, 1996). To further understand the nature of educational change, we have to consider "the objective reality of educational change" (Fullan, 1991, p. 36). What is meant by this is, what change *is* in actual practice. Again, taking the classroom level, there are at least five components or dimensions at stake when implementing any new programmes or policies: (1) the possibility of teachers using new or revised materials, (2) using new teaching approaches, (3) altering or changing beliefs or values (Fullan, 1991; Hopkins et al., 1994), (4) acquisition of new knowledge by teachers--to which I would add pupils-- and, (5), structural and organizational changes in school (Hopkins et al., 1994).

These two concepts, 'subjective' and 'objective reality' were relevant to this study in that they are issues that had to be addressed when initiating change or when engaging in improvement efforts and, thus, related to the current study's main research question.

To address the complexities of change, schools and school systems would need a change in mindset (Fullan, 1993; Senge, 1990): a "*change theme*" mindset instead of one that tries to "retain the *status quo*" (Fullan, 1993, p. 3) [italics in the original]. And, this would require them to become learning organizations (Barth, 1990; Fullan, 1993; Senge, 1990; Stoll & Fink, 1996).

### **2.7.1.2 Learning Organisations**

Senge (1990) has defined learning organizations as "organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn" (p. 3), while Handy (1991), in Stoll and Fink (1996), has defined it as, "an organization that encourages learning in its people" (p. 150). So, in simple terms, a learning organization helps all its members to learn by creating an environment conducive to learning. Organisations that foster learning for their people have the following qualities which also reflect almost all the key themes or internal conditions and two broad functions, maintenance and developmental (Hopkins, 2002; Hopkins et al., 1994; Stoll & Fink, 1996), that schools perform (as given in parenthesis, in italics) that make for school improvement (Stoll & Fink, 1996, pp. 150-1):

- Treat teachers as professionals ... Learning organizations trust teachers to make decisions which benefit children. (*coordination*)
- Promote high quality staff development ... [and, therefore, they] invest in teacher learning. (*staff development*)
- Encourage teacher leadership and participation ... (*leadership*)
- Promote collaboration for improvement ... (*collaborative planning*)
- Develop ways to induct, include and develop new organizational members ... and compensate for loss of key participants. (*the culture aspect*)

- Function successfully within their context ... [that is, for schools to be successful, they have to work in close association with their environment] (*involvement*)
- Work to change things that matter ... [that is, they focus more on the classroom level] (*the developmental function*)
- [Learning organizations] address such issues as discipline, routines, decision making, conflict resolution, communications and public relations in ways which prevent issues of structure from interfering with curricular, teaching and learning changes ... [that is, they pay special attention to the administration of day to day activities in such a way that these don't interfere with teaching and learning activities.] (*the maintenance function*)

To a greater or lesser extent, all of the above eight qualities of learning organizations were relevant to this study in gauging how much emphasis there was laid on teaching and learning in the case study school.

Drawing heavily from the 'Ten Guidelines for Principal's Action' (Fullan, 1997a, pp. 26-7; Fullan, 1992, pp. 87-95; Fullan, 1991, pp. 167-8), and the eight points of practical advice for the principal committed to building learning schools (Fullan & A. Hargreaves, 1991, pp. 84-5), it has been argued (by the researcher) that, to create a learning organization, the principal of a school should attend to the following 'leadership actions': Get started quickly on the improvement initiative without elaborate planning in order to keep the momentum and plan small wins; focus on fundamentals: curriculum, instruction, assessment and professional culture; be prepared to take risks and know when to be cautious; embrace diversity and empower others to take lead roles and support them to perform those roles; build a shared vision, emphasizing both content and the process of the vision; build allies or create partnerships and build relational trust, too; and, become the 'head learner' of the school. Key aspects of these actions are given in figure three.

**Figure 3: Key aspects of leadership actions to create learning organisations**

**1. Get started quickly (avoid elaborate planning) and plan small wins**

- Think about what is important for one (the leader) and people around him or her. This would help to get started quickly and not wait for elaborate planning. However, a certain amount of planning, “goal and priority setting” or, “an overall sense of direction” is needed to get started (Fullan, 1992, p. 88).
- More ‘doing’ than ‘planning’ makes one better at implementation planning and, this would help to develop ownership, because people begin to take ownership during the process rather than in advance (ibid).
- Plan small wins as the implementation process unfolds because this would give the impetus to move forward (ibid).

**2. Focus on fundamentals: curriculum, instruction, assessment and professional culture**

- The best way to approach the push for change is to decide to concentrate on implementing few priorities well and important other priorities as the school would do anyway (ibid, p. 89).
- Attempt at achieving something closer to the core educational goals of the school, some thing related to the curriculum even if all potential priorities are not given equal weight. This would show the leaders commitment to core business of the school regardless of the multiple and, sometimes even competing, priorities. (ibid).
- Attempt at fostering a professional culture through staff development and establishing a supportive climate (Newman & Wehlage, 1995).
- Decide on what you are not going to do. Four strategies are advocated by Fullan (1992):

- (i) Maintaining focus by giving priority to two things: instructional leadership and public relations. Former includes working with teachers and others to decide on what is most needed for students and latter is about instructionally focused public relations;
- (ii) Make your priorities known to your boss by discussing them with her/him in terms of specific instructional activities;
- (iii) Managing time by protecting priority time and delegating tasks; and,
- (iv) Acquiring the habit of saying ‘no’.

**3. Practise fearlessness and risk-taking and know when to be cautious**

- To bring about improvements in an organisation, one needs to face its realities through “continual acts of courage” (Block, 1987, quoted in Fullan, 1992, p. 90) or, in other words, practise fearlessness and risk-taking.
- Fullan (1992) suggests three criteria for practicing fearlessness: To be selective; attempt at small scale implementation; and, make only positive acts of courage. And, Stoll and Fink (1996) and Fullan (1991) suggest that risks taken should be calculated risks, “backed by personal experience” (Stoll and Fink, 1996, p. 112).
- Block (1987), in Fullan (1992), state three circumstances under which caution should be exercised when practising fearlessness or taking risks: when the situation at hand is too complex to understand; when survival is at stake; and, when there is a lack of trust among staff.

Figure 3: (continued)

**4. Embrace diversity, empower others to take lead roles, support them to perform those roles and build relational trust**

- In organisations such as schools which are complex in nature, differences in opinion among members and resistance to change are likely and should be expected and treated as positive forces for change because otherwise there is the likelihood of resistance being increased (Fullan, 1997a).
- People become empowered when they have the support of their boss, can influence decisions that affect them and have access to information and resources needed to implement any decisions that they take (Patterson et al., 1996, in Fullan 1992).
- Supporting includes staying involved, reviewing progress and being able to meet them if the need arises (Patterson et al., 1996, in Fullan, 1992).
- Trust is a 'social resource' in school improvement. It facilitates the ways in which teachers engage students in learning (Bryk and Schneider, 2002, in Fullan, 2003). Relational trust incorporates four elements or traits characteristic of day to day behaviour of effective principals: respect, competence, personal regard for others and integrity and, principals are in a key position to build this trust (ibid).

**5. Build a shared-vision while emphasizing both content and the process of the vision**

- A vision is simply "an image of the future" (Kouzes & Posner, 1987, p. 85), created, first, in the mind of the leader, but which has to be communicated to others so that they "come to see what leader sees" (p. 100).
- A shared vision includes both the content of the school as it might become and what is involved in the change process. Therefore, both content of the vision and the process of building and implementing the vision should be emphasised (Fullan, 1991, 1997a).
- It is essential that all implementers come to share the deeply held version of the meaning, and find out what is important for them because otherwise the change would be superficial (Fullan, 1997a).

**6. Build allies or create partnerships**

- The principal should make an effort to create alliances through school related activities with at least five groups: senior level administrators, peers, parents, teachers, and individuals external to the system (Fullan, 1997a).

**7. Become the 'head learner' of the school**

- Leaders in change contexts get involved as learners, critically reflecting on new initiatives, looking for "promising and empty ideas" (Fullan, 1997a, p. 41). And, in this way, they become "less vulnerable to and less dependent on external solutions" (p. 41).

*Adapted from: The 'Ten Guidelines for Principal's Action' (Fullan, 1997a, pp. 26-7; Fullan, 1992, pp. 87-95; Fullan, 1991, pp. 167-8), and the eight points of practical advice for the principal committed to building learning schools (Fullan & A. Hargreaves 1991, pp. 84-5).*

The 'principal actions', mentioned in figure three, are themselves reflective of modern, as well as, some current thinking on effective leadership (see, for example, Blase & Kirby, 1992; Collins, 2001 cited in Fullan, 2003; Edwards, 1999, 2003; Greenleaf, 1977, cited in Sergiovanni, 1991; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985 cited in Hopkins, 2001; Hopkins 2001; Kouzes & Posner, 1987; McEwan, 2003; Pajak, 1993; Senge, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1991; Smith & Piele, 2006; Stoll & Fink, 1996). The most cited dimensions of effective leadership in schools according to most of these authors are: building a shared vision and planning; being achievement-oriented in terms of student learning; committed to colleagues as well as one's own professional growth; empowering colleagues to take leadership roles; risk taking or having courage and influencing school culture. In addition to these, more recent thinking on leadership centres on the concepts of 'distributed leadership' (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2004) and 'sustainable leadership' (A. Hargreaves & Fink, 2003, 2006). These two concepts are discussed in section 2.8.1.

To the extent that a school head plays a vital role in improvement efforts, these leader actions and key dimensions of effective leadership were found to be helpful in understanding the Head's actions in the case study school that related to the progress the school was making.

This discussion on change, so far, has centered on complexity of change, one of the two key messages in change literature. The next key message, as stated earlier, is that change has to be planned and managed.

### **2.7.2 Planning For Change**

Fullan (1991, 1997b, 2001a) suggests that we consider two interrelated issues when planning for change: "What *assumptions* about change should we note? [and,] how can we plan and implement change more effectively?" (p. 105, p. 211 & p. 107 respectively) [*italics in the original*]. Regarding the former, Fullan advocates ten 'do' and 'don't' assumptions of change (see below) and, for the latter, what is important is a thorough understanding of the phases or stages involved in the process of change (Fullan, 1991, 1997b, 2001a; Harris, 2002). In addition to these two issues, there are two other issues to take into account when planning for change: to be on the lookout

for resistance to change (Hopkins et al., 1994; Neville, 1992) and evaluating change (Harris, 2002; Hopkins, et al., 1994; Stoll & Fink, 1996;). Before taking a closer look at these four issues, it would be helpful to consider first, some ways of looking at change.

### ***2.7.2.1 Perspectives on Educational Change***

One of the earliest descriptions of the types of change strategies as reported by Bolam (1975), Harris (2002), Hopkins et al. (1994), Neville (1992) and Wikeley (1998), is that of Bennis and colleagues (1969) who had advocated the following three types of change strategies:

- Power coercive: these are strategies that are based on the application of force, either legal, political or otherwise;
- Normative – re-educative: these are strategies that attempt to win the hearts and minds of people involved in the change, i.e., changes are targeted to changing attitudes, norms and belief systems of the people; and,
- Rational empirical: these are strategies that assume that people are rational beings and they would accept rational explanations or objective research findings as an impetus for change.

More recently, House (1979), in Hopkins, et al. (1994), has identified three perspectives on planned educational change that more or less echo the above strategies as advocated by Bennis, Benne & Chin (1969): technological, political, and cultural. The technological perspective assumes that things happen in a rational way (Hopkins et al., 1994); yet things do not always happen in that way (Patterson, Purkey & Parker, 1986, in Hopkins et al., 1994). Change involves people trying out new things that would disturb the status quo and, therefore, the political perspective assumes that educational change would involve conflict, because, while a change may mean improvement for some, for others it might seem irrelevant or foolish (Hopkins et al., 1994). The cultural perspective assumes that organisational life is complex and non-linear (Bolman & Deal, 1991) and that change occurs in a social setting where long held beliefs and practices get threatened when innovations are attempted (Hopkins et al., 1994). Generally, most change efforts require more than one strategy (Bolam, 1975; Corbett & Rossman, 1989, in Hopkins et al., 1994): In each school

there would be people who would be receptive to each of these perspectives; therefore, focusing on all three perspectives simultaneously would “increase ... the pool of potential implementers” (Hopkins et al., 1994, p. 35).

### **2.7.2.2 What Assumptions About Change Should We Note?**

Fullan (1991, 1997b, 2001a) states that the assumptions planners of change make about the change are powerful, sometimes subconscious, determinants of action. To the extent that change is how people experience it, these assumptions play an important role in whether the change gets confronted or ignored (ibid). Further, proponents of school improvement (for example, Hopkins et al, 1994; Stoll & Fink, 1996, among others) agree that these assumptions have been very useful for schools in their improvement initiatives, especially at the planning stage. While some of these assumptions were relevant to this study, others were peripheral. All these assumptions are given in figure four.

**Figure 4: "Do" and "don't" assumptions of change**

<p><b>“Do” and “don’t” assumptions of change</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Your version of change might not be implemented. Therefore exchange your reality or ideas with other implementers because continual development of initial ideas is necessary for successful change.</li><li>• Individual implementers need to work their own meaning. It involves some ambiguity, ambivalence and uncertainty for the individual. Continuous clarification leads to effective implementation.</li><li>• Conflict and disagreement are fundamental to successful change because a group would possess multiple realities. All attempts at change would experience an ‘implementation dip’ at the early stages.</li><li>• People need pressure to change, even if it is in their desired direction but they need to react to give their views, interact with other implementers and obtain technical assistance if change has to be effective.</li><li>• Being a process, change takes time. While a moderate change might take 3-5 years, a complex one would take even longer, perhaps 5 -10 years. Hence, persistence is of utmost importance.</li><li>• Lack of implementation might not be resistance to change. There might be a number of reasons: value incongruence, not enough resources, insufficient time, etc. Resisters might have good points.</li><li>• Don’t expect everyone or most to change but work progressively. Take one step or a few steps at a time such that the number of people affected would increase gradually.</li><li>• Plan change based on the above assumptions. Evolutionary planning and knowledge on problem coping and of change process are essential.</li><li>• “No amount of knowledge will ever make it totally clear what action should be taken.” (p. 109).</li><li>• The real agenda is changing the culture of the institution. Stated differently, see whether or not relationships are developing among individuals.</li></ul> <p><i>Adapted from Fullan (1991: 105-107; 200a1: 108-110)</i></p>
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### **2.7.3 Planning and Implementing Change: The Phases of Change**

As stated earlier, a thorough knowledge of the process of change is what is needed for planning change. The process of change consists of three broad phases: initiation, implementation and institutionalization (Fullan, 1991, 2001a; Miles, 1986, in Hopkins et al., 1994). These phases are not linear, but overlap each other (ibid). In other words, what happens in a particular phase can either modify or change a decision taken at an earlier point in time (Fullan, 1991, 2001a). Events in these phases unfold in an interactive way (Harris, 2002; Fullan, 1991, 2001a;). Although described under different names, there are others who have viewed change similarly. For example, Lewin (1951), in Neville (1992), describes these phases as ‘unfreezing’, ‘change’ and ‘refreezing’ and, Harris (2002), as ‘starting change’, ‘securing change’, and ‘sustaining change’. These three phases of change were relevant to describe change efforts made by the case study school.

#### **2.7.3.1 Initiation**

“Initiation is the process leading up to and including the decision to proceed with implementation” (Fullan, 1991, p. 50).

Innovations get started for many reasons and from many sources. Fullan (1991) gives several of these factors and states that any one or several may be the reason to start change: existence and quality of innovations; access to information; advocacy from central administration; teacher advocacy; external change agents; community pressure and/or support; new policy and funds; and, problem solving and bureaucratic orientations. In addition, the principal can also be the advocate, as Fullan (1991) notes: “some principals are actively engaged as initiators or facilitators of continuous improvement in their schools” (p. 144). Furthermore, Fullan states that ideally the best beginnings combine 3 R’s: relevance, readiness and resources. In this study, these 3R’s have been used to understand how the initiation process unfolded. According to Fullan (1991), relevance, the first of the 3R’s, includes need, clarity and utility.

- A need should be identified and it should be relatively focused or specific

- Goals should be well defined and means to achieve should be clearly specified
- The change would be practical if it addresses a salient and focused need, relates to teachers' situation and there are specified concrete ways to go about it (Mortimore et al., 1988 in Fullan, 1991).

Second, readiness could be looked at in terms of individual and organization factors: For the individuals: "Does it address a perceived need? Is it a reasonable change? Do they have necessary prerequisite skills? Do they have time?" For the organization: "Is the culture compatible? Are there all necessary facilities, equipment and material available? Are any other changes in progress?" (pp. 63-4). The greater the number of no's to the above questions, the more there is reason to look at readiness (Crandall, Eiseman & Louis, 1986, in Fullan, 1991). Finally, resources concern the accumulation and provision of support for the change process (Fullan, 1991).

### ***2.7.3.2 Implementation***

"Implementation consists of the process of putting into practice an idea, programme, or set of activities and structures new to the people attempting or expected to change" (Fullan, 1991, p. 65). Change being complex, researchers have tried to find ways to best understand the process of implementation. In this regard, Fullan (1991) suggests two methods: one involves identifying a list of key factors associated with implementation success; and, the other way is to identify main themes. Both are important and they interact together to determine success or failure. The more these factors and themes support implementation the more change in practice will be accomplished (Fullan, 1991). First, these factors will be discussed, followed by the themes.

#### ***2.7.3.2.1 Factors affecting implementation***

Fullan has identified nine critical factors affecting implementation that are organized into three broad categories: (i) characteristic of change; (ii) local roles and, (iii) external factors. These factors and categories proved to be helpful in portraying how change was implemented by the case study school.

*(i) Factors related to the characteristic of change*

*Need:* A relatively focused or specific need should be identified and its importance in relation to other school needs gauged, if necessary, by referring to the school's vision. Early in the implementation process, people should begin to realize that the identified need is significant and that they are making some progress. This should be followed by early rewards and identifiable benefits.

*Clarity:* Goals should be well defined and means to achieve clearly specified; diffused goals and unspecified means can cause anxiety and frustration which results, more often than not, in reverting back to old ways of doing things (Louis & Miles, 1990). People should also, guard against 'false clarity': interpreting expected change in an over simplified way.

*Complexity:* "Complexity refers to the difficulty and extent of change required, and extent of alterations in beliefs, teaching strategies, and use of materials" (Fullan, 1991, p. 71). So, break complex changes into component parts and implement in an incremental manner and provide sustained assistance through.

*Quality and practicality of programme:* With regard to quality, enough time should be spent for preparation and/or development; otherwise implementation would suffer. The attempted change would be practical to the extent that it addresses a significant need, aligns with teachers' situation and includes concrete next steps. Once the implementation is underway, people would begin to see that attempted change is achievable (or alternatively, not achievable).

*(ii) Local factors*

*The school district:* Changes within the school can be brought about by the school people, but not system wide change. However, the central office can and should provide help in and/or, oversee, the process of managing change.

*School board and community:* Implementation of improvement efforts are more likely to succeed when there is a mutual relationship between the school and the community.

*The principal:* The principal is the main agent of change and, hence, can influence the likelihood of change. Her or his actions are paramount in sending a key message to teachers: that is, whether the change is taken seriously (or not) in school. Principals can directly influence conditions necessary for success (Fullan, 1985; Leithwood, Aitken & Jantzi, 2006) such as, developing shared goals, providing collaborative work structures, and monitoring of results and the like. Best indicator of principal's involvement is whether s/he attends workshop training sessions. Principals themselves also need help, just like teachers.

*The role of teachers:* A teacher's psychological state (personality, previous experience, stage of career) determines how much change-oriented s/he is. This is not a permanent condition but will be shaped by the schools culture. To the extent that change involves learning something new, acquiring this new learning is enhanced when there is exchange of ideas, support and positive feelings about their work. To this end, positive working relations are critical for implementation success.

*External factors:* This set of factors places the school or school system in the context of the broader society and this includes, among others, the district or central office and other education sector institutions. Views of these parties and schools exist in two different worlds; and, to the extent each side is ignorant of the other side's subjective world, reform efforts are bound to fail. Hence, "a processual relationship with each other" (Fullan, 1991, p. 79) is needed. But, more often than not, this relation seems to take the "form of episodic events than processes" (ibid). Help from these parties can stimulate and influence implementation provided that their assistance is integrated with the local factors mentioned above.

### 2.7.3.2.2 *Key themes<sup>5</sup> in the implementation process*

#### *Vision-building*

Vision building affects and is affected by the other themes. It imbues an organization with values and purpose. Vision building generally involves two dimensions: That is, to articulate the 'what' of vision and then the 'how', (the process) of vision.

#### *Evolutionary planning*

The important thing is not to have a 'water tight' plan, so to speak, but to have flexibility built into the plan. In other words, adapt the plan to fit the emerging conditions as the implementation process unfolds. This could be done by collecting good data about what is happening (Miles, 1987, in Fullan, 1991).

#### *Empowerment and power-sharing*

Implementation is about 'doing' and, therefore, providing support to people, who are acting in the direction of the attempted change, is crucial. Forms of support include power sharing, including delegation of authority and resources, developing collaborative work cultures so that there will be a constant flow of information and, on the part of the head, to maintain an active involvement with key staff.

#### *Staff development and resource assistance*

Change involves new learning on the part of the people attempting to bring about change. Therefore, staff development becomes a must for them. The important thing is that staff development should be an ongoing process because it is only when people actually start to do new things that specific concerns and doubts surface (Fullan, 1985); no matter how much staff development occurs at the beginning. Teacher-specific training activities are the most effective together with opportunities to regularly meet with peers.

#### *Monitoring and problem-coping*

Monitoring the implementation process is just as important as measuring the outcomes. Fullan (1991) highlights two functions of monitoring: it brings to fore good

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<sup>5</sup> To the extent that change and improvement are related, as described previously, the following themes are similar to the ones described earlier. Therefore, readers are asked to bear with the researcher with these inevitable repetitions.

ideas and subjects new ideas to scrutiny such that mistakes are avoided while enabling the development of further promising ideas. Furthermore, information obtained about the progress of the implementation process would help to determine what additional resources and support would be needed or whether any modifications are needed to the plan and the organizational arrangements.

### *Restructuring*

Restructuring here refers to how schools are organized as workplaces (Fullan, 1991). In this regard, restructuring involves such areas as organizational structures and roles, finance, governance and policies that explicitly push for improvement.

Fullan (1991) argues that it is these themes in concert that would bring about implementation success; in isolation, they are ineffective. The relevance of these themes has been mentioned earlier (see page 22).

### **2.7.3.3 Institutionalisation**

“Institutionalisation occurs when the change is no longer viewed as an innovation; instead, it is considered part of the regular pattern of operation within the school” (Sergiovanni, 1991, p. 263). Although institutionalisation is considered as the third phase of a planned change process, it should be noted that “all phases must be thought about from the beginning and continually thereafter” (Fullan, 1991, p. 90). According to Miles (1986), in Hopkins et al. (1994), key activities in the institutionalization phase include the following: eliminating all practices competing with or contradicting to the change initiative being pursued; linking the new initiative with all other ongoing change efforts in a strong and purposeful way; and, making the initiative a school-wide affair. The continuation or institutionalisation of innovations, according to Huberman and Miles (1984), in Fullan (1991), depends on the extent to which the change gets built into the school’s normal way of life through policies, structure and resources; has trained a cadre of teachers, including administrators, who have developed the necessary skills and commitment to the change effort; and, established ways for receiving continuous assistance, especially in terms of supporting new teachers and administrators.

Lately, there has been an extension to this last phase of the change process, 'institutionalization'; that is, the concept or "the notion of sustainability" or "deeper reform" (Fullan, 2006, p. 113) or, simply, "sustainable change" (A. Hargreaves & Fink, 2006b, p. 14). While a change is said to have been institutionalized when it gets built into the daily routine of an organization (Fullan, 1991; 2001a), sustainable change refers to the development of an initiative within an organization without compromising other ongoing developments and not necessarily to whether a change initiative lasts in that organization (A. Hargreaves & Fink, 2003, 2006b).

Sustainable change necessitates the development of "system thinkers" and, to do so, "eight elements of sustainability" have been advocated by Fullan (2006, p. 115), the essence of which are as follows: A commitment to raise the achievement levels of all students in one's own school as well those in the system and this includes target setting and having high expectations for students; promote collaborative work among school staff and form networks among peers in order "to increase the amount of purposeful interaction" which is "a powerful strategy for school improvement [as well as for] learning" (p. 116); a mechanism for school self-evaluation coupled with external inspection that is more focused on school priorities; on-going professional development and strong leadership by the school head to effect all of the above, especially to share leadership among as many staff as possible (the concept of 'distributed leadership') and to prepare future leaders (the concept of 'leadership succession'). Except for leadership succession, all the other aspects are reflected in the 'principal actions' to create a learning organization identified earlier (see section 2.5).

#### **2.7.4 Resistance to change**

Neville (1992) has stated that resistance to change is more or less inevitable and, according to Sergiovanni (1991), people resist change when their basic work needs are threatened. Four fairly universal needs have been identified by Mealiea (1978), in Sergiovanni (1991), and they are: the need to be clear about what is expected of us; the need to have some certainty about the future in terms of job security; the need to have opportunities for social interaction; and, the need to have some say in decisions that affect our work.

Teacher participation would address these needs (Sergiovanni, 1991) and thereby help to overcome resistance (Neville, 1992): “involve ... resisters ... during planning” (Kell & Louis, 1980, in Louis & Miles, 1990, p. 28) then “they are more likely to be part of the solution than if they ... [were] left ... [out]” (p. 28). Targeting respected teachers first, too, would help minimize resistance (Sergiovanni, 1991). “Keeping the proposed change simple and implementing aspects of the change gradually [would] increase teacher’s confidence in themselves as successful implementers” (ibid, p. 261).

This issue of resistance to change is a key issue to address in change efforts (Fullan, 1991; Neville, 1992; Sergiovanni, 1991). However, in this study, the issue of resistance had little relevance as the change initiated in the case study school was from within.

### **2.7.5 Evaluating Change**

Evaluation can be defined as the systematic process of determining the worth or merit or significance of things (Scriven, 2003; Stufflebeam, 2003). According to Stufflebeam (2003), “a functional evaluation system assesses all important aspects of the school, provides direction for improvement, maintains accountability records, and enhances understanding of teaching and learning, and other school processes” (p. 775).

Scriven (1972) distinguished between two kinds of evaluation: formative and summative. Formative evaluation is any action taken to improve a programme, usually a newly implemented one, whereas summative evaluation is to appraise a programme that is up and running without the overt goal of improvement (Cronbach, 1963, in Scriven, 1972).

“Evaluating only for ends without evaluating the means would not provide enough clues and ideas for starting and carrying out school improvement efforts” (Sergiovanni, 1991, p. 202). In this regard, Poskitt (1993), Stake (1967), in Sergiovanni (1991), Stewart and Prebble (1984) and Stufflebeam (2003), all contend that evaluation should be an ongoing process and not something that should be done at the end of an activity or a programme. Further, school improvement has been

likened to a journey (Fullan, 1993); in this sense, the journey (process) is as important as the destination (outcomes), an indication that both formative and summative judgments would be needed. Furthermore, there is a suggestion that, even in evaluation, both internal and external emphasis would be more fruitful than either one alone (Eltis et al., 1984; Stoll & Fink, 1996; Stufflebeam, 2003). This is because school people might be too close to the problem to adequately address the problem and, in this regard, the outside eye could spot such issues unintentionally overlooked by the school. This is one area where the 'critical friend' (Hopkins, 2001; Stoll & Fink, 1996) would become very helpful.

## **2.8 School Improvement and Change Management**

Two very important tasks in the management of change, according to Marks (1998), are: the exercise of leadership and instituting cultural change.

### **2.8.1 Leadership, for Managing Change**

Change management demands, on the part of the leader or initiator or change agent, a style of leadership that would make the change process work (ibid). First, a definition of leadership is in order. Bolman and Deal (1991) have given many definitions, two of which are relevant here. A common sense definition of leadership according to these authors is, "the ability to get others to do what you want" (p. 405). Mitchell and Larson Jr. (1987) reflect this view in their definition: "the way in which individuals influence the behaviour of groups" (p. 434). Bolman and Deal's (1991) second definition is more related to a school situation: "leadership is *really* facilitation" and, in this regard, "the task of a leader is not to get what he or she wants but to *empower* people to do what *they* want" (p. 405). [Italics in the original] This definition reflects what Sergiovanni (1991) meant by power "to" as opposed to power "over". Stating that leadership is indeed "a special form of power, power to influence" (p. 137), Sergiovanni (1991; 1987) has distinguished between two conceptions of power: power "over" and power "to". The former connotes control which means that a leader would use his/her access to rewards and punishment to dominate the situation or the person concerned; the latter connotes facilitation, which means that a leader would help others to accomplish things that are important to them (ibid). "In power to, far

less emphasis is given to what people are doing, and far more emphasis is given to what they are accomplishing" (Sergiovanni, 1991, p. 138). So how does a leader or a school principal go about influencing or empowering others to do what they want?

Leadership comprises a set of forces that a principal could use in order to move the school forward toward effectiveness or prevent it from sliding backwards and they are: technical, human, educational symbolic and cultural forces (Sergiovanni, 1991). The technical force is about the principal's ability to manage day to day activities by performing such activities as planning, organizing, coordinating and the like, in order to ensure optimum effectiveness (ibid). The human force is about the ability of a principal to harness the potential of all the school's human resources by performing such activities as providing "support, encouragement, and growth opportunities for teachers and others" (ibid, p. 101). The educational force is about the expert knowledge regarding matters pertaining to education and schooling that a principal has acquired (ibid). With the possession of expert knowledge, "the principal is adept at diagnosing educational problems; counselling teachers; providing for supervision, evaluation, and staff development; and developing curriculum" (ibid, p. 102). These three forces together make up "the critical mass needed for basic school competence" (p. 103). However, they are not enough to create excellence in schools; the other two forces of leadership, symbolic and cultural, are required, too, because they are much more powerful in effecting change and contributing to a school's effectiveness than the other three (Sergiovanni, 1991, 2001).

The symbolic force is about the ability of the school leader to direct others' attention on matters of importance to the school (ibid). A key aspect of symbolic leadership is to provide purposing to the school (ibid). Vaill (1984) defines purposing as "that continuous stream of actions by an organisation's formal leadership which have the effect of inducing clarity, consensus, and commitment regarding the organisation's basic purpose" (quoted in Sergiovanni, 1991, p. 103). Visiting classrooms, spending time with students and teachers, giving prominence to educational concerns over management concerns, providing a common vision for the school through appropriate actions and words, are all forms of actions denoting symbolic force of leadership (Sergiovanni, 1991, 2001). The cultural force of leadership is about a principal's ability to nurture an identity unique to a particular school by "seeking to define,

strengthen, and articulate those enduring values, beliefs, and cultural strands that give the school its unique identity over time” (Sergiovanni, 1991, p. 104). Activities associated with this force of leadership include, among others, clear articulation of purposes and mission, enculturing new members, reinforcing traditions and beliefs and rewarding those who display this culture (p. 105).

These five forces of leadership resonate closely with the four “frames” of Bolman and Deal (1991) and the four aspects important to a school leader as advocated by Edwards (2003). This latter almost squares with some recent research indicating “a credible set of leadership behaviours ... associated with student achievement” (Smith & Piele, 2006). A discussion of these follows.

Bolman and Deal (1991) have advocated four vantage points from which to view organizations: structural, human resource, political and symbolic perspectives. They have called these perspectives, “frames”.

The structural frame emphasizes the importance of formal rules and relationships that enable an organization to pursue its goals, while the human resource frame views organizations as existing to serve human needs (careers, salaries, etc) who, in turn, serve the organization by utilizing their skills. Hence, organizational leaders attempt to keep a balance between peoples’ needs and those of the organizations (ibid). From the political perspective, organizations are seen as coalitions composed of groups of people who have varied interests, values and preferences and, in this regard, an organization’s most important decision becomes the allocation of scarce resources (ibid). Furthermore, because of scarce resources and enduring differences, conflict is inevitable; thus, power becomes a key resource for a leader to see that the organizational goals are accomplished (ibid).

The symbolic frame asserts the importance of meaning making at work: the meaning of what happened in an event becomes more important than what actually happened in the event (Bolman & Deal, 1991). In the event of uncertainty and ambiguity, people create symbols to bring clarity and meaning out of confusion.

While technical and human forces could be said to have close relation to structural and human resource frames respectively, the cultural and symbolic forces together reflect the working of the symbolic frame. As for the relationships between the political frame and the human force, their relationship could be shown as follows: schools are organizations that deal with educational matters. Therefore, power issues would centre on aspects of education either directly or indirectly. Expert knowledge pertaining to matters of schooling together with the ability to harness human potential would, more or less, reflect the political frame in a school situation.

Edwards' (2003) four aspects important to school leaders of today, while squaring with the set of credible leadership behaviours as mentioned above, closely reflect the five forces of leadership in the following way: 'school leaders should manage the business', squares with 'establishing managerial order' and reflect the technical force; 'work with people', squares with 'develop people' and reflect the human force; guide the curriculum, squares with 'providing direction' and reflect the educational force; and, lead towards the future, squares with 'leading change' and reflect both the symbolic and cultural forces. Thus, I agree with Bolman and Deal who say, "issues of structure and people, of politics and culture are important *everywhere* ..." (1991, p. 17). [Italics in the original].

From the above discussions on leadership, it could be noted that all the 'actions of principals' cut across all the five forces of leadership. For example, leader's actions to getting started quickly would involve some planning, organizing and coordination and, in this respect, this action of the principal would reflect the technical force; whereas empowering others and supporting them and building a shared-vision are all support providing actions of the principal and, thus, are indicative of the human force; and, actions that relate to curriculum and instruction, such as providing for staff development, evaluation, counselling and the like, would all be indicative of the educational force.

A change becomes successful when actions that make up the change becomes routinized or internalised or institutionalised. When this happens, it is actually the culture that has changed. Principals who are continuously trying to instill a particular kind of culture, for example, a risk-taking mentality, becoming life-long learners,

building professional cultures and the like within their school, are, in fact, exhibiting symbolic and cultural forces because both are about values, beliefs and actions to strengthen these. To the extent that these two forces would aid in building a school culture, they would incorporate the other three forces as well: "Culture building occurs ... through the way people use educational, human and technical skills in handling daily events or establishing regular practices" (Saphier & King, 1985, quoted in Sergiovanni, 1991, p. 106).

The concept of leadership as 'facilitation' and 'empowering others to do what they want' and the five forces of leadership discussed above were very useful in understanding the actions of the Head of the case study school and the significance of these actions to the working of the school. Further, this understanding was crucial in answering one of the research questions of this study.

At this point it is worth taking a look at the two recent developments in 'leadership' thinking: 'distributed leadership' and 'sustainable leadership'. Each is discussed in turn.

*Distributed leadership:* The concept of 'distributed leadership' (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2004) portrays a departure from the conventional models that focus on a particular person or a particular set of behaviours (Graham, 2006; A. Hargreaves & Fink, 2003; Martinez, Firestone, Mangin & Polovsky, 2005). Lately, this singular view of leadership has been challenged (Stoll & Harris, 2006) because, organisations that exist in today's complex and fast-paced world, are faced with unpredictable and sometimes overwhelming demands which cannot be catered for by the intelligence of a single person (A. Hargreaves & Fink, 2003, 2006b). Spillane et al (2004) have further argued that, "rather than seeing leadership practice as solely a function of an individual's ability, skill, charisma and/or cognition, ... it is best understood as a practice distributed over leader, followers and their situation" (p. 11). For them, what is important is not the leader or what she or he does, but the "leadership *activity*" (p. 10). [Their emphasis] Graham (2006) provides a succinct description about distributed leadership which was useful for this study. I quote her in full:

It [distributed leadership] is essentially about sharing leadership throughout and across the organization. The focus is on leadership rather than leaders ...

Distribut[ed] leadership is about creating space, contexts and opportunities for leadership by others.... It is a form of leadership which is about learning together and constructing knowledge and meaning collectively and collaboratively through people at various levels of the organization exercising leadership. (pp. 11-12)

In essence, distributed leadership involves sharing of leadership among as many personnel as possible and learning and working together collaboratively.

*Sustainable Leadership*: Sustainable leadership refers to three aspects of leaders: “leader learning, ‘distributed’ leadership and leadership succession” (A. Hargreaves & Fink, 2003, p. 8). According to A. Hargreaves and Fink (2006b) these are three key dimensions of sustainable leadership which they call depth, breadth and length, respectively.

‘Leader learning’ or ‘depth’ dimension underscores the importance of learning that is useful for students later in their lives and not just information or skills to pass exams and do well in school. Further, focus is on everyone’s learning and not just student’s learning; in other words, putting everyone in the business of learning or taking learning to centre stage. Leadership succession or the ‘length’ dimension is about preparing leaders to lead because no leader is immortal. The important thing for current leaders is to start on the work of preparing the future leader or leaders quickly and not to wait for the announcement of their departure.

Many of these ‘principal actions’ (stated above) are people oriented and, hence, they reflect transformational leadership. “Transformational leaders are ‘people oriented’; rather than being organization or task oriented, they help to promote collaboration among staff (Harris, 2002). Actions which are purposely directed at impacting culture are also indicative of this kind of leadership (Stoll & Fink, 1996). And, the exercise of this transformational leadership, which is one of the key themes (Harris, 1999) or internal conditions (Hopkins et al., 1994) or climate setting conditions (Stoll & Fink, 1996) vital for school improvement, is, as mentioned earlier, one of the two important

tasks in managing change. The next important task in managing change is to attempt to influence the school's culture.

### **2.8.2 Culture, for Managing Change**

Managing change requires a good understanding of the school's culture (Prosser, 1999; Stoll, 1999) and how to institute cultural change (Deal, 1990 and Trice & Beyer, 1993 in Marks, 1998; Beare, Caldwell, & Millikan, 1989). So, what is culture?

Many and varied definitions of culture exist in the literature. However, some terms--values, beliefs, norms, and assumptions--seem to appear more often than others--customs, rituals, practices, attitudes--in those definitions. (see, for example, Beare et al, 1989; Deal, 1985; Edwards, 1991; Handy, 1985; Hopkins, 2001; Owens, 1995; Sashkin & Sashkin, 2003; Schein, 1992, 2004; Sergiovanni, 1991; Stacey, 1993, in Beach & Reinhartz, 2000). And, in many ways, the word 'shared' is used with the former set of words. For example, Owens (1995, p. 81) defines culture as: "a system of shared values and beliefs that interact with organization's people, organizational structures, and control systems to produce behavioural norms" (Owens, 1995, p. 81). In practical terms, shared values indicate what is considered important (ibid) or right or wrong or good or bad (Sashkin & Sashkin, 2003); shared beliefs indicate what one considers true (Owens, 1995) or "what people expect to happen as a consequence of their actions" (Sashkin & Sashkin, 2003, p. 116); and, behavioural norms indicate the adage 'how we do things around here' (Owens, 1995).

Because we are talking about improvement and change, and the management of change through culture, one other aspect of culture would need to be understood: the levels at which culture manifests in an organization, where levels denote the extent to which the phenomenon is visible and audible to the outsider (Schein, 1992, 2004). Schein has identified three levels: the level of artefacts; the level of values; and the level of basic assumptions: Artefacts are the organization's structures and processes which are easy to observe but very difficult to decipher; values include "espoused justifications" (2004, p. 26), sometimes in written form too, such as in mission statements, goals, strategies and the like; basic assumptions are the "unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts and feelings" (ibid). Others, for

example, Beare et al (1989), have identified two levels, with second level having three sub-levels, while Sergiovanni (1991) has identified four levels. Although the numbers of levels differ, they map fairly well with the three levels of Schein as shown in figure five.

**Figure 5: Levels of culture**

<b>Schien (1992, 2004)</b>	<b>Beare et al (1989)</b>	<b>Sergiovanni (1991)</b>
Basic assumptions	Conceptual intangible foundations	Assumptions
Values/ espoused justifications	Conceptual verbal and conceptual behavioural manifestations	Perceptives and values
Artefacts	Visual/material manifestation and symbolism	Artefacts

A culture exists in every organization or school (Beare et al., 1989; Deal & Kennedy, 1982;). It impacts powerfully on every aspect of organisational life (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Fiore & Chip, 2005) and, therefore, plays a crucial role in organizational success (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). Edwards (2003) and Prosser (1999) have described its implicitness and yet its importance in the following ways: Prosser views school culture as, “an unseen and unobservable force behind school activities, [yet] a unifying theme that provides meaning, direction, and mobilization for school members” (p. 14) and, for Edwards, school culture is “usually implicit, subconscious and seldom written down. Yet, it guides our understanding of what is acceptable and what is promoted in each of our schools” (p. 10). Regardless of its importance, however, it has been a neglected dimension of schools (Hopkins et al., 1994; Stoll & Fink, 1996; Stoll, 1999). And, yet, as Purkey and Smith (1983, p. 442) state, “successful change efforts are more likely to be realized only when the entire school culture is affected”, a view supported by many (see, for example, Fullan, 1991; Hopkins et al., 1994; Saphier & King, 1985; Stoll & Fink, 1996; among others). Hence, understanding and affecting culture become imperative in any school improvement effort. However, to understand culture, one has to get down to the level of shared basic assumptions, and one must understand how such basic assumptions came to be; this is “difficult, time-consuming, and highly anxiety-provoking” (Schein, 2004, p. 36).

Some scholars, however, have expressed culture in a slightly different form from the above authors; a more practical perspective, so to speak. In this regard, MacGilchrist, Mortimore, Savage and Beresford (1995) have stated that school culture is expressed through “three interrelated generic dimensions” (quoted in Stoll, 1999, p. 35): ‘professional relationships’, ‘organizational arrangements’, and ‘opportunities for learning’ (p. 35). For Purkey and Smith (1983), culture is “a structure, process, and climate of norms and values that emphasise successful teaching and learning” (p. 442). Process, here, refers to various forms of relationships (Purkey & Smith, 1983). Stoll (1999) agrees with the above authors: “school culture is most clearly ‘seen’ in the ways people relate[d] to and work[ed] together; the management of the schools’ structures, systems and physical environments; and the extent to which there is a learning focus for both pupils and adults, and the nature of the focus...” (p. 35). One could now see three main elements emerging in expressing culture: relationships, structures and norms: norms emphasizing teaching and learning; in other words, norms, which actually reflect strongly held values and beliefs of organizational members (Sergiovanni, 1991), that have a bearing on improvement. How D. Hargreaves and Hopkins (1991) view culture also reflects these three elements. Their expression of culture include three dimensions: “frameworks”, “roles and responsibilities” and “work together” (p. 16), where ‘frameworks’ depict structures, ‘roles and responsibilities’ depict, for the most part, norms and ‘work together’ obviously is about relationships. A final point, worth noting, about culture is that A. Hargreaves (1997) has gone to the extent to say that culture is seen mostly in three types of relationships: one, among the professional; another, among the professionals and the pupils; and, the other, among professionals and the various stake holders in the larger society. So, one could argue that culture is all about relationships! Consider the three elements stated above: The first is, by itself, ‘relationships’; second is, ‘structure’, denoting the formal or the written or the visible part as to how the interactions should be carried out in order to achieve organizational goals; and, the third is, ‘norms’, denoting the informal or the unwritten part as to how the interactions actually unfold in the direction of achieving goals. This ‘practical perspective’ (that is, culture as structure, norms, emphasizing teaching and learning and relationships) was helpful in learning about school culture in this study.

It has been stated previously that a culture exists in every school. However, the existing culture may either be weak (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Firestone & Wilson, 1985, cited in Leithwood, Begley & Cousins, 1994) or strong (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). In a similar vein, Fiore and Chip (2005) talk of negative and positive cultures. Poorly specified, or ambiguous or too many goals, teacher isolation and low levels of commitment are signs of weak cultures (Firestone & Wilson, 1985, cited in Leithwood, Begley & Cousins, 1994). Moreover, in weak cultures, people waste a fair amount of time figuring out what to do and how to do (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). In contrast, “a strong culture is a system of informal rules that spells out how people are to behave most of the time” (Deal & Kennedy, 1982, p. 15) and, in this regard, a strong culture enables employees to perform better, especially in two ways: if employees know exactly what they are supposed to do, then they waste almost no time in figuring out what to do in any given situation and, in a strong culture, they are more satisfied about their work and therefore they work harder. Furthermore, teacher satisfaction and student achievement are both tied to strong or positive professional cultures (Fiore & Chip, 2005; Mc Laughlin, 1996 & Mc Laughlin & Talbert, 1993, cited in A. Hargreaves, 1997).

The literature suggests many strategies that leaders use to maintain a strong culture. In this regard, Schein’s (1992, 2004) six mechanisms for embedding and transmitting culture and Sashkin and Sashkin’s (2003) three basic ways by which leaders construct culture are, among others, worth noting. According to Schein, leaders embed the assumptions that they hold in their daily work through:

- what they pay attention to and what they reward;
- how they allocate resources;
- how they do role modelling;
- how they react to critical incidents and how they act in crisis situations; and,
- the criteria they use in the personnel selection process, including promotions, and excommunication.

By attending to these six mechanisms, leaders are able to communicate, explicitly and implicitly, their own assumptions (Schein, 1992, 2004). Sashkin and Sashkin’s three basic ways by which leaders construct culture are: leaders make their organisational

philosophy explicit and clear by defining it briefly and at the same time incorporate their values and beliefs; then they develop policies, programmes and procedures that reflect the philosophy. They do both of these with the involvement of others; and finally, through their daily routine actions and consistent practices, leaders model their values and beliefs. This concept of leaders maintaining strong cultures was relevant to the study for it helped the researcher to get a better understanding of school work.

To reiterate, these values and beliefs, strongly held by leaders and other organisational members, are expressed as norms (Sergiovanni, 1991), the unspoken rules governing the daily actions of teachers and administrators (Stoll, 1999). "If certain norms of school culture are strong, improvements in instruction will be significant, continuous, and widespread; if these norms are weak, improvements will be at best infrequent, random, and slow" (Saphier & King, 1989, p. 142). Further, if these norms exist in the school, it will reside in teachers' and administrators' beliefs and their daily actions would reveal these norms (p. 143). Hence, these authors have advocated twelve cultural norms that can either be enhanced or instituted, depending on its existence or non-existence, respectively, by the leader and the staff. These norms are: collegiality; experimentation; high expectations; trust and confidence; tangible support; reaching out to the knowledgebase; appreciation and recognition; caring, celebration and humour; involvement in decision making; protection of what's important; traditions; and, honest, open communication (pp. 143-5).

More recently, Stoll and Fink (1996) have advocated ten cultural norms, some of which differ in terminology but share similar ideas with those of Saphire and King. Because norms are manifest beneath the level of artifacts and, therefore, cannot be identified easily, some phrases have been used to denote these norms (Edwards, 2003; Stoll & Fink, 1996; Stoll, 1999). This notion of cultural norms and the associated 'catch phrases' were useful for understanding the 'not-so-evident' aspects of school life but which had an effect or influenced school life. These ten cultural norms and the associated 'catch phrases' are as follows:

- Shared goals – 'we know where we're going';
- Responsibility for success – 'we must succeed';

- Collegiality – ‘we’re working on this together’;
- Continuous improvement – ‘we can get better’;
- Life long learning – ‘learning is for everyone’;
- Risk-taking – ‘we learn by trying something new’;
- Mutual respect – ‘everyone has something to offer’;
- Support – ‘there’s always someone there to help’;
- Openness – ‘we can discuss our differences’; and,
- Celebration and humour – ‘we feel good about ourselves’.

(See Stoll & Fink, 1996, pp. 92-98, for a fuller description of the above-mentioned norms).

One other aspect of culture needs mentioning: the relationship between culture and structure. This could be illustrated by examining the relationship between culture and structure. But first, consider the following definition of structure: the arrangement of roles and relationships that an organization puts in place for the purpose of accomplishing its goals (Bolman & Deal, 1991).

Both culture and structure are interdependent (Fullan, 1993; D. Hargreaves, 1999; Hopkins et al., 1994; Hopkins, 2001; Stoll & Fink, 1996; Stoll, 1999). This means that a change in one would affect the other. However, while culture could only be affected indirectly, it would be easier to change structure (D. Hargreaves, 1999; Hopkins, et al., 1994; Hopkins, 2001; Stoll & Fink, 1996; Stoll, 1999). A contrasting view has been advocated by some authors: efforts to effect cultural change should precede structural change, if not then change won’t work (Beare et al, 1990 in Fullan, 1993; Fullan, 1993). However, the dominant view has been that changes in structure should accompany changes in culture, and further, David Hargreaves (1999) has helpfully found a way out of this issue by splitting the culture aspect into two: ‘mental elements’ and ‘behavioural elements’ (p. 62). He states that the obvious or the natural way of changing culture is changing mental elements (beliefs, attitudes, values), “the conceptual intangible foundations” according to Beare et al. (1989, p. 180), “pattern of shared, basic taken-for-granted assumptions” according to Schein (2004, p. 36) and “assumptions” according to Sergiovanni (1999, p. 220). But, this is difficult (D. Hargreaves 1999; Schein, 1992, 2004). It would be easier to change behavioural

elements (practice, routines, habits, ceremonials, rituals), the 'tangible expressions' of culture according to Beare et al. (1989, p. 186), "shared espoused beliefs and values" according to Schein (2004, p. 36), and "level of perspectives" according to Sergiovanni (1991, p. 220), even on a trial basis, so that later people could adjust their mental elements to these new behavioural elements (D. Hargreaves, 1999, p. 62). In this regard, Barth (1990) has given an excellent example of how a structural change led to a cultural change which in turn reflects improvement:

Each June I asked teachers to prepare curriculum outlines for the following year that revealed what they wanted to teach... This practice shifted the teacher's role from passively compliant to actively creative....

So each year we selected a different subject ... and collated each teacher's plans for the year. A huge poster in the faculty room revealed what each teacher was doing ...; it also tended to show some startling omissions and redundancies... Questions emerged. Teachers had to talk to one another... The curriculum began to be articulated, because teachers began to be articulate, to be colleagues. (pp. 35-6)

Talking about the importance of the role of the principal in schools, Barth has stated that there are many acts such as these that principals could deliberately manipulate (see, for example, Barth, 1990, pp. 35, 59-60; Stoll & Fink, 1996, pp. 22-25). In this particular case, a structural change (how the curriculum was prepared, the behavioural element) has brought about cultural change (from an 'everyone-to-him/herself' kind of culture to a 'sharing culture', the mental element). The culture-structure relationship was helpful in understanding change efforts in relation to the existing structures and culture of the case study school.

To the extent that culture is how people relate and interact with each other in their workplace, we would need to understand that schools not only have a single culture but also they have many cultures, referred to as "subcultures", a well documented phenomenon in the literature (see, for example, Deal, 1988; D. Hargreaves, 1999; Leithwood, Begley & Cousins, 1994; Stoll & Fink, 1996, among others).

A subculture category that is widely addressed in literature is that of teacher cultures (Prosser, 1999; Stoll, 1999). There are four contrasting teacher cultures:

'individualism', 'balkanization', 'contrived collegiality', and 'collaborative cultures' (see, for example, A. Hargreaves, 1997; Hopkins, et al; 1994; Stoll & Fink, 1996; Stoll, 1999). Individualism is characterised by teacher isolation and this "reinforces uncertainty and insulates teachers from positive feedback and support" (Hopkins et al., 1994, p. 93). Balkanization is the formation of sub groups among teachers, such as by subject or grade level, and these groups are mostly indifferent and sometimes even hostile to one another (A. Hargreaves & Macmillan, 1995, in A. Hargeaves, 1997). Contrived collegiality occurs when forms of collaboration, such as fixed times for training and meetings, etc., are imposed from above (Fullan & A. Hargreaves, 1992, in Hopkins, et al., 1994; Stoll & Fink, 1996; Stoll, 1999). In collaborative cultures, teachers choose to work together and share their ideas and materials without any imposition from above (Nias et al., 1989 & Johnson, 1990 in A. Hargreaves, 1997; Stoll & Fink, 1996). Thus, what we most want in today's schools is collaborative cultures. Little (1981), according to Hopkins et al., (1994), has given the most cogent conceptions of collaborative cultures and these were useful in portraying the working relationships among staff:

- Teachers engage in frequent, continuous and increasingly concrete and precise *talk* about teaching practice ...
- Teachers and administrators frequently *observe* each other teaching, and provide each other with useful ... evaluations of their teaching ...
- Teachers and administrators *plan, design, research, evaluate and prepare teaching materials together...*
- Teachers and administrators *teach each other* the practice of teaching. (quoted in Hopkins, et al., 1994, p. 95) [emphasis in the original]

This review of literature, so far, has identified three interrelated, key concepts that undergird most school improvement efforts: Leadership, change and culture, together with the main components involved in these three concepts. These key concepts and the associated components have enabled me to develop the following sub-questions of the study and establish a framework (see figure six) that would drive the data collection and analyses phases and assist in presenting the findings of this research endeavor.

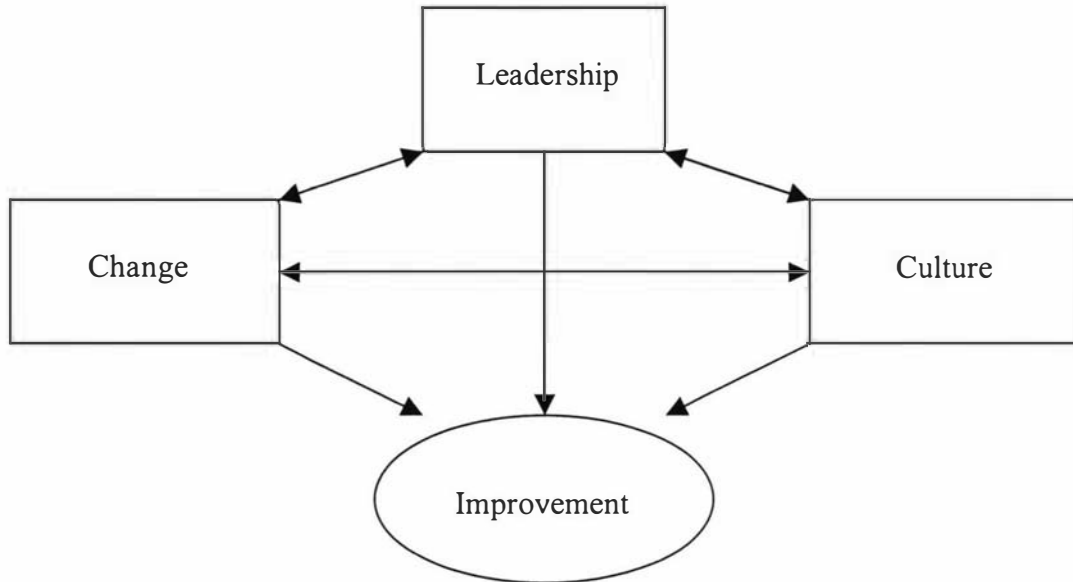
*The sub questions*

1. How does the principal effect and manage change in a Maldivian urban primary school?
2. What are the internal conditions or major components or themes at work with regard to improvement efforts in a Maldivian urban primary school?
3. How does the principal create and/or manipulate the necessary internal conditions within the school that would bring about lasting improvements?
4. How do teachers perceive improvement efforts?
5. What is the role of the central office (the MOE in this case) and, what other parties, besides the MOE, influence the school's efforts to change and how do they exert influence?
6. How does a school determine the worth of its improvement programmes?

A review of literature, such as the above, that lays the foundation for a research project, should end with an identified gap the research is intended to fill. However, in order to do so, a further area of literature has been explored: educational research in developing countries. The reason for doing so is because, as mentioned earlier, this research is being undertaken in the Maldives, a developing country.

Figure 6: The conceptual framework of the study

**A Conceptual Framework for School Improvement**  
 (Three interrelated, key concepts under girding school improvement efforts)



<b>Change</b>	<b>Leadership</b>	<b>Culture</b>
Planning & managing the change by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attending to 3 phases of change               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Initiation</li> <li>- Implementation</li> <li>- Intitutionalization</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Considering the 'do' &amp; 'don't' assumptions of change in planning</li> <li>• Dealing with resistance to change</li> <li>• Instituting cultural change (see column three)</li> </ul>	Creating a learning organisation through specific leader-actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get started quickly</li> <li>• Focus on fundamentals</li> <li>• Practice fearlessness &amp; take risks</li> <li>• Embrace diversity, empower others to take lead roles &amp; build relational trust</li> <li>• Build a shared vision.</li> <li>• Build allies &amp; create partnerships</li> <li>• Become the 'head learner'</li> </ul>	Instituting or managing cultural change through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structures (frameworks, strategies &amp; policies)</li> <li>• Norms (supporting teaching &amp; learning)</li> <li>• Relationships (with five groups of people):               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Staff</li> <li>- Senior colleagues</li> <li>- Peers</li> <li>- Students</li> <li>- Other stakeholders</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

- **Improvement (Student outcomes)**
  - Academic progress
  - Pupil satisfaction
  - Pupil-teacher relationship
  - Attendance
  - Behaviour

## 2.9 School Improvement in the Developing Countries<sup>6</sup>

Earlier I have mentioned that school improvement is related to school effectiveness. So, in this respect, even though in the developing countries there are not many improvement studies per se, there is a growing number of studies on making schools more effective. Therefore, to the extent that both school effectiveness and school improvement are related and deal with enhancing outcomes, it would not be irrelevant to talk about these studies of effective schooling in developing countries and what guidance they offer for school improvement in such countries. Lockheed and Levin's (1993) general statement about effective schools is worth considering here: "In general, the term 'effective schools'... refer to the types of schools that research has shown to be successful" (p. 4) and that is what has been reviewed and reported in this section.

School effectiveness research in the industrialised countries began in the 1960's, especially to refute Coleman's findings, that home background has more influence on students than school factors, whereas in the developing countries, educational research was done in the 1970s to justify investments (Motola, 1995, in O'Sullivan, 2006). Only fourteen major studies seemed to have been completed by the start of 1970's and, during the 1970's, another 26 studies were done (ibid). In the 1980's, the concern shifted to expanding access, a move to increase efficiency or reduce unit costs in the face of declining resources, and this emphasis on quantity was accompanied by an emphasis on quality which has continued to the present day (O'Sullivan, 2006), a route similar to educational development trends in the Maldives, too (Ministry of Education, 2000).

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<sup>6</sup> Developing countries are "those countries which are characterized by relatively low levels per capita income, limited industrialization and restricted infrastructure" (Vulliamy, 1990, p. 2). Lewin's (1985) description of 'developing countries', is similar to Vulliamy (1990) as well: "'Developing countries' is used broadly to refer generally to those countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America loosely characterized by relatively low levels of per capita income, limited industrialization and restricted infrastructure. It has no precise definition, nor does it convey any connotation of cultural poverty" (p. 132).

One of the earliest reviews of school effectiveness studies done in developing countries, as reported by many scholars (for example, Fuller, 1987; Jensen, 1995), is that of Simmons and Alexander (1978). These authors reviewed nine empirical studies done in developing countries and concluded that school's influence on student achievement is not significant once account has been taken of family background, a finding similar to that of Coleman regarding school effectiveness in the industrialized countries. In the decade that followed, Heyneman and Loxley (1983) conducted a study to find out the influence of school and family on student achievement. In this regard they reviewed original data from 16 developing countries and 13 industrialised countries and concluded that schools in the developing countries, in contrast to industrialized countries, exert a greater influence on student achievement even after accounting for pupil background. Fuller's (1987) review of some 60 empirical studies done in developing countries concluded similarly: "the school institution exerts a greater influence on the achievement within developing countries, compared to industrialized nations, after accounting for the effect of pupil background" (pp. 255-6). From his review, Fuller identified the following factors to be associated with higher student achievement: school expenditure; specific material inputs; teacher quality; teacher practices and classroom organization; and, school management. While 'school expenditure' was peripheral, the other two factors had more relevance to this study.

Riddell (1989) was very critical of Fuller's review. Her main argument was that multilevel modeling was not used and that student background factors were either not included or miscalculated. Yet, Fuller (1987) did acknowledge these weaknesses and addressed some: "only studies that used some form of control for pupils' social class were included" (p. 273). Furthermore, he also notes, with many others, (for example, Scheerens, 2001) that social class differentiation is not well established in the developing countries (which is the case in the Maldives, too) as it is in the industrialized countries.

A slightly different approach to Fuller was taken by Cohn and Rossmiller (1987). They compared SER from both industrialised and developing countries. Based on this review, the implications they drew for educational policy in developing countries relate to six areas: school expenditure and school effectiveness; the school as a unit of

production; achieving change in schools; school staffing; staff development; and, use of student and teacher time. Key aspects of each area are given in table four.

**Table 4: Educational policy in developing countries: Implications for school improvement**

<b>Area of policy implication</b>	<b>Key aspect</b>
School expenditure and school effectiveness	Spending more money does not bring about effectiveness, but how it is spent does
The school as a unit of production	Policies should reflect what goes on at school and classroom levels because that's where teaching and learning occur
Achieving change in schools	For change to occur, both top-down and bottom-up approaches are needed for one must change the norms, behaviours, and attitudes of those inhabiting the school organization
School staffing	Effective schools utilize resources wisely and it affects students positively and, therefore, recruiting capable and competent teachers and providing them with additional training and incentives to retain them are necessary preconditions
Staff development	Develop school-wide programmes based on teachers needs and, further, teachers jointly plan the programme, bearing in mind that content as well as process of planning and implementing such programmes are also important
Use of student and teacher time	How time is used and how much is used for learning is important for student learning both in industrialised and developing countries.

*Source: Cohn and Rossmiller (1987)*

From the six areas mentioned in table four, 'staff development' and 'use of student and teacher time' had the most relevance, while 'achieving change in school' and 'school as a unit of production' had some relevance to this study. 'School staffing' and 'school expenditure and school effectiveness' were, however, of little relevance to this study because staffing and expenditure are central office functions. Even the school budget is streamlined which means that there is not much leeway on how to spend the money.

More recently, Lockheed & Levin (1993) argued that, to create effective schools in developing countries, three elements are needed: 'basic inputs', 'facilitating conditions' and 'the will to change'. 'Basic inputs' include: curriculum; instructional materials; learning time; teaching practices include those that encourage the involvement of students. 'Facilitating conditions' include: community involvement

and participation; school-based professionalism; and, flexibility. The ‘will to change’ includes: having a vision and decentralized solutions.

A year later, Fuller and Clarke (1994) came up with another study in which they reviewed over 100 studies from developing countries, including the previous 60 studies. Three main categories of variables were assessed in these studies: school inputs, teacher attributes and pedagogical practices. In this review, too, weaknesses similar to the earlier review by Fuller (1987) were acknowledged and to which Riddell (1997) was similarly critical. However, Fuller and Clarke state that, regardless of these limitations, the findings are quite instructive in that, across many societies and different local conditions, “rather consistent school effects have emerged in three major areas[:] availability of textbooks and supplementary reading materials[...;] teacher qualities[...; and,] instructional time and demands placed on students” (pp. 127-130). Scheerens (2001), too, support Fuller and Clarke’s (1994) findings and state that “there seems to be no reason to denounce these studies as Riddell (1997) does, partly based on the unjustified criticism that production function studies have used unadjusted data as the criterion variable” (p. 363). Furthermore, Scheerens continues to say that Fuller and Clarke’s study does give useful suggestions: that is, to pay more attention to cultural contingencies when studying effectiveness in developing countries because such studies might “help in explaining why school-level and classroom-level variables ‘work’ in one country but not in the next” (p. 364).

According to Walberg (1991), in Harber and Davis (1997), factors promoting science achievement in developing countries include: length of instructional programmes; pupil feeding; school library activity; years of teacher training; and, textbooks and instructional materials (p. 38). These findings, with the exception of ‘pupil feeding’, resonate with the findings of Fuller and Clarke. Table five (see below) shows how much of overlap there is in the findings of the different studies mentioned above and what is different. Overall, it appears that, in developing countries, resource inputs and instructional processes together with contextual factors seem to be the key contributing factors for achievement. To this study, instructional processes and contextual factors were most relevant.

Three very recent studies, too, have much in common with many of the factors shown to boost achievement in the developing countries, as noted in table five (see below). That is, Fullan and Watson's (2000) review of some school-based management efforts in many developing countries, Willms and Somers' (2001) analysis of a data set from 13 Latin American countries and Chapman, Weidman, Cohen and Mercer's (2005) comparative analysis of the strategies used by five Central Asian states to improve educational quality at both primary and secondary levels.

**Table 5: Some key reviews of SER in developing countries in the last two decades showing factors that affect achievement**

	<b>Fuller (1987)</b>	<b>Cohn &amp; Rossmiller (1987)</b>	<b>Lockheed &amp; Levin (1993)</b>	<b>Fuller &amp; Clark (1994)</b>
A	(1) School expenditure	(1) School expenditure & school effectiveness	(1) Basic inputs:	(1) Text books and supplementary reading materials
	(2) Specific material inputs	(2) School staffing	(1.1) instructional materials	
B	(3) Teacher quality	(3) Staff development	(2) Facilitating conditions: (2.2) school-based professionalism	(2) Teacher quality
	(4) Teaching practices & Classroom organisation	(4) Use of student & teacher time	(1.2) learning teaching practices (1.3) curriculum (1.4) time	(3) Instructional time and work demands placed on pupils
C	(5) School management	(5) Achieving change in schools (6) The school as a unit of production (recognizing the context)	(2) Facilitating conditions: (2.1) community involvement and participation; (2.3) flexibility  (3) The will to change: (3.1) Vision (3.2) Decentralized solutions	

Legend: A: Resource inputs; B: Instructional processes; C: Contextual factors

Fullan & Watson (2000) reviewed six review-studies of school-based management efforts in many developing countries, done by various scholars, and proposed six strategies that would strengthen school improvement efforts in such countries, reflecting two main conclusions: one, that resource inputs, both material and human, are important and, two, that the human resource function or aspect in schools should

be supported externally; that is, to establish an ongoing, mutual working relationship between the school and the next level (district, regional or national) above. Two of these six strategies relate to resource inputs, a factor common across all the four studies mentioned in table five, and four strategies relate to school-central office relationship (in reality, a contextual factor) and relates to Levin & Lockheed's 'facilitating condition'.

The study done by Willms and Somers (2001) examined the relationships between 3 schooling outcomes (language and mathematics achievement, and time to complete primary schooling) and family background, as well as various school policies and practices. The analyses included data from 13 Latin American countries, with samples of approximately 100 schools in each country. Over 50,000 grade 3 and 4 pupils were tested in their language and mathematics skills, and questionnaires were administered to the pupils and their parents, teachers, and school administrators. The study showed, across all countries, the following factors to be associated with the most effective schools: high levels of school resources; classrooms which are not multigrade, and where students are not grouped by ability; classrooms where children are tested frequently; classrooms and schools with a high level of parental involvement; and classrooms that have a positive classroom climate, especially with respect to classroom discipline. Overall, these factors reflect 'resource inputs', 'teacher quality and classroom organization' and 'context' as shown in table five.

In the Chapman et al's (2005) study, data were collected through case studies conducted by country teams. Data suggested that there were 14 different strategies used by these countries to improve quality in education which these authors have categorized broadly into three areas: 'reestablishing former levels of financing', 'developing curriculum standards and contents' and 'decentralizing management'. These three areas or broad categories closely align with two of the factors ('resource input' and 'context', as depicted in table five) that affect achievement in developing countries because the first two categories are, in fact, 'resource input' factors. Furthermore, unlike the other studies of developing countries discussed above, Chapman et al's study indicated that, in the five countries that they studied, less focus was placed at the class room level and, therefore, they met with limited success (Chapman et al., 2005). As previously mentioned, from the factors that affect

achievement in developing countries, ‘teacher quality’ and ‘classroom organization’ and ‘context’ were the factors most relevant to the current study; ‘resources inputs’ has little relevance.

It should be noted that school effectiveness research in developing countries has been characterized by what Fuller & Clarke (1994) call the “policy mechanics” approach, metaphorically termed as the “production function” type of research (Jensen, 1995; Scheerens, 2001). This is basically an input-output model where it is assumed that a certain type of resource input will produce favourable outcomes (Fertig, 2000). Some (for example, Pritchett & Filmer, 1997) do not favour that conclusion on the basis that too narrow outcomes have been studied to arrive at that conclusion while some others (for example, Jimenez and Paquea, 1996) support the production function model on the basis that inputs have effect on outcomes (cited in Scheerens, 2001). In addition, Fuller and Clarke (1994) provide further support: “in countries providing a reasonable level of basic materials,... additional production-function studies will hold limited utility” (p. 135) and, furthermore, the results from production function model do not provide an adequate understanding of how to plan improvement efforts at the school and classroom levels (Heneveld and Craig, 1996, in Fertig, 2000; Vulliamy, 1990b). As such, this model was not relevant to my study.

Another approach, not so commonly taken in developing countries, is the “classroom culturalist” approach (Fuller, 1994) which is basically an input-process-output model. What many scholars (e.g. Fertig, 2000; Heneveld, 1993, in Jensen, 1995; O’Sullivan, 2006; Scheerens, 2001) are suggesting is to incorporate contextual factors: thus, an “input-process-context-output” model. Fertig (2000) calls this “an attempt to marry the ‘policy-mechanics’ approach ... with its interest in inputs and the more process-oriented ‘classroom-culturalist’ methodology, with its concern to investigate school processes” (p. 396). As I have argued earlier in chapter one and this chapter (see below), process-oriented studies are very few in the Maldives and, in this regard, a research design that aligns more with the ‘classroom-culturalists’ approach is more apt to the Maldives.

Although research suggests that an ‘input-process-context-output’ model is most suitable for gauging achievement in developing countries, what Harber & Davis (1997) have said about contextual factors has more relevance to the case study school. After identifying six contextual factors that impinge on improvement efforts in developing countries, ‘demographic’, ‘economic’, ‘resources’, ‘violence’, ‘health’ and ‘cultural’ (p. 10), they concluded that “not all schools in developing countries experience the contexts outlined ... [above]. Many schools in the more prosperous areas of large cities function similarly to those in developed countries” (p. 24).

The case study school is in such a “prosperous area”: Male’, the capital of Maldives and it is the largest city in population terms (over 100, 000: Census, 2005). Further, it does not display many of the difficult contextual features identified by Harber and Davies (1997, pp. 10-22) or situations described by Lockheed (1993, p. 20) or Hawes and Stephens (1990, pp. 2-3). Furthermore, the present education condition in Male’, where the state has taken over the responsibility of mass education, has existed for almost four decades. Hence, the three interrelated, key concepts, change, leadership and culture, and their associated components previously identified from the literature as undergirding most school improvement efforts (see figure 6), provided a useful enough framework for guiding this study – i.e. to answer the research questions mentioned earlier.

In fact, a recent study done in the Maldives, lends some support to this framework. Stating that structural changes, especially frequent changing of principals, is a common practice in Maldives, Qasim (2007) examined the processes, school systems and practices that facilitated change in structure in one secondary school in Maldives. Data were collected using observations, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis and were analysed using the constant comparative method. The study found that there were three major factors that facilitated structural change in the school. They are: the systems in place; the role of the change agents; and, the culture of the school. These components reflect two of the key concepts (change and culture) as depicted in the conceptual framework of the current study, although ‘leadership’, as conceptualized in this study, was not reflected in Qasim’s study.

So, as mentioned earlier, the conceptual framework developed by the researcher enabled him to answer the research questions of this study. By answering these questions, the researcher hopes to make a contribution to the field of school improvement.

## **2.10 The Study's Contribution**

A number of electronic searches were done to locate studies on school improvement. Two of them warrant mentioning here. First, a 'tag' search on the Web of Science was done which showed over 500 titles. Because the vast majority of the studies that seemed to have some relevance to the broad topic of my study, 'school improvement', appeared in the premier Journal of School Effectiveness and School Improvement, the abstracts of all the articles that appeared in this journal in the last decade (1996 – 2005) were scanned<sup>7</sup> to locate qualitative studies related to school improvement in developing countries. I was able to locate only a few studies from developing countries, let alone any study from the Maldives; and, among these few, only a handful are in-depth qualitative studies.

Second, the abstracts of the articles in International Journal of Education for the last ten years were scanned for Vulliamy (1990a) has argued that this journal has been "a natural home for the products of such qualitative research" (p. 25). However, the result of this search revealed that many articles have been written on the theme 'education, peace and democracy' (see, for example, Harber & Muthukrishna, 2000) and depicts a national or, at most, a regional perspective. Very few have been written on what goes on at the school and classroom levels, the factors which influence student achievement the most in developing countries, in particular and in general, in industrialized countries. Further, there was only one article about Maldives in this journal and that was about the secondary examination system in the Maldives.

In fact, many scholars (for example, Fuller & Synder, 1991; Hawes & Stephens, 1990; Scheerens, 2001; Vulliamy, 1990a) contend that educational research in developing countries has been concerned more with identifying policy-manipulable factors or

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Berg, 2001, for this idea of scanning abstracts of journal articles in order to identify potentially useful elements for one's own literature reviews

system wide features rather than observing the realities of schooling or instructional processes. For example, Fuller and Clarke (1994) reviewed a total of 47 studies done in developing countries between 1987 and 1993 out of which 27 were at the primary level, representing 22 countries. Three main categories of variables were assessed in these studies: school inputs, teacher attributes and pedagogical practices. The level and factors most relevant to my study are primary and pedagogical practices respectively and, therefore, these have been addressed here. Factors related to pedagogic practices addressed in these studies were, however, few in number. For example, the study done by Al-Baz, Hassan, Fouad & Farouq (1992), in Egypt, assessed eight factors of which only three could be considered as being related to pedagogical practices: 'rewards for pupil performance', 'homework', and 'encouraged reading outside of school'; the other five were: 'lecture time', 'school library', 'teacher training', 'salaries' and 'teacher experience' (Cited in Fuller & Clarke, 1994, p. 145). Similarly, Lockheed and Fonacier's (1988), in Fuller and Clarke (1994), study done in the Philippines assessed six factors of which three were related to pedagogic practices and Ching, Yoong, Buan, Salim, Marimuthu, Aziz et al. (1990), in Fuller and Clarke (1994), in their study done in Malaysia assessed five factors of which three related to pedagogic practices. In another nine studies, either two or one factor related to pedagogic practice were assessed (ibid). In contrast, 15 of the 27 studies did not assess any factor related to pedagogic practice. Hence, by making inferences in this way, it is possible to conclude that, overall, instructional processes have been studied much less than the physical presence of material and human resource inputs in developing countries. Lately, however, there have been attempts at qualitative studies in some developing countries (see, for example, Hallinger & Kantamara, 2001; Simkins, Sisum, C., & Memon, M., 2003; Van der Werf, G., Creemers, B., & Guldemon, H., 2001). See also Fullan and Watson (2000) and Scheerens (2001).

Furthermore, according to O'Sullivan (2006), not only are such research studies scarce, but also they are not made accessible even when they are done, especially in developing countries. My own experience as a member of two Supervision Committees of the Ministry of Education suggests that a fair amount of classroom observations have been done in Male' schools under the supervision programme but they lack proper analyses and dissemination. The lack of references identified in the

reference list of the latest national report on school assessment done by a consultant attest to this fact: the scarcity of such studies in the Maldives.

One of the most thorough reviews of education ever done in the Maldives was the Education Master Plan (EMP) 1995-2006 (Ministry of Education, 1995). People from all walks of life were consulted and all the important documents available were examined. But the Plan's reference list cites only one study that is related to quality improvement and even this report is about secondary education.

Having had the benefit of working in the MOE's section that handles all the important documents for the last five years, I have not being able to locate any research, especially a qualitative study, that has dealt with the topic of this study. One of the reasons why such studies are so limited in the Maldives is the fact that the country's education system is very young and its tertiary level is in its infancy and, as such, a research culture has not yet developed (Didi 1997; Lutfi, 2000). See also Qasim (2007), who has iterated the scarcity of research literature on the education system in general and, in particular, on schools in the Maldives. The fact that there were only ten masterates and six doctorates (Ministry of Education, 1995, p. 51) in the country about fifteen years ago attests to this fact. According to Ministry of Higher Education, Employment and Social Security (MHES), Maldives, even today, there are only 26 doctorates in the country (MHES, 2007).

However, since the EMP of 1995, quite a number of studies (mainly at the Master's level and some at PhD level) would have been done relating to quality improvement, in one way or another. But, as previously mentioned, even if they are done, getting access to them is difficult, especially in developing countries (O'Sullivan, 2006). There is no mechanism that assembles these studies or made provisions for their availability to research purposes. However, it appears that the National Library has stepped towards this end lately<sup>8</sup>. Nonetheless, through various informal contacts, I was able to locate three research studies done on schools. Yet, none of them were written about an urban primary school: two were about secondary schools and one was about Atoll (rural) schools. The one that had most relevance to my study has been

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<sup>8</sup> The researcher received a letter from them stating that they would like to get a copy of the thesis for their collection: see Appendix 1).

discussed in the previous section. Thus, this study will make a contribution to the limited research in Maldives on school improvement and, to the extent that “the field of SESI [school effectiveness and school improvement] is strengthened each time a new country goes ‘on-line’, that is, each time researchers from a new country address the international literature and place their results from their own context within that framework” (Teddle, 2004, p. 239), this study would also make a contribution to the international literature on school improvement (see also Creemers, Reynolds, Chrispeels, Mortimore, Murphy, Stringfield et al., 1998; Teddle, 2003).

## **2.11 Summary**

School improvement is a vast and a fast growing body of literature. Although the mass of it comes from the western world, literature from developing countries is also growing. However, one observation was the need to do more qualitative studies on this topic, especially in the developing countries. Further, no blue prints exist for improvement. In other words, there seems to be no one best way to approach improvement. However, what is evident is that there are major themes common to many school improvement initiatives.

There are some other concepts to which ‘school improvement’ relates: school effectiveness and change. This latter relationship is rather complex and, therefore, it has been discussed at length. Given below are the main points of this relationship.

All improvements entail change. Therefore, schools embarking on improvement initiatives have to deal with change. However, change is complex; one of the key messages in change literature. To deal with this complexity, schools need to become learning organizations. Learning organizations foster learning for all members. This review identified specific leader actions that would nurture organizational learning in its people. The other key message is that change is a process and not an event and, therefore, it takes time. To deal with this issue, change has to be planned and managed.

Planning change involves, for the most part, giving due consideration to three broad phases: initiation, implementation and institutionalization. Key aspects of each of these phases has been discussed.

Managing change involves, on the part of the school leader, a style of leadership that would make the change process work. Because schools are inhabited by people to produce people-outcomes (student learning) and not products (widgets), transformational type of leadership suits most, because, “transformational leaders are ‘people oriented’; rather than focus on tasks and performance, they build relationships and help followers develop goals and identify strategies for their accomplishment” (Mitchell & Tucker, 1992, quoted in Stoll & Fink, 1996, p. 106). The set of leader actions, mentioned earlier, are mostly people oriented in nature and, therefore, they enhance organizational learning.

Managing change also involves influencing school’s culture. Culture is defined in the literature in various ways. A more practical perspective has been taken in this study. That is, culture is expressed in three interrelated generic dimensions: structure, norms supporting teaching and learning and working relationships. A culture exists in every school and it could be either strong or weak. Effective schools or effective principals, work towards establishing strong cultures by nurturing relationships through collaborative work cultures.

The terrain of educational research in the developing countries has also been explored in this review for this study was undertaken in such a country. It was evident in the review that, overall, the key contributing factors for achievement are resource inputs and instructional processes, together with contextual factors. However, one important observation was, as mentioned earlier, the scarcity of qualitative research in these countries and, hence, the potential contribution of this study.

This review of literature has identified three interrelated, key concepts that undergird most school improvement efforts: Leadership, change and culture, together with the main components involved in these three concepts. These key concepts and the associated components have enabled me to develop the following sub-questions of the

study and establish a framework (see figure six) that would drive the data collection and analyses phases and assist in presenting the findings of the research endeavor.

*The main research question:*

How does a primary school in an urban setting of the Maldives deal with school improvement efforts?

*The sub questions:*

1. How does the principal effect and manage change in a Maldivian urban primary school?
2. What are the internal conditions or major components or themes at work with regard to improvement efforts in a Maldivian urban primary school?
3. How does the principal create and/or manipulate the necessary internal conditions within the school that would bring about lasting improvements?
4. How do teachers perceive improvement efforts?
5. What is the role of the central office (the MOE in this case) and, what other parties, besides the MOE, influence the school's efforts to change and how do they influence?
6. How does the school determine the worth of its school improvement programmes?

In the next chapter, the researcher describes the methodological approach taken in this study to answer the above research questions.

## CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how an urban primary school in the Republic of Maldives deals with the issue of school improvement. A review of related literature, discussed in the previous chapter, enabled the researcher to formulate the following sub questions:

1. How does the principal effect and manage change in a Maldivian urban primary school?
2. What are the internal conditions or major components or themes at work with regard to improvement efforts in a Maldivian urban primary school?
3. How does the principal create and/or manipulate the necessary internal conditions within the school that would bring about lasting improvements?
4. How do teachers perceive improvement efforts?
5. What is the role of the central office (the MOE in this case) and, what other parties, besides the MOE, influence the school's efforts to change and how do they influence?
6. How does the school determine the worth of its school improvement programmes?

This chapter provides justification for selecting a qualitative, case study research design to address the above research questions. It also provides theoretical backing for this selection. Further, information on sample selection, research site and participants are provided together with data collection and analysis methods. Finally, issues of trustworthiness and ethical considerations are also discussed.

### 3.2 The Approach to Research Design

Punch (2000, p. 7) defines research as “an organized, systematic and logical process of inquiry, using empirical information to answer questions ....” Epistemology, the theory of knowledge especially with regard to its methods and validation, has

significant impact on the theoretical frameworks and processes used in conducting research. According to Crotty (1998), three most common and distinct epistemological stances in research are objectivism, constructionism and subjectivism. Objectivism portrays that there is a 'real' reality out there in the world, that which can be discovered; constructionism portrays that there are multiple realities which are constructed by the researcher and the participant; and, subjectivism portrays that reality is conferred on the object by the subject (Crotty, 1998). Objectivism is often referred to as positivism; constructionism as interpretivism or constructivist theories; and subjectivism is often referred to as feminism or post modernism.

It should be noted that this terminology is not consistent with many others. For example, many scholars do not explicitly distinguish between epistemology and theoretical perspectives, instead they refer to 'paradigm' (see Carr & Kemmis, 1986, in Merriam, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Hatch, 2002; Scott & Usher, 1999, among others). A paradigm is simply "a worldview – a way of thinking about and making sense of the complexities of the real world... Paradigms tell us what is important, legitimate, and reasonable" (Patton, 2002, p. 69). More specifically, paradigms are "basic belief systems based on ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 107). In other words, a paradigm represents the most informative view obtained by its proponents in answering three basic questions: (i) What is the nature of reality? (ii) What is the relationship between the knower and the known? (iii) How can the knower find out what can be known? Respectively, they are the ontological, epistemological and methodological questions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Hatch, 2002).

Although terminology differs, many researchers (see, for example, Carr & Kemmis, 1986, in Merriam, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Hatch, 2002; Scott & Usher, 1999, among others) have identified a similar set of philosophical stances to that of Crotty. Of these, positivism and interpretivism are featured most in educational research studies, and have relevance to the current study. Hence, I have discussed these two perspectives in some detail.

### **3.2.1 Positivism Versus Interpretivism**

Positivists assume that there is an objective reality or truth or fact that exists independent of human perception (Gall, Gall & Borg, 1999; Hatch, 2002; Scott & Usher, 1999). And, through scientific methods, truth can be discovered. During the investigation, researcher bias is prevented from influencing the outcome (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Hatch, 2002; Scott & Usher, 1999). Most quantitative research is carried out by positivists whose main concern is to find out how representative their findings are to the larger population from which the sample was drawn (Gall, Gall & Borg, 1999). Their data are mostly numeric in nature and statistical procedures are used to analyse them (ibid).

Interpretivists, on the other hand, assume that there is no absolute truth (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Hatch, 2002) but reality is constructed (Gall, Gall & Borg, 1999; Hatch, 2002; Scott & Usher, 1999;) and, because different individuals view the world from different vantage points, there exists no single reality but multiple realities (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Hatch, 2002). The researcher and the researched mutually interact in order to construct the subjective reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Hatch 2002). Qualitative research is often carried out by interpretivists and they generalize their findings by comparing it with similar cases (Gall, Gall & Borg, 1999) but not in a statistical sense.

Because the current study deals with human beings and their interactions in the context in which they are occurring, the qualitative approach, informed by an interpretivist perspective, suited the task. The next section, therefore, discusses the qualitative approach to research.

### **3.2.2 Qualitative Research**

Qualitative methods have their roots in the ethnographic and field study traditions of anthropology and sociology (Patton, 1987). Although the use of qualitative research in educational settings is fairly recent, it has been used in the fields of anthropology and sociology for a long time (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Hatch, 2002).

Defining qualitative research in any precise way is difficult (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Glesne, 1999; Patton, 2002) because it neither has a theory nor any practices that are entirely its own (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Hence, many scholars contend that qualitative research is an umbrella term or concept (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Denscombe, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 1998) that covers many forms of inquiry. For example, Hatch (2002) has identified 17 types of qualitative research and Patton notes 16 types which he calls 'theoretical traditions' (see pp. 20-32 & 132-133, respectively). However, five most common types of qualitative research in education, according to Merriam, are: basic or generic qualitative study, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory and case study (Merriam, 1998, p.11). Each form of inquiry portrays the world in a different way and, hence, there is frequently a commitment to using more than one interpretive practice in any study, the idea being "to get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 4). Furthermore, no methodology or research procedure is superior to another (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Scott & Usher, 1999). As such, researchers have tried to characterize the qualities that distinguish qualitative work from other forms of inquiry.

### **3.2.3 Characteristics of Qualitative Research**

Merriam (1998) has identified a list of essential characteristics that cut across all forms of qualitative research:

1. Understanding the meaning people construct for themselves to make sense of their world;
2. Researcher as data collecting and analyzing instrument;
3. Researcher goes to people and/or places to observe behaviour occurring in the natural setting;
4. Inductive approach;
5. The product is rich in description;
6. Other characteristics are: design is flexible; small and (usually) non-random samples are used; and, a lot of time is spent in the field with participants.

These characteristics are similar to those identified by Bogdan & Biklen (1998), Hatch (2002), and Patton (2002). In fact, Patton calls it "themes of qualitative

inquiry” or “strategic themes” (p. 37). Not all qualitative approaches display equally all of the above characteristics (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998; Hatch, 2002). The question, then, is not whether a particular study is absolutely qualitative but an issue of degree (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). This current study is qualitative in that it has been informed by the above essential characteristics. The next section discusses the case study approach for it falls, according to many scholars, under the rubric of qualitative studies (see, for example, Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002).

### **3.3 The Case Study Approach**

The case study approach to research has been widely used in many fields; for example, anthropology, psychology, sociology, social work and political science (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1994). However, it is only in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s that it gained popularity in education (Merriam, 1988).

#### **3.3.1 Defining ‘Case Study’**

A case study has been defined and classified in various ways. Yin (1994) defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). Berg (2001) adds more aspects and states that “case study methods involve systematically gathering enough information about a particular person, social setting event, or a group to permit the researcher to effectively understand how it operates or functions” (p. 225). While Berg provides a practical perspective, Yin’s definition is more conceptual in nature. Further, Denscombe (1998) underscores the depth case studies offer and contends that “case studies focus on one instance (or a few instances) of a particular phenomenon with a view to providing an in-depth account of events, relationships, experiences or processes occurring in that particular instance” (p. 32). Thus, in the current study, the need to investigate a contemporary phenomenon (‘school improvement’) in depth, in one particular natural setting (one school), makes case study a suitable approach.

### 3.3.2 Types of Case Studies

Case study research can be based on either a single case or multiple cases (Berg, 2001; Yin, 1993). When two or more settings are studied, they are considered to be multi-case studies (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) or collective case studies (Stake, 1994). Single case studies are conducted in order to get an in-depth understanding of one particular case or situation or phenomenon while multiple cases are attempted when the purpose is to strengthen the understanding of a broader context within which a particular phenomenon is occurring (Stake, 1994) or enhancing the generalizability of findings which is made possible by comparing several cases, rendering the researcher a more compelling interpretation of the phenomenon of study (Merriam, 1998).

Case studies, whether single case or multi-cases, can be exploratory, explanatory or descriptive (Berg, 2001; Yin, 1993). Exploratory case studies are designed to investigate one or more particular situation in order to try to understand a general issue. The case is chosen because it is expected, in some way, to be typical of some thing more general and we may gain insight into the phenomenon of interest by studying the particular case. The focus is on the issue rather than the case and the researcher will start and end with the issues that are dominant. Explanatory case studies are conducted to present cause and effect relationships, while a descriptive case study describes fully a phenomenon within its context, usually when exploring a new phenomenon (Yin, 1993).

While the above authors define case studies in terms of either design or purpose, Stake (1994) places emphasis on the case: “case study is not a methodological choice, but a choice of object to be studied” (p. 236). Yet, his (Stake’s) classification, too, has similarities to the others in the following way: intrinsic case study is similar to descriptive case study and instrumental case study with exploratory and explanatory case studies. According to Stake (1994), intrinsic case studies are undertaken in order to have a better understanding of a particular case; we have an intrinsic interest in that case while any outside concern is not of interest. On the other hand, an instrumental case study is undertaken in order to understand more about a particular issue or phenomenon of interest occurring within a case. Here, the interest in the case is secondary. Yet, “the case is often looked at in depth, its contexts scrutinized, its

ordinary activities detailed ... because this helps us pursue the external interest” (Stake, 1994, p. 237).

Furthermore, Merriam (1998) has identified three “special features” of case study research in education which resonate more or less with the above classifications and they are: particularistic, heuristic and descriptive. The particularistic feature lets the study focus on one particular instance or case. The logic behind this concentrated effort on studying one case is that the case might be important for what it might reveal about the phenomenon of study. The heuristic feature lets a reader’s understanding of the phenomenon of study be illuminated. The former is similar to intrinsic case study while the latter to the instrumental case study in Stake’s classification and also to the exploratory case study in Yin’s classification. The descriptive feature lets the end product of the study contain a detailed description of the phenomenon under investigation and, hence, is similar to the descriptive case study in Yin’s classification. This study, therefore, has more relevance to Yin’s exploratory case study or Stake’s instrumental case study.

### **3.3.3 Some Limitations and Strengths of the Case Study Approach**

According to Berg (2001, 2004), there are two concerns that are generally raised with regard to the case study approach: lack of rigour and objectivity in case study findings, relating to the issue of subjectivity brought in by the researcher (Berg, 2001, 2004; Denscombe, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1994) and the other is that case study findings render little basis for scientific generalizations (ibid).

To overcome the first issue, the following strategies have been suggested by Merriam (1998): triangulation; member check; long-term observation; involvement of participants in the research process; and, to be explicit about researcher biases. These strategies have been used in this study to add rigour and objectivity to its findings.

It should be noted that these are strategies common to all forms of qualitative research, not just to the case study approach, in dealing with threats to validity and, hence, I have elaborated on these strategies in the next section: “Research credibility”.

Regarding the next issue, generalizations of case study findings, Denscombe (1998) has argued that “although each case is in some respect unique, it is also a single example of a broader class of things” (p. 36). Hence, how far one could generalize the findings of one study to another depends on how similar this other study (or these other studies) is to the former one (Berg, 2001, 2004; Denscombe, 1998; Gall, Gall & Borg, 1999; Merriam, 1998). Patton (1990) uses the term ‘extrapolate’ to reflect this thought: “extrapolations are modest speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar, but not identical, conditions” (p. 489). Further, Denscombe (1998) advocates four significant features or factors for comparing cases and they are ‘physical’, ‘historical’, ‘social’, and ‘institutional’ locations. The researcher believes that, by using Patton’s concept of extrapolation and Denscombe’s significant features or factors for comparing cases, the readers of this study would be able to make generalizations about this study’s findings.

Regardless of these limitations, many of case study’s advantages outweigh the limitations, as noted by Merriam (1998). Most notable of these advantages are: one, that aspects of human phenomenon are complex and interconnected (Denscombe, 1998; Gillham, 2000) and, as such, case study allows a researcher to investigate such complexities, consisting of many variables which are of significance in understanding the phenomenon in question (Denscombe, 1998; Merriam, 1998); two, that the holistic descriptions that a case study offers illuminate practitioners’ and policy makers’ understanding and experience (Denscombe; 1998; Gall, Gall & Borg, 1999; Merriam, 1988, 1998; Stake, 1994, 2005), playing an important role in advancing the knowledge base of a field (Denscombe; 1998; Gall, Gall & Borg, 1999; Merriam, 1998); and, finally, that such understanding and experience can refine or improve educational practice (Gall, Gall & Borg, 1999; Merriam, 1998).

These advantages and the key features or characteristics described above suggest that the qualitative case study approach is well suited for this study which aims to investigate a contemporary phenomenon in depth and in real-life context using a range of data gathering techniques. Ultimately the investigation will provide a detailed description of the phenomenon, revealing the processes and relationships occurring in the setting with regard to the phenomenon and, hence, enable policy, practice and future research to be influenced.

### 3.4 Research Credibility

The legitimacy of any research findings centres on the issues of validity and reliability (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Merriam, 1998). Some scholars (for example, Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Miles & Huberman, 1994) call them 'trustworthiness' issues. Two types of validity are identified in the literature and they are internal validity and external validity (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Internal validity refers to the extent to which observations or research findings match reality, while external validity is about the extent to which such findings can be applied to other situations or groups; and reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Merriam, 1998). In addition to internal and external validity and reliability, there is a fourth trustworthiness feature; that of objectivity. This is about freeing research findings from unwarranted researcher biases (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Payne & Payne, 2004). In other words, "findings should not depend on who did the research, but on *what was there* to be found" (Payne & Payne, 2004, p. 153) [their emphasis].

These are terms used in the positivist paradigm where the assumptions undergirding the investigation are very different from those of the interpretive paradigm. Because of this difference, some scholars, for example Lincoln & Guba (1985), advocate four alternatives which they say reflect more accurately the assumptions of the qualitative paradigm: 'credibility', 'transferability', 'dependability' and 'confirmability'.

**Credibility.** To establish credibility, the researcher is faced with a twofold task: one, to conduct the research in such a way as to ensure that the probability of the findings is enhanced and, two, to have the subjects or participants approve the credibility of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Transferability.** This is about demonstrating the applicability of one set of findings to another context (Marshall & Rossman, 1985). Transferability depends on "the degree of similarity between sending and receiving contexts" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 297). The original investigator cannot know the receiving context and, therefore, what s/he could do is to supply enough description about the context so that the person making the transfer could gauge the contextual similarities (ibid).

Dependability. This is reliability, in the traditional sense and, it means, “Would another researcher, by repeating the same procedures, get the same results?” In qualitative research, there is no absolute truth out there to serve as a bench mark for purposes of repetition (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) so, instead of requiring getting the same results, we should agree that, given the data collected, the results make sense within the same research context.

Confirmability. Lincoln & Guba (1985) stress the need to ask whether the findings of the study could be confirmed by another researcher. This is done by placing the evaluation squarely on the data and not on some inherent characteristic of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In other words, “Do the data confirm the general findings”?

Regarding research credibility, Merriam (1988), however, argues, “in any event, the basic question remains the same: to what extent can ... [one] trust the findings of a qualitative ... study” (p. 166). Therefore, to enhance the research credibility of this study, the following strategies have been incorporated in this research:

(i) Strategies to enhance internal validity are: First, ‘triangulation’, that is, collecting data from different sources and using multiple methods (Creswell, 1994; Glesne, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Locke, Spirduso & Silverman, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Merriam, 1998); second, ‘member check’, a process by which the researcher asked participants to confirm whether the researcher has described their views accurately (Creswell, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Locke et al, 2002; Merriam, 1998; Poskitt, 2002); third, ‘prolonged engagement’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) or ‘long-term observation’ (Merriam, 1998), this is about spending a considerable amount of time in the field which would enable the researcher to get acquainted with the setting (Glesne, 1999 in Poskitt, 2002); and fourth, ‘referential adequacy’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), this is about archiving all or some of the data in its original form in order to “provide a kind of benchmark against which later data analyses and interpretations ... could be tested for adequacy” (p. 313).

(ii) Strategies to enhance external validity are: to provide rich, thick description. This is about providing detailed descriptions of the object or situation being studied so that

readers can determine how closely they match their own situations and, hence, whether findings are transferable (Edwards, 1986; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Merriam, 1998; Poskitt, 2002).

(iii) Strategies to enhance reliability are: to building an audit trail, the ability of the researcher to fully articulate the procedures s/he used in arriving at the conclusions so that others might repeat the procedures to see whether they too get the same results (Berg, 2001; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Merriam, 1998). Gall, Gall and Borg (1999, p. 304) describe an audit trail as “a complete documentation of the research process used in ... [a] case study”.

(iv) Strategies to enhance objectivity are: First, to keep a detailed record of the methods and procedures used in the study so that an audit trail can be conducted (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994); second, being explicit about personal values and assumptions (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990); and third, being open about describing the limitations of the study (Patton, 1990).

How the researcher used the above strategies to enhance research credibility are discussed in sections 3.4.2 and 3.10 (‘the researcher’s role’ and ‘the research process’, respectively). Further, to establish credibility of any research, the investigation should also be conducted in an ethical manner (Merriam, 1998).

### **3.4.1 Ethical Considerations**

In research, especially in qualitative research, the question of ethics arises because the researcher intrudes into other human beings’ lives (Berg, 2001 & Bouma, 2000), observing their behaviours and asking them questions to get various information about them (Bouma, 2000). For the most part, concerns about research ethics centre on “issues of harm, consent, privacy and confidentiality of data” (Punch, 1994, cited in Bouma, 2000, p. 39).

Bouma (2000) asserts that, “if you are conducting an observational study, you need to make sure that ... you have permission ...” (p. 200). To conduct this investigation, written approval from two sources were obtained: one, from Massey University

Human Ethics Committee, since this study was done at a New Zealand university and, two, consent from the MOE, Maldives, as the fieldwork was conducted in a Maldivian context. (see Appendix two and three for permission letters from these two sources, respectively).

Before approaching the MOE to obtain permission to do the study, the researcher contacted some school principals, the potential gatekeepers, to talk about the study because, as Bogdan & Biklen (1998) have noted, "even if permission is granted from up high without first checking with those below, it behoves you to meet those lower on the hierarchy to seek support" (p. 75). Furthermore, such contact would "lay ... the groundwork for good rapport with those with whom ... [the researcher would] be spending time..." (p. 75).

Once the MOE had granted permission, informed consent was sought from all the participants. This was done by distributing an information sheet prepared according to the guidelines set by the MUHEC, New Zealand, to all potential participants. (A sample copy of this information sheet is in Appendix four). Further, participants were informed that they could always appeal to the MOE, should they feel that the researcher had violated the initial understandings indicated in the information sheet that was sent to them to obtain informed consent (see, appendix five, for a copy of this consent form). Furthermore, they were also informed that the study would not bring any harm to them: harm here goes far beyond physical harm (see Snook, 1999, p. 76). They were also notified that the information they provide would not be revealed to others (Berg, 2001). Further, to safeguard the research participants' rights to privacy, confidentiality would be respected throughout the project by not discussing any specific findings or events (Glesne, 1992).

As the setting in which this investigation took place is a closely-knit community, extreme care was taken regarding data security. All data were kept in a place accessible to the researcher only; especially the audiotapes which were kept under lock and key at all times. In this way, the researcher made sure that the research-related data did not fall into wrong hands and nor did he discuss it carelessly (Berg, 2001).

Further, Berg (2001) warns that issues of confidentiality and anonymity should also be treated very carefully for 'confidentiality' and 'anonymity' are not synonymous: "confidentiality is an active attempt to remove from the research records any elements that might indicate the subjects' identities ... [and,] anonymity means that the subjects remain nameless " (p. 51). In order to maintain confidentiality and anonymity, researchers use pseudonyms for people and places. But such descriptions, as Glesne (1992) warns, have the potential of being identified in small communities. Hence, Berg (2001) suggests that we "avoid keeping identifying records and lists any longer than is absolutely necessary" (p. 59). In this study, both of the above aspects were taken seriously by the researcher. For example, during the interviews, very specific examples were given to illustrate key points by various participants. Such information has been presented only after removing identifiable elements from them. Further, no names have been used for any participant; even designations (e.g. teacher, supervisor) have been used with care, meaning only if the information is not sensitive to cause harm in any way to the respective participant or reveal their identity is it used.

Literature points to two ways in which research could be conducted: overtly or covertly. In the former case, you make your interests known to your participants and obtain their cooperation before you begin to collect data, while in the latter case, you collect data without the knowledge of your participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). In this study, there were no attempts made to conduct research covertly, everything was made transparent (refer to the information sheet mentioned above). However, the following suggestion by Bouma (2000) was noted when giving information about the study to the participants:

While it is appropriate to tell people why you are doing the research, it is usually not wise to tell them what you hope to find as this may bias the information participants provide. After the research is completed, many researchers now offer to tell participants what they found and what conclusions they drew. (p. 192)

### **3.4.2 The Researcher's Role**

The researcher has been an official of the Ministry of Education since 1989, fulfilling a middle level and, later, senior level, education officers' posts in various departments

or sections: rural schools administration; educational supervision; educational planning and monitoring; educational documentation; regulating quality in post-secondary courses. Therefore, as an official of the MOE, conducting research in a school setting could pose ethical problems in terms of power relations: that is, school personnel thinking that they would be obliged to cooperate or feeling that the study might have negative consequences for them. And, even if positive, the information that they give might be contaminated due to this issue. To address these issues, I described to them my position now as a researcher in the information sheet and prolonged time was spent in the field to establish trust and, during this time, my level of participation was more on the observer end of the continuum so that the participants would come to realize that the researcher 'is not wearing the MOE hat'. For example, during various meetings, except for jotting down some important points, I was just observing what was happening. Even during lesson observations, I was just observing from one spot; I did not move around, just in case I might interrupt the daily events of the classroom. However, I gave feedback about their teaching, to all teachers whom I observed; that is, after the observation and when they had time for it, because giving feedback after observing a lesson was a routine activity of the school.

### **3.5 Sampling and Sample Selection**

Within every study, there can be many entities (people, places, events, documents) that could be studied (Merriam, 1998). But the fact is that data cannot be collected from everyone and everywhere (Denscombe, 1998). Thus, the researcher needs to select the entities, the sample, to study (Merriam, 1998).

Two basic types of sampling are used in conducting research: probability sampling and non-probability sampling (Merriam, 1998). Conventionally, the dominant mode of sample selection has been probability sampling (Babbie, 2001; Denscombe, 1998). Probability sampling allows a researcher to generalize the findings to the larger population from which the sample was drawn. However, in qualitative research, this type of generalization (statistical generalizations) is not a goal (Merriam, 1998) and, therefore, probability sampling is rendered inappropriate (Babbie, 2001; Denscombe, 1998; Merriam, 1998). Thus, researchers chose one or the other depending on the purpose of the study which, in turn, is grounded in the philosophical stance of the type

(quantitative or qualitative) of research. When the study's aim is to 'discover' rather than hypothesis testing, researchers opt for non-probability sampling techniques (Denscombe, 1998). The current study does not attempt to test any hypothesis but it tries to uncover (or discover) what is there to learn about the school improvement process in an urban primary school of Maldives and, hence, one form of probabilistic sampling, 'purposive sampling', more specifically, 'intensity sampling' (Patton, 1990), has been used.

Purposive sampling is a non-probabilistic sampling technique that is, "based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). Patton's (1990) notion of purposeful sampling is instructive in this regard:

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting *information-rich cases* for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance ... The purpose of sampling is to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the question under study. (p. 169) [His emphasis]

Neuman (1997) also concurs with Patton with regard to the intent of purposeful sampling: purposeful sampling occurs when a researcher wants to identify particular types of cases for in-depth investigation (p. 206).

To begin purposive sampling, a researcher has to establish selection criteria for choosing the people or sites to be studied (Merriam, 1998). According to Merriam, "the criteria you established for purposeful sampling directly reflect the purpose of the study and guide in the identification of information-rich cases" (pp. 61-62). Because this study's aim was describing improvement efforts in a school, it was crucial that the school chosen for data collection was one that had made improvements or at least made attempts to improve in the recent past. Therefore, in this study, I used a set of criteria suggested by Gray et al (1999) who have advocated a useful way to gauge improvement and they are as follows:

- Get an account from the principal about the improvements made by the school;

- Get an account from the principal, as stated above and, at the same time, collect information on outcome measures;
- Obtain a judgment from people external to the school (i.e., external supervisors);
- Consider ‘harder’ measures such as test and /or exam results, to judge the extent of improvement.

The above criteria were used to ensure that the site chosen would yield “a rich mix of processes, people, ... interactions, and structures of interest” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 51). How the researcher used the above criteria to select the school for investigation is described in section 3.10.1, ‘selecting the school’.

A serious limitation of this type of sampling, according to Berg (2007), is its “lack of wide generalizability” (p. 44). However, there are some advantages that outweigh this limitation. First, an instance (a case) or instances (cases) selected using purposive sampling would enable a researcher to get an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of interest (Denscombe, 1998). Second, given the logic of purposive sampling, as stated above, it allows a researcher to use his/her expertise to select samples (Berg, 2007; Denscombe, 1998; Merriam, 1998), thus avoiding the need to locate a list of all possible elements in a full population (Berg, 2007) which would be the case in probability sampling. In this sense, it is economical and “also ... informative in a way that conventional probability sampling cannot [be]” (Denscombe, 1998, p. 16).

### **3.6 Research Site and Participants**

The selected school had about 1600 students enrolled in seven grades. The professional staff of the school included the senior management team (consisting of the principal, assistant principals, supervisors and the administrator--head of financial and administrative matters in the Maldivian context) and a teacher cadre of about 80. I included all the teachers and members of the senior management team who gave consent, together with a selected sample from among the students, in their final grade, whose parents gave consent for their children to take part in the study. A senior education sector official, each from three key areas (curriculum, teacher training and

school supervision), related to the study but outside of the school, and one parent also participated in the study.

### **3.7 Data Collection Methods**

In line with the study's philosophical stance (i.e., interpretive perspective) and the research methodology (i.e., the case study approach), in-depth interviewing, participant observation and reviewing of documents were selected as the main data collection techniques. In addition to these three techniques, a questionnaire was also administered as a corroborative measure. Hatch (2002) and Marshall and Rossman (1995) contend that in-depth interviewing, participant observation and reviewing of documents are the primary data gathering strategies in qualitative research. Furthermore, Bassey (1999) and Merriam (1998) have argued that data collection in case study research mainly involves interviewing, observing and analyzing documents. However, not all three strategies are used to an equal extent in gaining an in-depth understanding: one or two methods predominate while the other(s) play a secondary role (Merriam, 1998). In this study, interviews and observations made up the bulk of the data and multiple sources of data were sought because, as Patton (1990, p. 244) argues, "no single source of information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective on the [phenomenon of interest]. And, because each type of data source has strengths and weaknesses, researchers combine different sources to validate and cross-check findings (p. 244).

#### **3.7.1 Interviewing**

"An interview is a conversation, usually between two people. But it is a conversation where one person—the interviewer—is seeking responses for a particular purpose from the other person: the interviewee" (Gillham, 2000b, p. 1). It is a tool for gathering information (Denscombe, 1998).

Understanding the experience of people and what meanings they derive from those experiences is at the heart of in-depth interviewing (Seidman, 1998), and the only way to get at this meaning is to study behaviour in the context in which it is occurring (Schutz, 1967, in Seidman, 1998). Since understanding people's behaviours and what

those behaviours mean to them is one of the specific purposes of this study, interviewing made a good technique for collecting such data: “interviewing provides access to the context of people’s behaviour and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behaviour” (Seidman, 1998, p. 4). Patton (1990, p. 278) succinctly explains the purpose of interviewing in the following way:

The purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind... we interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe... we cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviours that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things.

Interviews enable the researcher to collect large amounts of data quickly (Marshall & Rossman, 1995) and allow immediate clarification of points raised during the conversation (Bell, 2005; Marshall & Rossman, 1995). All the non-verbal cues, gestures, facial expressions, body movements and the like, could be observed easily in an interview which would give additional meaning to what the interviewee says (Gillham, 2000a). Further, Interviewing, as Glesne (1992) notes, provides an occasion for reciprocity: listening carefully and seriously to what participants say would give them a specialness and, especially, if researcher’s questions dealt with important issues to them, they would enjoy and come to believe their worth as information providers in the endeavour. However, since interviews involve personal interaction, obtaining the cooperation of the interviewees is essential (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Further, the interviewer needs to be extremely good at listening and skilful at interacting with the interviewee, framing questions to probe for elaboration (ibid).

Interviews fall into three categories: structured, semi structured and open-ended interviews (Berg, 2001; Marshall & Rossman, 1995). This categorization is based on the degree to which it is structured (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Gillham, 2000b; Marshall & Rossman, 1995) and the extent to which the interviewee is allowed to shape the interview's content (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

The structured interview is used when the researcher knows the ground that he would cover during the interviews, and he further assumes that questions included in the interview schedule would seek all or nearly all the information related to the topic of study (Berg, 2001). In unstructured or open-ended interviews, the researcher does not assume that he knows what ground to cover and, therefore, he would not have a set of questions to ask, while in semi-structured interviews, although there is a predetermined set of questions, the interviewers are free, in fact expected, to probe beyond the answers to these questions (ibid). It is this type of interviewing that was used in this study for the researcher has worked in this field for a long time and knows the ground and, further, it (semi-structured interview) enabled the researcher to follow the leads of the participants in uncovering the phenomenon of interest more deeply.

In addition to face to face interviews as discussed above, group interviewing or focus group interviewing is among many other specific types of interviews that are used in research (see, for example, Gillham, 2000a, pp. 81-89). Although more extensively used in market research, this form of interviewing is gaining ground in other areas of social research (Berg, 2007). Hence, it warrants some discussion.

### **3.7.2 Focus Group Interviews**

In this type of interview, a small group of people is brought together in order to explore their ideas about a particular topic (Denscombe, 1998) under the guidance of a facilitator, usually known as the moderator (Bell, 2005; Berg, 2007).

Berg (2007) highlights many advantages of focus group interviewing. Among these, most notable are: “it permits the gathering of a large amount of information from potentially large group of people in relatively short period of time” (Berg, 2007, p. 148); “the moderator can explore related but unanticipated topics as they arise in the course of the group’s discussion (Berg, 2007, p. 148); Interactions among and between group members stimulate discussion in which one group member reacts to comments made by another (Berg, 2007, p. 146). Further, according to Fontana & Frey (1994), “the group interview has the advantage of being inexpensive, data rich,

flexible, stimulating to respondents, recall aiding, and cumulative and elaborative, over and above individual responses”.

Berg (2007) has also highlighted some disadvantages of this type of interviewing:

One of the disadvantages is that “a limited number of questions can be used during the course of any focus group session” (Berg, 2007, p. 148); “Focus group data does not actually offer the same depth of information as ... a long semi structured interview” (Berg, 2007, p. 149); The quality of the data is deeply influenced by the skill of the moderator to motivate and facilitate (Berg, 2007, p. 148). Also, ‘groupthink’ can be a possible outcome of this type of interview (Babbie, 2002; Fontana & Frey, 1994). ‘Groupthink’, according to Babbie (2002) is “the tendency for people in a group to conform with the opinions and decisions of the most outspoken members of the group” (p. 301).

Regarding some of the advantages of group interviewing, the data from focus group interviews being rich and elaborate has been debated. While this is the view of Berg, Fern (1982), in Berg (2007, p. 151), found that “group interviews did not produce significantly more or better ideas than an equivalent number of one-on-one interviews”. Furthermore, Fern also found that “group interviews produced only 70 percent as many original ideas as the individual interviews” (p. 151).

Berg even contradicts himself: in one instance, he states: “a far larger number of ideas, issues, topics, and even solutions to a problem can be generated through group discussion than through individual conversation” (Berg, 2007, p. 149). Later on, he states, “in truth, traditional interviewing styles permit a more detailed pursuit of content information than possible in a focus group session (Berg, 2007, p. 149) and, furthermore, “focus group interviews will produce substantially less data than individual interviews (Berg, 2007, p. 151).”

Considering the above advantages and disadvantages, this type of interviewing was not used in this study for the following reasons:

First, the most significant advantage of focus group interview over face-to-face interview is that it allows a lot of interaction among and between members,

stimulating them and letting members spark ideas off one another regarding the topic, while in the latter, this possibility is not there (Berg, 2007). In this study, however, seeing how people interact with each other is not a key concern, at least not over and above depth of information. Second, the greatest disadvantage of group interviews with regard to this study's purpose is that it does not offer the same depth of information as face to face interview produces (Berg, 2007), whereas this study aims to obtain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of interest.

### **3.7.3 Participant Observation**

In the participant observation process, "the researcher carefully observes, systematically experiences, and consciously records in detail the many aspects of a situation" (Glesne, 1999, p. 46). Although one has to spend a considerable amount of time in the setting for observation (Marshall & Rossman, 1995), this method of data collection is very basic to all qualitative studies (Hatch, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Merriam, 1998;) because it allows the researcher to experience reality from the participants' perspectives (Denscombe, 1998; Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990).

According to Glesne (1999, p. 44), participant observation ranges across a continuum from "observer" role, in which the researcher mostly observes, to "full participation" role, in which the researcher becomes fully engaged in the investigation. In between these two extremes are two other roles: "observer as participant" and "participant as observer". In the former role, "the researcher remains primarily an observer but has some interaction with study participants" while in the latter role, the researcher interacts with participants extensively yet spends time just observing (ibid). Where the researcher should be on the continuum is determined by the nature of the study (p. 44) and, as Patton (1990) notes, "the extent of participation can change over time" (p, 206). In this study, during participant observation, the researcher was on the 'mostly observation' end of the continuum; the idea being "to minimize disruptions" to the ongoing daily events in order "to see things as they normally occur" (Denscombe, 1998, p. 148).

One point of caution put forward by Bell (2005) is that “observations ... depend on the way people perceive what is being said or done” (p. 184). This is because, as human beings, we filter information we obtain from observations and, in this process, our own interpretations get imposed on what is being observed; thereby, distorting our understanding of the meanings attached to an event by those who are experiencing the event (Bell, 2005). So, “we have to be particularly aware of ... [our own biases and] do our best to eliminate preconceived ideas and prejudices and constantly look out for possible signs of bias” (p. 185). This has been discussed under ‘researcher role’ in the section on ‘ethical considerations’.

According to Hatch (2002), Merriam (1998) and Patton (1990), the major strengths of observation are that it allows:

- first hand experience of how participants make sense of their setting;
- better understanding of the context in which the phenomenon of study is occurring;
- to see “taken for granted” things by participants which would be less likely to be discerned from other sources;
- sensitive information that participants may feel reluctant to discuss in interviews or that which will not appear in documents to be collected; and,
- a researcher to bear his/her own experiences of the setting on the emerging picture of the phenomenon of interest by being closer to it.

### **3.7.4 Documents**

Documents include a wide range of material: photographs, videos, memos, diaries, memorabilia of all sorts (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998), logs, announcements, formal policy statements (Marshall & Rossman, 1995), annual reports, and so on. "Documents corroborate ... observations and interviews and thus make ... findings more trustworthy" (Glesne, 1992, p. 52). Bogdan & Biklen (1998) have identified three main types of documents: personal, official and popular culture documents. In this study, only official documents were reviewed because these had the kind of information most relevant to the study's topic.

Information contained in documents is not produced for the purpose of research (Denscombe, 1998; Merriam, 1998). It is more of interpretation of the producer than it is a closer, “objective picture of reality” (Denscombe, 1998, p. 170). Or, it might be selective; that is, for example, giving only positive points (Patton, 1990). Therefore, it is the researcher’s job to look into its credibility and authenticity (Bell, 2005; Denscombe, 1998; Merriam, 1998). One way of doing it is to see whether documents are primary sources or secondary sources: primary sources are data produced during the time of the event and by those who directly experienced the event, while secondary sources refer to interpretation of the primary sources; that is, data produced by people who did not experience the event directly (Bell, 2005; Merriam, 1998) and often they are compiled at a later date (Merriam, 1998). In this study, documents deemed useful, given the study’s purpose, were either from the school or from the MOE and, as such, they were prepared by the people who directly experienced the events. Hence, in this way, the researcher was able to establish their credibility and authenticity.

Despite the above limitations of reviewing documents, its greatest strengths lie in its unobtrusive and non-reactive nature: unobtrusive in the sense that it does not interfere with the ongoing, daily activities (Hatch, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Merriam, 1998); non-reactive in the sense that it is free from biases of research participants (Hatch, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 1995). In addition to these, documents provide access to large amounts of data with relative ease and less expense (Denscombe, 1998; Merriam, 1998), data can be checked by others because of its permanent nature (Denscombe, 1998) and, finally, data obtained from documents provides the possibility of grounding the investigation in the context of the problem being investigated (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 1998).

### **3.7.5 Questionnaire**

A questionnaire is a set of questions given to participants on paper to be answered by them. In qualitative research, a questionnaire is used to learn about characteristics, attitudes or beliefs among a particular group or a sample population (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). But the usefulness of the questionnaire is limited to the fact that the researcher would have to rely completely on the respondents’ honesty and accuracy of

their answers (p. 96). The type of questions contained in a questionnaire is mostly factual, straightforward and, to some extent, open-ended (Gillham, 2000b; Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Because questionnaires have to be filled by respondents without any assistance, extra care should go into their design and development (Gillham, 2000a). Even with these limitations, questionnaires are useful in many ways: They allow the collecting of small amounts of data from a large group within a short period of time; they are relatively easy to analyze; and, they are impersonal.

In this study, two questionnaires were administered: one to staff and another to students. The main purpose of the staff questionnaire was to corroborate their views with the findings from the interviews. Given the resource constraints, particularly in terms of time and other logistical issues, interviewing with students was not possible. However, to have an input from them, (after all, they are the prime reason why all of us (educators) are employed) a questionnaire was filled out by them as well. This, too, fulfilled the corroborative function mentioned above together with providing students' views on key processes of schooling.

### **3.8 Data Management**

The key question in data management is: "What will you do with the data to organize them and make them ready for analysis?" (Berg, 2001, p. 34). The answer to this question is that it depends, in part, on the form of data: whether it is textual (e.g. field notes, interview transcripts); or, whether it is non-textual, physical material (e.g. photograph, interview audio-tapes, video tapes, etc) (Berg, 2001). If it is the textual, then, the manner in which it is organized will be different from if it were non-textual (Berg, 2001). Because almost all data in this study is in textual form, dealing with this kind of data will be discussed.

Some types of textual data (interview transcripts, field notes) have to be made more readable by editing and correcting even before they could be organized and stored in a computer filing system (Berg, 2001) or in manila folders: a 'physical filing system' (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 46). The key point in data management, then, is to establish a system whereby data can be easily stored and retrieved (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this study, all the interviews were transcribed, typed and made

more readable by editing them and storing them in a computer filing system for easy retrieval. Field notes from observations of both places and processes were also edited and corrected in order to make these more readable. However, all were not typed, but still they were organised and filed in manila folders in a way that retrieval was easy. (Both hand-written and type-written examples of field notes are given in Appendix six).

Further, one very important point about data storing is that a back up of both soft and hard copy versions of the data has to be made for safe keeping (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Safe keeping should also include maintaining confidentiality: to put it differently, none other than the researcher should have access to these materials, especially when it is in raw form. Both soft and hard copies were made of all data that were entered into the computer and all data were kept in a safe place only accessible to researcher even during the data collection phase.

### **3.9 Data Analysis in Qualitative Studies**

*Qualitative data.* Qualitative data are mostly in textual form (Carley, 1993) or in the form of words (Berg, 2001; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Neuman, 1997; Tesch, 1990). These words come from observations, interviews or documents (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1994) and, according to Basse (1999), the three main sources of data in case study research; two of which were also the main sources of data in the present study, too. According to Neuman (1997), they are “relatively imprecise, diffuse, and context-based, and can have more than one meaning” (p. 418-420).

*Data analysis.* Data analysis in qualitative research becomes a process by which a researcher systematically searches for meaning in the data (Hatch, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Merriam, 1998). To Gall, Gall and Borg (1997), it is about “produc[ing] significant, meaningful findings” from “many pages of field notes” (p. 298) and, to Patton (1990), it is about “mak[ing] sense of massive amounts of data... [to get at] the essence of what the data reveal” (pp. 371-2). And, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), it is “simply ... a process for ‘making

sense' of field data", the sources of which are interviews, observations, documents, among other unobtrusive sources (p. 202).

Unlike quantitative data which are numeric and render themselves to statistical analysis, qualitative data, as mentioned earlier, consist of mainly words and do not lend themselves readily to statistical analyses. The nature of qualitative data renders itself more to an inductive approach rather than to a deductive approach. In this study, both approaches were used.

### **3.9.1 Inductive and Deductive Analyses**

In qualitative research there is an emphasis on inductive information processing (Hatch, 2002; Lofland, 1995; Patton, 2002; Tesch, 1990) rather than a deductive approach (Hatch, 2002; Patton, 2002; Tesch, 1990). Inductive analysis offers researchers a systematic way of processing huge amounts of data in ways which give them the confidence that what they report is in fact representative of situations or perspectives they are studying (Hatch, 2002, p. 179). So, "to argue inductively is to begin with particular pieces of evidence, then pull them together into a meaningful whole" (Hatch, 2002, p. 161). In other words, categories, patterns and themes emerge from the data (Patton, 2002) whereas, in the deductive approach, data pieces are sorted into a pre-established framework (Patton, 2002; Tesch, 1990). However, both approaches can be used in qualitative data analysis (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). During the early stages of the qualitative analysis, when codes are identified or possible categories, themes and patterns are developed, the analysis process is often inductive but, once they are established, the final stage where these inductively generated categories and themes are tested for their authenticity and appropriateness, the process tends to be deductive (Patton, 2002), and this was how the analysis took shape in the current study.

### **3.9.2 Strategies in Qualitative Data Analysis**

Different strategies for data analysis have been discussed in the literature. For example, among others, Miles and Huberman (1994) describe eight methods of

analysis; Lofland (1995) advocates six strategies for developing analysis; and, Hatch (2002) presents five models of qualitative data analysis.

It should be noted that the terms used to denote a particular step in the strategies mentioned above differ by scholars. Seidman (1998, p. 107) illustrates this point: “the process of noting what is interesting, labeling it, and putting it into appropriate files is called ‘classifying’ or, in some sources, ‘coding’. Tesch (1990) has made this observation too: “authors of texts on methods conceptualize their operations differently, use different terminologies, emphasise different aspects of the process, and some spell out explicitly what is left implicit by others” (p. 97). Hence, many scholars (Lofland, 1995; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Tesch, 1990) have contended that there is no one best way of analysing qualitative data. In fact, Lofland is of the view that one should “select, adapt, and combine those parts that works for ... [one] in ... [his or her] project” (p. 182). The data analysis process for this study was informed by two specific techniques: ‘content analysis’ and ‘memoing’, two key analysis techniques that are used in most qualitative studies (Babbie, 2002; Lofland, 1995; Neuman, 1997). A brief discussion of these two techniques follows before presenting the data analysis steps used in this study.

### ***3.9.2.1 Content Analysis***

Historically, content analysis has been used as a quantitative technique (Merriam, 1998; Payne & Payne, 2004), especially in newspaper stories to count the number of words, topics or themes to find out the importance given to them (Payne & Payne, 2004). However, it has proliferated into the domain of qualitative research (Payne & Payne, 2004; Merriam, 1998). Merriam (1998) even contends that “in one sense, all qualitative data analysis is content analysis in that it is the *content* of interviews, field notes, and documents that is analysed” (p. 160) [*italics in the original*]. Moreover, Berg (2001) states that content analysis is useful when analyzing depth interviews, the main source of data in this study.

Content analysis involves the concurrent acts of identifying substantive points in the raw data, coding them and constructing categories for sorting the coded pieces of information (Gillham, 2000; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1987). Codes are names or

labels (Patton, 1990) assigned to these meaningful pieces of information. Therefore, identifying codes and assigning them to those meaningful chunks becomes two distinct activities but tasks that could happen concurrently.

### **3.9.2.2 Memoing**

A memo is “the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding” (Glaser, 1978, quoted in Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 72). In simple terms, a memo or an ‘analytic memo’, as Neuman (1997) calls it, contains a discussion or an elaboration of a coded category or concept (Neuman, 1997; Lofland, 1995). It is also the researcher’s thoughts and ideas about the data and coding (Neuman, 1997). Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 72) have provided an insightful summation of what a memo is:

Memos are primarily conceptual in intent. They don’t just report data; they tie together different pieces of data into a recognizable cluster, often to show that those data are instances of a general concept. Memos can also go well beyond codes and their relationships to any aspect of the study—personal, methodological, and substantive. They are one of the most useful and powerful sense-making tools at hand.

These two processes, coding and memoing, let a researcher map concepts graphically and enable him/her to find order in qualitative data (Babbie, 2002). The application of these principles and procedures are taken up in the next section, ‘the research process’, in which the researcher described how the school was selected, access was gained, data were collected, managed and analysed.

## **3.10 The Research Process**

### **3.10.1 Selecting the School**

During the first week of the data collection phase, I contacted key officials of the MOE, reviewed some relevant documents, met two potential primary school

principals and two secondary school principals<sup>9</sup>. The second week, however, coincided with school holidays and, therefore, officially meeting with the two potential schools' personnel was not possible. Even getting data from the secondary schools posed some difficulties. However, the researcher made use of this week to interview key personnel from the ESQIS, MOE, and reviewed two recent studies of potential schools for this study. Once the schools reopened, I contacted the two potential gatekeepers to see what kind of data they had on student performance. During the third week, I was able to select one school based on the discussions I had with key MOE officials, data from two secondary schools, two primary schools and the two reports from ESQIS. These decisions were in line with Gray et al.'s (1999) suggestion mentioned above.

### **3.10.2 Gaining Access**

Before obtaining approval from MUHEC, New Zealand and, MOE, Maldives, I contacted some potential gatekeepers (principals) informally and mentioned my study. Even at this stage, all of them said that they were willing to help me. Once the school was selected, I met the principal officially<sup>10</sup> to obtain her consent to do the study in this school. In this regard, I presented the information sheet and the letter of invitation to her. I also distributed these to all academic staff, two key administrative staff members and seven parents (one representing each of the seven grades of the school's PTA), purposefully selected by a senior staff member of the school who was in charge of PTA affairs. (Copies of covering letters are given in Appendix seven).

On the very first day at school, the head took me on a tour around the school and introduced me to all staff. The tour ended with morning tea offered to me from the school's canteen and a work space for me for the entire period of data collection in the school, from the supervisors' office and for which I thanked the head.

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<sup>9</sup> These are the receiving schools which are knowledgeable about their intake. And, it is in this regard, meeting with them was important to the researcher.

<sup>10</sup> I mentioned this study to her informally before approaching formally.

### 3.10.3 Data Collection and Management

I spent six weeks in the school, averaging five hours per day, five days a week, (that is, at least over 150 hours on site) for collecting data relevant to the study's purpose and research questions. Four methods were used for data collection: Face-to-face interviewing, participant observation, document reviews and the administering of two questionnaires. In addition, during the entire data collection period, all observations made that were of potential relevance to the study, were recorded in a 'field note book'.

#### *Interviews*

Twenty five, semi structured interviews were conducted in this study. This included ten<sup>11</sup> teachers who gave consent to be interviewed, all eight supervisors who were currently working<sup>12</sup> in the school, the two assistant heads, the head, one parent from the school and a person each from the ESQIS, MOE, the Educational Development Centre and the Faculty of Education, MCHE. Each interview lasted for half-an-hour to one hour. The school provided a quiet room for interviewing. I used an interview schedule, drawn heavily from Mitchell et al (2002). (Interview schedules are given in Appendix eight).

All twenty five interviews were tape recorded and consent was obtained for tape recording them. (One interview, however, was not recorded, due to an unknown cause<sup>13</sup> in the equipment, but was fixed for all later interviews. This was the very first interview. The researcher made notes while interviewing and, about one-and-half hours after the interview, while the words and even certain expressions were still fresh in the memory, full notes were made of this interview). And, for the most part, interviews formed the bulk of the data for this study. All the interviews were transcribed by the researcher and then member-checked. Only one participant

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<sup>11</sup> Altogether 23 teachers participated in the study

<sup>12</sup> One supervisor was on leave throughout the data collection period

<sup>13</sup> No apparent reason for this because the machine was quite new (only about six months old) and, in fact, the researcher installed new batteries the previous night. In subsequent interviews, the researcher checked each time whether voice was recorded before continuing with the interview (Seidman, 1998). And, immediately after the interviews, he checked the voice at random places because while in the school it was not possible to listen to the entire interview and, therefore, later in the day, he listened to the complete interview to make sure nothing was missed.

requested to delete a few phrases and sentences while all the others fully agreed that the researcher had presented what they said accurately.

### *Participant observation*

Processes and places observed in the study included staff meetings (most commonly known as 'Performance discussion meetings'), 'review meetings', 'coordination meetings' (most commonly known as 'sharing meetings'), lesson observations and assemblies as the processes observed and, Staff room and supervisors' office as places. Detailed notes of these observations were made using different strategies: Field notes were taken of staff meetings, coordination meetings and review meetings; in describing the supervisors' office, a method suggested by Merriam (1998) was used; and, staffroom and lesson observation notes were made using methods suggested by Glickman (1990). These observations of processes and places are fully described in the chapter on 'Findings'.

### *Document review*

In this study, only official documents from the school and MOE were reviewed because these had the kind of information most relevant to the study's topic. Notes were made from documents deemed relevant, given the study's purpose and research questions. Document review in this study served two purposes: one, to corroborate findings from other data sources and, two, to enhance the grounding of the investigation in the context of the problem being investigated (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 1998).

### *Questionnaire*

In this study, two questionnaires were administered: one to staff and another to students. In developing the questionnaires, I drew heavily from Beresford (2003), Hopkins (2002) and Mitchell et al (2002). (Appendix nine shows these two questionnaires). Twenty teachers, seven supervisors and thirteen students filled out the questionnaire. The main purpose of the staff questionnaire was to corroborate the findings from the interviews. Given the resource constraints, particularly in terms of time and other logistical issues, interviewing with students was not possible. However, to have input from them, a questionnaire was filled out by them as well. This, too, fulfilled the corroborative function mentioned above and provided student'

views, an important element for informing school improvement (McCall et al., 2001), on key processes of schooling.

#### *Data management*

In this study, all the interviews were transcribed, typed and made more readable by editing them and stored in a computer filing system for easy retrieval. Field notes from observations of both places and processes were also edited and corrected in order to make them more readable. However, all were not typed but still they were organised and filed in manila folders in a way that retrieval was easy. Both soft and hard copies were made of all data that were entered into computer and all data were kept in a safe place accessible only to the researcher, even during the data collection phase.

### **3.10.4 The Data Analysis Process**

The following steps made up the data analysis process of this study, informed by the two strategies, 'content analysis' and 'memoing', as discussed above. This process is also shown graphically in figure seven.

**1. Identifying substantive statements.** This "iterative process" (Gillham, 2005, p. 137) was conducted using the following criteria suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Tesch (1990).

- (i) Stimulate researcher's thinking beyond the bit of information;
- (ii) Stand on its own in terms of meaning;
- (iii) It should contain one idea, episode or piece of information; and,
- (iv) It should, in some way, relate to the study's purpose (Dey, 1993; Seidman, 1998; Tesch, 1990)

Even though the researcher himself transcribed the interviews and was familiar with the data, all the interviews were read once before identifying the substantive statements. The idea was to "get a sense of the whole" (Tesch, 1990, p. 142). A second round of reading was done to see if all significant statements were identified and whether previously identified statements, in fact, were significant. In other words,

were there any statements that were identified but were not significant? Seidman (1998) advises that if we are unsure whether to include or exclude, err on the side of inclusion because material can always be excluded at later stages of the analysis. But material, once excluded, tends not to come back (Vygotsky, 1987, in Seidman, 1998).

**2. Identifying codes**<sup>14</sup>. That is, “look at what is there and give it a name, a label” (Patton, 1990, p. 381), based on what is talked about in the statement (Tesch, 1990); in other words, what is the topic of the statement? Labels or codes can be derived from various sources and from any combination of these sources (Bogdan & Biklen; 1998; Dey, 1993; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Tesch, 1990). In this study, codes were derived from two sources: the majority of the codes from data themselves and some from reviewed literature related to the study’s questions. (A coded interview transcript is given in Appendix 10(a). See also Appendix 10(b) for some examples of ‘codes’ and ‘significant statements’).

Further, while reading the transcripts to identify meaningful pieces of information, those codes that came to the researcher’s mind were jotted down (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). This step of identifying codes also included the process of revising the codes; abandoning existing codes when they don’t seem to fit field material; creating new codes or even breaking codes into sub codes when too many data segments got the same code (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Furthermore, new codes that were better grounded empirically emerged as the analysis progressed (ibid).

**3. Forming categories** or groups. In this step, the labels or codes were reviewed, not the substantive statements, and a more abstract category was assigned to several labels having some commonalities. Usually the categories derived in this way are quite elaborate (Tesch, 1990); Dey (1993) calls it “detailed categories” and they stay “close to the data” (p. 101).

**4. Clustering.** As the categories obtained from the previous step are elaborate, first, in this step, they are trimmed down to most relevant ones, “the broad categories” (Dey, 1993, p. 101). Next, all the statements bearing the same category name are assembled in one place (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Tesch, 1990) “so

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<sup>14</sup> Coding was done both manually and using NVivo, version 7.1

that the researcher can read in a continuous fashion about ... [a particular topic]" (Tesch, 1990, p, 122). What we are doing is "trying to understand a phenomenon better by *grouping* and then *conceptualizing* ... [statements] that have similar patterns or characteristics" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 249). [Their emphasis] (See Appendix 11(a), for an assembled set of statements bearing the same category name).

**5. 'Sense-making'**. By reading all the statements bearing the same category name in a continuous fashion, the researcher was able to generate a "connected set of statements reflecting the findings and conclusions of the study" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 75). In fact, these statements were read several times and refined in order to generate a set of themes related to the study's main research question.

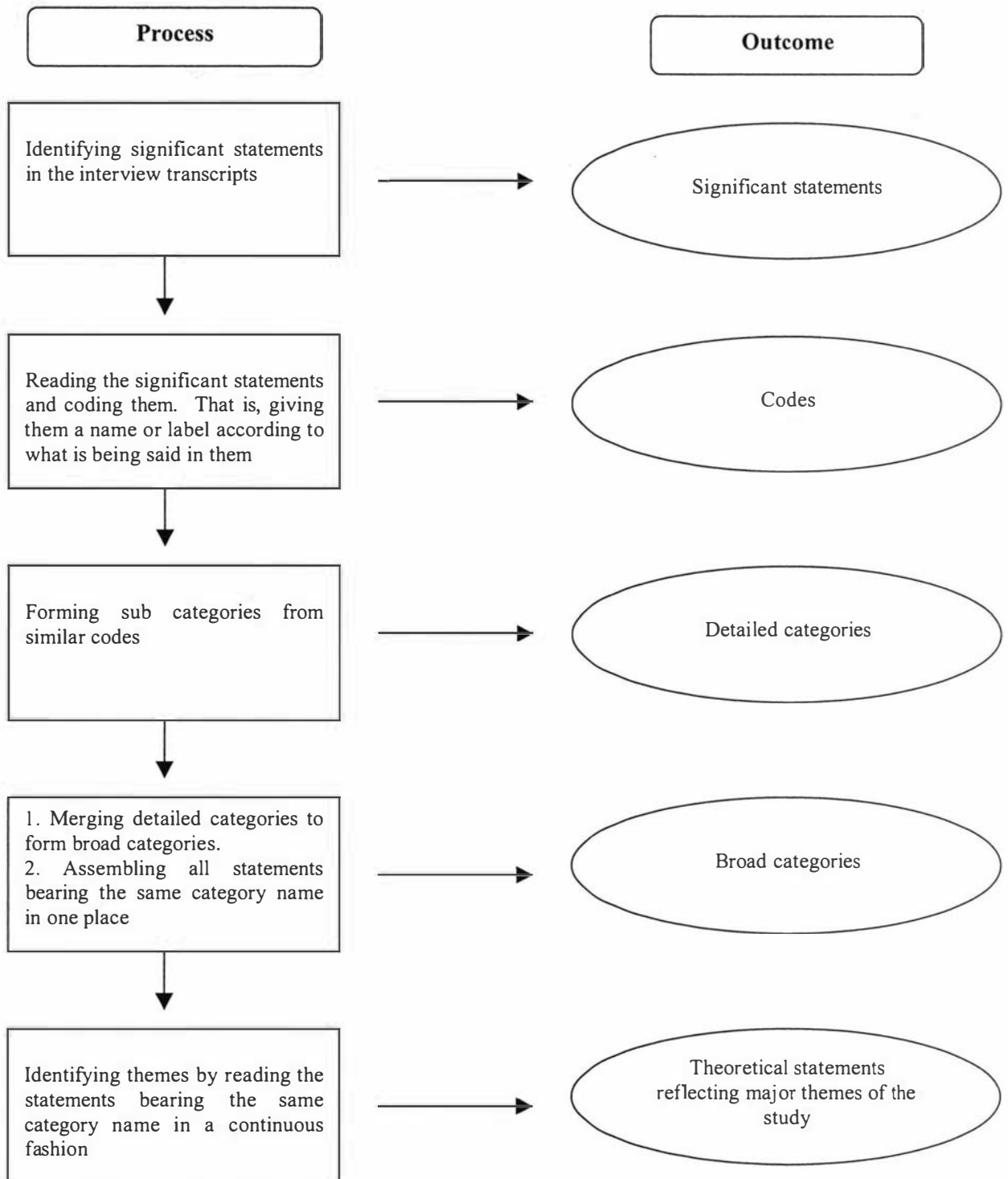
Neuman (1997, p. 421) succinctly describes a qualitative data analysis process:

A qualitative researcher analyzes data by organizing it into categories on the basis of themes, concepts, or similar features. He or she develops new concepts, formulates conceptual definitions, and examines the relationships among concepts. Eventually, he or she links concept to each other in terms of a sequence, as oppositional sets..., or as sets of similar categories that he or she interweaves into theoretical statements.

Appendix 11(b), 'Examples for the steps in the data analysis process', shows an example of one theme, together with its related 'broad categories', 'detailed categories', and 'codes' identified in this process. It should be noted that the above process used in the data analysis was not a linear process as it appeared on paper. But it involved a lot of 'going forwards' and 'backwards' between the steps before finalizing, for example, a code, category, theme or conclusion. Table six shows a timeframe of the study.

Figure 7: The data analysis process of the study

The data analysis process<sup>15</sup> used in this study



<sup>15</sup> Adapted from Dey, 1993; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Tesch, 1990

**Table 6: The timeframe of the study**

<b>Research phase</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Duration</b>
Phase 1: Proposal preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reading of related literature</li> <li>- Formulating research questions</li> <li>- Drafting the proposal</li> <li>- Formal presentation of the proposal</li> </ul>	Jan 2003 – April 2004
Phase 2: Preparation for data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Obtaining approval from MUHEC</li> <li>- Obtaining approval from MOE, Maldives</li> <li>- Preparation of field instruments (information sheet, invitational letters, interview schedules and questionnaires)</li> </ul>	May 2004 – Nov 2004
Phase 3: Data collection in the Maldives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Meeting key personnel in the education sector</li> <li>- Review of most relevant documents</li> <li>- Conducting interviews, including listening to all recorded interviews to check on sound quality and transcribing a few and member check of one</li> <li>- Participant observation</li> <li>- Questionnaire administration</li> </ul>	28 Mar 2005 – 2 June 2005
Phase 4: Data analysis after returning to New Zealand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Transcribing interviews</li> <li>- Member checking of all transcripts</li> <li>- Coding and category building and, interpreting and identifying themes</li> </ul>	July 2005 – Jan 2007

Table 6: (continued) The time frame of the study

<b>Research phase</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Duration</b>
Phase 5: writing of the chapters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Writing of the chapter on literature review (first draft was reviewed by the chief supervisor)</li> <li>- Writing of the chapter on methodology, the theoretical section (first draft was reviewed by the two supervisors)</li> <li>- Writing of the chapter on Findings (first draft was reviewed by the chief supervisor)</li> <li>- Writing of 'the research process'</li> <li>- Writing of the chapter on Discussion (first draft was reviewed by the chief supervisor)</li> <li>- Writing of the chapter on Introduction (first draft was reviewed by the chief supervisor)</li> <li>- Writing of the chapter on Conclusion</li> </ul>	Dec 2005 – Apr 2007
Phase 6: Thesis submission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All chapters (less introductory pages and appendices) given to Chief supervisor for a second revision</li> <li>- Incorporating comments from Chief supervisor</li> <li>- Full thesis given to both supervisors</li> <li>- Incorporating comments from both supervisor and final corrections</li> <li>- Revised draft given to supervisors</li> <li>- Final corrections</li> <li>- Formal submission of the thesis</li> </ul>	<p>11 May 2007</p> <p>24 May – 11 June 2007</p> <p>12 June 2007</p> <p>2<sup>nd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> week in July 2007</p> <p>4<sup>th</sup> week in July 2007</p> <p>1<sup>st</sup> week in August 2007</p> <p>2<sup>nd</sup> week in August 2007</p>

### **3.11 Summary**

This chapter started by stating the purpose of this study and the research questions that it intends to answer. In this regard, the methodological approach taken to address these questions, a qualitative case study design, was described. Information about the research site, participants, data collection and analysis methods, ethical considerations and trustworthiness issues were also discussed. This chapter also described and justified two specific data analysis methods used in this study. They are content analysis and memoing; two data analysis methods used in many qualitative studies (Babbie, 2002; Lofland, 1995; Neuman, 1997). The next chapter presents the findings of this study which were reached at by subjecting the data to the above data analysis process.

## CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

### 4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how an urban primary school in the Republic of Maldives dealt with the issue of school improvement. The review of related literature, reported in chapter two, identified three interrelated, key concepts that undergirded most school improvement efforts; Leadership, change and culture, which in turn enabled the researcher to formulate the following research questions to fulfil the study's purpose:

*The main research question:*

How does a primary school in an urban setting of the Maldives deal with school improvement efforts?

*The sub questions:*

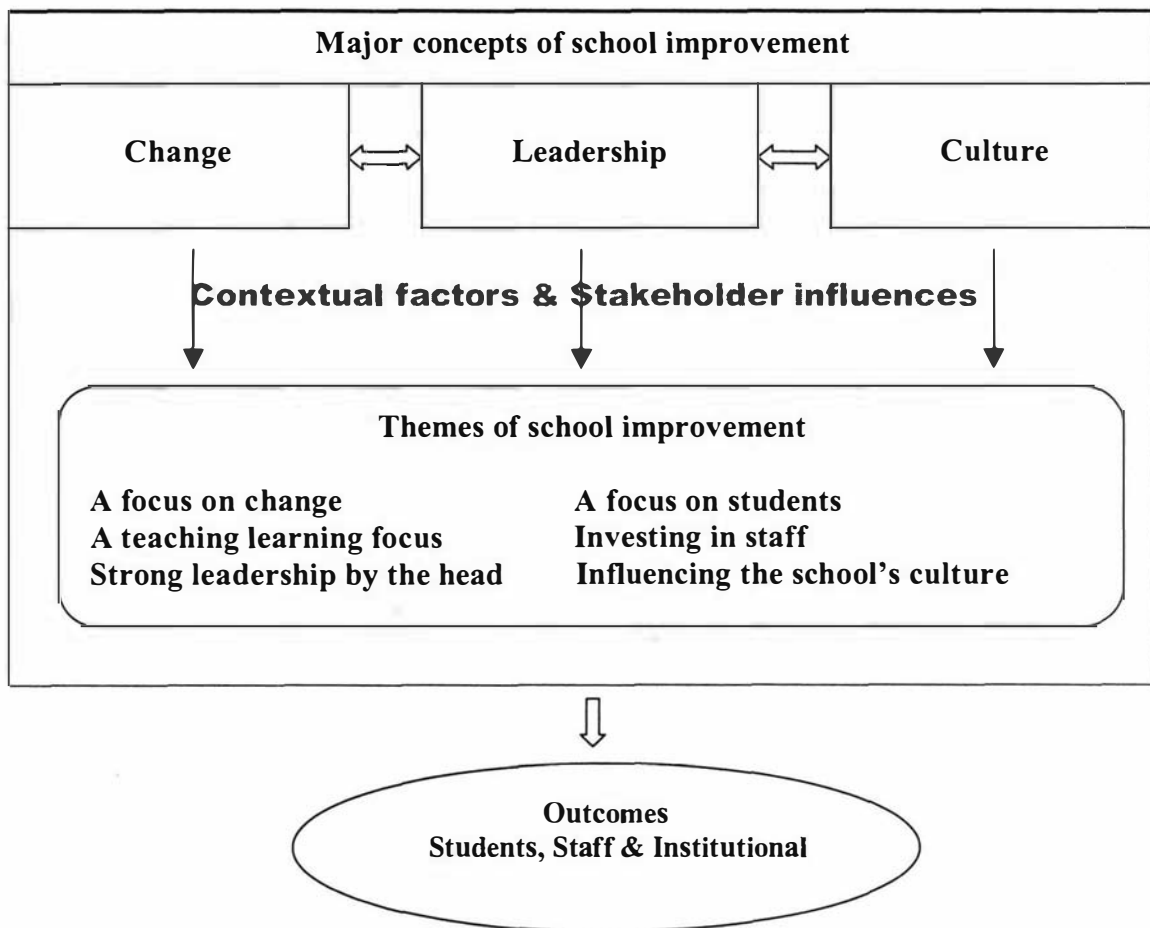
1. How does the principal effect and manage change in a Maldivian urban primary school?
2. What are the internal conditions or major components or themes at work with regard to improvement efforts in a Maldivian urban primary school?
3. How does the principal create and/or manipulate the necessary internal conditions within the school that would bring about lasting improvements?
4. How do teachers perceive improvement efforts?
5. What is the role of the central office (the MOE in this case) and, what other parties, besides the MOE, influence the school's efforts to change and how do they influence?
6. How does the school determine the worth of its school improvement programmes?

In the previous chapter the methodology used to answer these research questions was described, including two specific methods used for data analysis: content analysis and memoing. This chapter presents the findings derived from the data using these two

analysis methods. In this regard, six major themes of improvement were identified and they are presented together with stakeholder influences and contextual factors, the backdrop against which these themes emerged (figure eight shows a conceptual framework for presenting the findings). The six themes of improvement are given below and each is discussed in turn, in detail.

- A focus on change,
- A focus on students,
- A teaching learning focus,
- Investing in staff,
- Strong leadership by the Head and
- School culture.

**Figure 8: A conceptual framework for presenting data**



## 4.2 A Focus on Change: Change Over the Last Three Years

The school had seen some positive changes in the last three years. Some were quite significant given the school's circumstances<sup>16</sup>. These changes could be distinguished as student outcomes, teacher outcomes and institutional outcomes.

### 4.2.1 Student Outcomes

One area in which the school saw positive changes was students' academic achievements, more specifically, improvement in results. When asked what major achievements were there in the past three years, the spontaneous answer from many teachers and supervisors was that students' results had improved.

*R: What major achievements have there been in the past three years?*

P: I would say results.

(Interview 11)

P: See it is [sic] the results. We have improved the results.

(Interview 13)

P: Improvement of the results.

(Interview 22)

Although this improvement refers to overall learning of students, specific academic learning areas were pinpointed. Such areas included positive changes in reading, vocabulary and in the performance of weak students.

Because teachers say that they [students] don't use good vocabulary when they write essays, ... we introduced a vocabulary programme ... And, after they finished it, supervisors checked. Many children have learnt a lot of words and they know how to use it.

(Interview 19)

We started to have this reading programme. So this year they have improved a lot: the vocab[ul]ary of the children and the habit of reading also.

(Interview 6)

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<sup>16</sup> See 'school's history', under section 4.8.3

Last year those who were coming to extra classes, they were the children who were getting about E's and C's, they ended up getting C's and B's ...

(Interview 12)

Data collected by the case study school on student performances for the last three years (2002-2004) also revealed that, although the entire school (all the grades) had not shown improvements in performance, some grades did perform well over the said period (see table seven). It could be seen from the table that, all grades, except grades two and three, increased their performances between the years 2002 and 2004. However, when performances were considered in relation to the previous year (2003), grade five seemed to have made a downward trend (see Appendix 24). But still, performances of grades one, four and seven had increased, with grade six maintaining its performance level.

**Table 7: Percentile points increased or decreased in grade average: 2002-2004**

Subjects	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7
Quran	- 2	+ 4	+ 4	+ 1	- 1	--	--
Islam	+ 1	- 1	- 2	+ 4	+ 2	+ 6	+ 4
Dhivehi	+ 4	- 2	- 1	+ 1	+ 2	+ 1	+ 2
English	+ 9	0	+ 8	+ 4	+ 2	+ 1	+ 4
Math	+ 1	- 2	0	+ 3	+ 3	+ 2	+ 9
E/S *	+ 22	- 6	+ 4	+ 7	+ 5	--	--
Science	--	--	--	--	--	- 1	+3
S/S **	--	--	--	--	--	- 1	- 1

Source: Adapted from the case study school's performance data (2005). (Original source is given in Appendix 24)

\* Environmental studies; \*\* Social Science

Furthermore, judging by the three performance indicators, "academic progress", "pupil satisfaction" and "pupil-teacher relationships" advocated by Gray and Wilcox (1995, p. 27), the case study school could be considered as a good one (see Appendix 25).

On the social and personnel development side, particularly to develop in students the habit of being courteous, the school emphasized greeting lately and, therefore, it had become more habitual, especially in younger children.

I think the greeting started after this principal came in... that was about the first thing that she started with...

Students in grades one, two and three, they tend to greet a lot even if they see us after session, they greet us. But with older children, all grade six and seven, even five, they have to be told to greet. This may be because this was started later and they haven't had enough practice.

(Interview 15)

Since this [values] is something that has to be taught slowly, we have started with greeting: So everybody now greets; you'll hear it echoing, "Assalaam Alaikum<sup>17</sup>", when students come out or when they see us. So that is a very good thing.

(Interview 20)

Although many agreed on this point, one participant was not so optimistic:

As I have said, we have not given that much attention [on values], ... only the greeting part we could say...[there is emphasis]. But still we have to, on and off, remind the children about that. So it is still not a habit.

(Interview 16)

Further, discipline was generally good in this school and it had been maintained:

The students here are well disciplined I would say, because I was teaching in (name) school and it was like hell for me...

When I came here I felt that I came to heaven. There was such a big difference in behaviour; behaviour is so good here.

(Interview 12)

In lower grades, especially grades one, two and three, discipline is not a problem may be because they are small. However, in grades six and seven, there's some. But this year it is minimal to almost non-existent...

Last year when I come for the afternoon session, I see many being brought to office for some discipline related matters but this year this has decreased.

(Interview 10)

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<sup>17</sup> Islamic greeting

## 4.2.2 Staff Outcomes

The continuous efforts laid by the last two regimes in raising student achievement levels had made many teachers more result-oriented.

What I feel is, from our side, from teachers' side, from parents' side, from students' side, they have been more focused on their goals, their results. That is ... a significant change.

(Interview 16)

*R: What do you see as the most significant changes that have happened in this school over the last three years?*

P: We are focusing on the results a lot.

(Interview 17)

Further, the staff expected more from students now (see the section on 'high expectations'), and there was a strong working relationship among them which was also one of the positive changes that the school had had. (The sections on 'cultural norms' and 'relationships' further explain this relationship).

Also, more staff satisfaction was a positive change. Although there was no one common aspect of the school about which most of the staff were satisfied, better planning, including the identification of clear roles and responsibilities, better ways of dealing with staff, in the sense that they were cared for more now and their work was valued and, good relationships among staff, seemed to positively affect many staff.

... Now almost all teachers like to work in this school, because, ... now it will be planned, ... things won't come just like that; we will know everything ahead of time.

(Interview 12)

Everybody's roles are now identified.

(Interview 22)

Actually the team which I'm working in is very helpful, very caring; that's one thing I enjoy.

(Interview 11)

*R: What do you enjoy most about working in this school?*

P: The friendly environment and I very much feel that I'm valued here.

(Interview 22)

This increase in staff satisfaction had resulted in increased staff commitment too.

The major achievement has been the improvement of students performance and willingness of teachers and parents to work hard consistently for better results.

(Interview 2)

Everybody is prepared to bring up their students to the target percentage.

(Interview 6)

I was the one who was having the extra classes regularly because I wanted it. I took the initiative.

(Interview 12)

Improving staff teaching repertoire through appropriate in-school training and releasing teachers for such outside training helped many teachers to plan lessons more effectively.

Methods of teaching are more advanced and effective.

(Interview 18)

Teachers are also improving not only because of ways of teaching. Ways of teaching also have improved. Before, we did not even use the multimedia projector [meaning, power point presentations]. But now in lessons we use it as well.

(Interview 15)

### 4.2.3 Institutional Outcomes

Among the notable changes that could be regarded as institutional were: Increased academic focus (see the theme: 'a teaching and learning focus'), the school was better managed and planning of activities was more wide spread:

I could say now things are done more systematically. It is more organized and what everyone has to do has been written down. Activities are well planned ahead of time. Previously, activities were not so well planned.

(Interview 18)

At that time, ... it was not very clear which direction I had to go. But now it is very clear cut, like, I know what my duties are what I have to do and it is very easy for me to work now, to plan my work.

(Interview 19)

Many participants agreed that there was an increased awareness in parents and that they received more support from them. This was, in part, due to the focus on results, because parents knew their children's ability better and what they had to do and, in part, due to the system which had produced more educated parents.

The most notable of all changes is parental awareness of their own children.

(Interview 13)

Some [parents] ... know what their child's abilities are... I think most parents judge their children by the marks or grades they get.

(Interview 19)

Now the parents who are more educated, they are focusing more on achievements ... this education has made it, I mean, change in the parents as well.

(Interview 16)

We get a lot of parental support now... Most parents are very supportive.

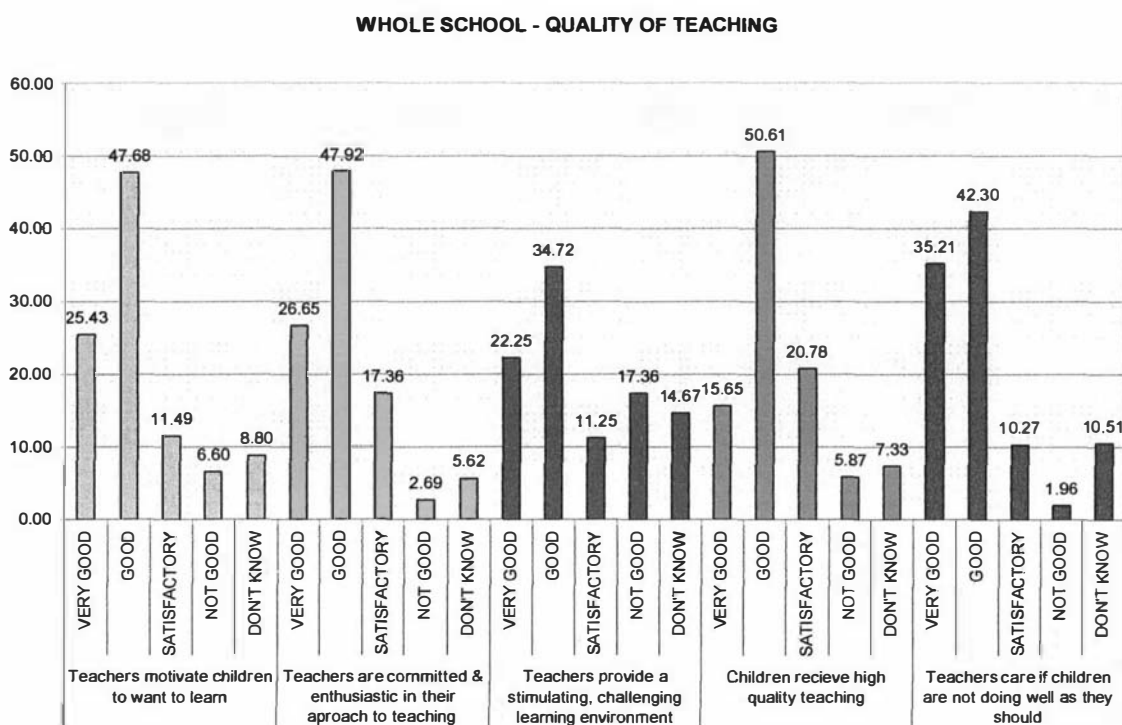
(Interview 10)

Parents are very cooperative. The school has a close relationship with parents.

(Interview 6)

Finally, the continuous efforts laid by the last and current regimes on raising student achievement levels indicated to the parents in particular and, to the public in general, that the school was working hard and was capable of achieving what other schools achieved. Parents' responses to one of the areas ("Whole school – Quality of teaching") included in a recent survey done by the school, clearly indicated this (see figure nine).

**Figure 9: Parental views<sup>18</sup> about teaching and learning**



As can be seen from the figure, a high percentage of parents responded either 'very good', or 'good' to four of the five statements for which their views were sought. Said differently, over 70 percent of the parent respondents believed that teachers motivated the students to learn, teachers were committed and enthusiastic about teaching and students were taught well and that they were cared if children were not doing as well as they should. The only aspect about which parents had a divided view was that challenging work presented to students: just over 55 percent thought that challenging work was given to students.

<sup>18</sup> These views were obtained through a questionnaire conducted by the school

#### **4.2.4 Summary of the Theme: A Focus on Change**

The case study school had seen some positive changes in the last three years. Some were quite significant given the school's circumstances (see the schools history, section 4.8.4). These changes could be distinguished as student outcomes, teacher outcomes and institutional outcomes:

Student outcomes:

- Positive changes in students' academic achievements, more specifically, improvement in results.
- Positive changes in reading, vocabulary and in the performance of weak students.
- Good discipline had been maintained during this period.
- Positive changes in one of the social skills: Respecting others, that is, greeting others had become more habitual, especially in younger students (those in grades one through three).

Staff outcomes:

- Teachers had become more result-oriented and they expected more from students.
- A strong working relationship had developed among staff and this had resulted in increased staff satisfaction and commitment.
- Various training opportunities had helped many teachers to plan more effective lessons and more teachers used activity-based methods of teaching.

Institutional outcomes:

- Planning of activities was more wide spread and the school was better managed.
- More emphasis was given to academic work now as a result of being relieved from the pressure to participate in sports competitions.
- Parental awareness and support had increased.

Data from the questionnaire also lend support to many of the outcomes mentioned above (see figure ten and thirteen).

**Figure 10: Change over last three years**

<b>Change aspect</b>	<b>Outcome type</b>	<b>Teacher ratings (n = 20)</b>	<b>Supervisor ratings (n = 7)</b>
We have made positive changes to the way we teach	Staff	15	7
We monitor our progress more	Staff	15	6
We enjoy our work more	Staff	14	6
We expect more of our students	Staff	14	5
We have made positive changes to how we plan ahead	Institutional	12	6
We have made positive changes to the way the school runs	Institutional	11	5
Student behaviour has improved	Student	11	4
Parents show more interest in their children's learning	Institutional	10	6
We have more professional development	Institutional	6	5
We have more contact with other schools	Institutional	2	5

(Note: The numbers shown in the last two columns indicate those who responded favourably to each of the 'change aspect' statements)

As can be seen by "a simple eyeball inspection" (Caroll & Caroll, 2002, p. 39) of the figure, both teachers and supervisors were very positive about most changes. It was only on two items (the last two statements) that teachers and supervisors responded variably. In the case of having contact with other schools, it was the more senior personnel (i.e. supervisors) more than the teachers who had a role to play in this regard. In the case of professional development, it might be the case that many teachers who responded to the questionnaire viewed more formal strategies (e.g. workshops), as opposed to more informal strategies (e.g. Thursday's 'sharing sessions'), as staff development.

Further, in response to one of the open-ended questions (see Appendix 21) which asked about the major achievements in the school over the last three to five years, four of the six supervisors responded that it was the improvement of results, confirming the interview data. In the case of teachers, six of the 20 teachers did not answer this question. Of the 14 who answered, six said it was the improvement of results, two said it was behaviour, five said there was no significant achievement and one said 'don't know'. Although not strong, there was some agreement among teachers who

filled the questionnaire that improvement in results was a major achievement. An interesting point to note was, of the five who said that there was no significant achievement, two agreed that teachers were working hard to improve results in answering the question, 'what is the current strength of the school'?

The next major theme of school improvement identified in the study was 'a focus on students'. Findings related to this theme are discussed next.

### **4.3 A Focus on Students**

#### **4.3.1 Academic Emphasis**

##### ***4.3.1.1 A Focus on Results***

One of the significant features of the school was that it had an elevated focus on improving students' results, with a specific target of achieving 80% pass in each subject for the class as a whole and for all the classes. Giving so much emphasis on students' results was something started by the former head (Interviews, 11, 13, 16, 17).

The 80% target was applied to even unit tests, the smallest unit of curriculum on which students were assessed in a formal way. The Head's expectations were such that anyone failing to reach this target was asked to work again with students till the level was achieved (Interviews, 12 & 17). Hence, this push was felt at every level of the school:

Everybody has to work hard until he achieves 80%. Otherwise, we have to re-teach the students. So we also push the teachers to do their level best.

[And] because we are focusing more on results, we are pushing students more towards studies.

(Interview 17)

The school is always concentrating on students' results so much that we are forced to work with that in our minds. Even the students from the first day

itself keep on reminding the goals which they have to reach at the end of the year.

(Interview 12)

... About two to three years ago, I didn't notice these in children. Now those who are working are really result oriented. They (students) work for marks actually, most of them...

(Interview 22)

#### **4.3.1.2 An Emphasis on Academic Work**

There was a time, according to many participants, when the school's focus was not so much on academic work, as one of the senior personnel mentioned:

At [that] time, the school[']s focus was more on winning interschool competition[s] whether it [was] sports, singing etc...

But this had changed:

Extra-curricular activities have been reduced lately and more emphasis [is] placed on academic work.

(Interview 18)

Now the focus has changed to school improvement through staff development, students' performance, etc... Now we identify the needs of the school and plan and work accordingly.

(Interview 2)

#### **4.3.2 Enhancing Student Learning**

Many activities were conducted to enhance student learning. Two broad categories of activities could be noted from among these activities. One type specifically dealt with the enhancement of language ability, especially that of English Language and, the other, to enhance their learning across other curriculum areas. Those that enhanced language ability included reading, vocabulary building and literary activities, and those that dealt with other curricular areas included, conducting quizzes, extra classes and the development of student contracts. Most programmes were conducted to specific grade levels (year levels) and not necessarily to entire school. However, there was a wide emphasis on reading. In this programme students were encouraged

to read whenever they had some free time. They were also encouraged to read at home.

Now we are pushing ... reading. We have given, for grades two and three, these reading booklets... prepared by [the] school...

They can [also] ... take [a] book from the library or they can bring one from home ...

Every time they get some free time they ... [are supposed to] read in class or they can go back home and read. It is up to the students and parents are informed about this programme.

(Interview 19)

Now we have been asking them to read as they come to school and then after the assembly, even for five minutes.

(Interview 6)

After reading a book students were asked to record the characters. This was for the lower grades. In the higher grades, they were asked to write a short review about what they liked or did not like about the book.

What they [second and third year students]... have to do is read a book and then ... write about the characters or name of the book... Then they get this badge ... They wanted to read so much now. So it is also helping them to read a lot.

(Interview 19)

We gave books to read ... and then write a review. If they don't know how to write a review then at least the name of the author [and] why they like the book or not like.

(Interview 6)

Reading was emphasized even from a very early age, as one of the assistant heads described:

We wanted all students [in grade one] to learn all their alphabets and Dhivehi letters by the end of first term, last year. We talked to the teachers, we planned it...

Teachers had all the students' names put up on the wall... They had very nicely done colourful hats. So after each child learns a letter, the letter goes up on the hat. Students wanted the letters on their hats so they were really working for that...

So there was no one left without a hat. Even the slower ones had some letters on their hats. That was very successful and ... that was a big achievement.

Success was also celebrated to further encourage students, according to her:

When all students finished learning their letters, ... we got all students to wear those hats [and] we took them out for a walk ... They were really happy ... Then they took their hats home with them. Their parents were also very happy. That was a real encouragement for them. ... It was such a success that we tried this year also, in the first term.

Here is what another participant said about reading:

Results have improved because of the programmes [we] conducted for children. For example, the reading programme: the way it is implemented has improved students' reading to a satisfactory level.

(Interview 23)

Recognizing that vocabulary was a problem with many students, the school introduced a vocabulary programme to grade four. In this programme, new words were introduced to students along with examples of how they were used. This programme was a success in that students learned a lot of new words and they knew how to use them:

Last year, when grade 4's were in the afternoon session, we felt that we should improve their vocabulary, because teachers say that they don't use good vocabulary when they write essays... So we introduced a vocabulary programme ... and after they finished it, supervisors checked. Many children have learnt a lot of words and they know how to use it.

(Interview 19)

Every week Sunday I am introducing two words with the meaning and a sentence with the words used in them ... [At] the end of the term ... I ... give an assessment ... Last year the teacher said it helped them a lot. The students improved. At least they learnt some new words.

(Interview 13)

Literary activities involved competitions for all children. Students first competed against one another at the class level. Then four to five students were selected to compete at the inter class level. These competitions let students practice a wide variety of skills like poetry, reading comprehension, listening, speech contests, essay writing, spelling and the like. Alongside these competitions, there were also literary association activities which were weekly events. However, only brighter students were selected for these activities in which students learnt how to express their views, gave speeches etc. Overall, literary activities had helped their language ability:

I think through that [literary activities] students learn a lot. They learn poetry, they learn reading comprehension, they learn how to express, they learn speaking, speeches and all those. I think they are very important for the students.

(Interview 20)

The literary activities that we have conducted have improved students' language ability both in English and Dhivehi.

(Interview 18)

The school conducted extra classes for students who fell behind in their achievement levels. In this regard, the Head mentioned thus:

Based on the results of unit test results, extra classes were held for those who need[ed] attention...

These classes were conducted just after the normal class time ended. Those who were unable to complete their class assignments as well as home work assignments were also kept after the normal classes to complete their work. Here is how one teacher viewed extra classes and the success, although a bit optimistic:

During the extra classes ... teachers get time to check all the work done by the students and also to find out the difficulties the students are having. The teacher cannot do all these work during a normal class period...

Keeping them after school for not finishing the work started during the first term of this year and we made that 99% success.

Interview 21

Another teacher also expressed a similar thought and she described what success was like in a more objective way:

There are very weak students in our classes ... To tell you the truth, it is not possible to assist them well in a 35 minutes period. So I ask them to come in extra times where I help them ...

Last year those who were coming to extra classes, they were the children who were getting ... E's and C's, [and] they ended up getting C's and B's.

(Interview 12)

Another school wide strategy for enhancing student learning was the conducting of subject quizzes. These were interclass quizzes based on questions and answers in various subject areas in which all students participated. Class teachers gave questions to which students answered on their own and showed them to the teacher. A specific week was set for this quiz competition. Winners were recognized by awarding certificates at three levels: merit, credit and ordinary. Parents supported this programme. The programme was believed to benefit the students:

We have been having inter-class quizzes ... to improve the results of the students; to help them get prepared for the test and it was very successful. Each and every student took part in the quiz.

(Interview 11)

Once the unit that we are teaching is over, we give a lot of questions on that. On their own they have to write the answers and show it to the ... teachers [who] will [then] mark them ... We have a set week for the quiz ... Now we have planned for the parents also to be there.

Each child will be asked 2-3 questions... to ... answer ... We ... [then] give marks, ... select the [best] students [and award] ... certificate[s in three] areas: ... ordinary, credit and merit ... Students want to achieve something... And parents also push a lot for this. I mean, nobody would want their child to go up on the stage and stay back without answering... So it has brought a positive impact.

Interview 16

When students compete in competitions like ... interclass quiz, that improves their academic level of the subject and also they take interest in answering questions ...

(Interview 9)

Recently, the school introduced a 'student contract' (see Appendix 12). This was basically an agreement that the students entered into and in which students themselves specified certain objectives to be realised within a timeframe. And, at the end of this time, a review assessed the progress made.

Now we prepare something called a 'student contract'. In this contract the marks of the previous term and the marks that the student hopes to achieve in the current term would be entered. The student, parent and the teacher would sign this. A copy each would be kept with parent and student. Once the term comes to an end, it would be checked whether the student achieved what was set out at the beginning.

(Interview 4)

According to one participant, these contracts made students work hard:

Very recently, they signed a contract and in that contract they had written a mark that they will be getting next term, the predicted marks. So, they wanted to work hard and achieve that much...

*[Researcher: So you have seen that students are working hard because of this contract?]*

In the first unit test I was sure about that.

(Interview 9)

### **4.3.3 Positive Reinforcement**

One aspect of learning is motivation: the more one is motivated to learn, the more one learns<sup>19</sup>. Teachers talked of motivating students by providing reinforcement in a variety of ways. The school analysed unit test results and some of these were displayed as graphs and simple charts and were shown to students to make them

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<sup>19</sup> See Levin & Nolan, 2004.

aware of their progress, indicate to them what needed to be done next and to encourage them.

We have started showing results to students. So that has, I think, created a learning spirit in them.

(Interview 22)

After analyzing the results, we always show them, we share with them, with their parents and we always encourage them.

(Interview 19)

Both supervisors and teachers talked to individual students about their performance and encouraged them to work hard:

Supervisors also go to classes and talk to students who have improved from term to term and encourage them to keep up with the good work. Like wise they talk to students whose results have gone down.

(School head)

I try to have a clear vision on what the students can do by talking to students who score low marks and praising and encouraging [them] ... and students know this.

(Interview 6)

I spoke to them and told them that if they really work hard the result[s] show that they can improve.

(Interview 9)

Teachers provided positive reinforcement to motivate students. That is, they provided feedback in such a way as to boost self confidence in students.

If I give one or two sums on the board for the fast learners and tell them that the person who finishes doing them is the most intelligent student in this class, they will go for it until they get the answer. So this strategy was useful because ... [everybody] want[ed] to be the most intelligent student in the class.

(Interview 12)

If it is reading and comprehension, I compare the marks with their past performance and [comment appropriately: For example,] ... I would say... "you know that you have done this individually and you can see how much marks you have got".

(Interview 5)

Furthermore, various reward systems were put in place to reinforce students positively. This included awarding certificates and badges to both academic and non academic work.

They [teachers] have to check ... the books regularly on a weekly basis and then give a badge to the child once he or she finishes a book.

(Interview 6)

They give badges for cleanliness[, too.]

(Interview 9)

In case of discipline, best students are identified and awarded certificates.

(Interview 8)

Public acknowledgement of success was a common feature of the school as this participant mentioned:

Good work is always appreciated. For example, today the principal congratulated the students who won an award in the National Quran Reciting Competition.

(Interview 14)

#### **4.3.4 High Expectations**

More than half the staff interviewed agreed that the school had set very high expectations, especially in academic, result-oriented terms, for students. That is, to reach a class average of at least 80% or even more in each test.

We have a target. We expect 80% pass percentage from each class, from each subject. That doesn't mean each student has to get 80 from each subject. But we expect at least 80% of students to pass from each subject.

(Asst Head)

Now in this school we try for 80% pass in every unit or whatever assessment they do in each subject.

(Interview 13)

School expects them to get above 80% average in each class.

(Interview 15)

But there were mixed feelings about how realistic this expectation was:

The school's expectation is that all classes should get above 80% in all the subjects. But this is not a very valid expectation...

(Interview 12)

To be frank I expect everyone to learn what they are supposed to. But I know that's not the reality.

(Interview 16)

Now [the target percentage is] ... above 80. Although they [weak students] don't get ... 80, we know that these classes have ... [high] ability students and they could cope, but we wouldn't accept less than 75.

(Interview 6)

There were some who had differential expectations:

I expect the brighter ones to really excel, the average ones to do their best and the weaker ones to learn how to read and write.

(Interview 10)

We always expect them to do their best. I mean, show their best, even though he or she is achieving 50 out of 100. That's OK if it is her best..

(Interview 19)

Nonetheless, because of this expectation of school, many of the staff expected students to perform well in academic work, although not so much in result-oriented terms. For example, seven out of ten teachers had academic expectations of which

five expected their students to take their own responsibility for learning, which according to one participant, was a high expectation:

The expectations are quite high: I want them to take initiative and do what they had to do for their studies ...

(Interview 12)

One participant was really explicit about her expectations:

My expectations are very high, even higher than the school's target. That's what I tell them always.

(Interview 5)

All eight supervisors had academic expectations. Half of them expected students to achieve curricular objectives. For example, one of them commented thus:

"Whatever is given [in] the syllabus, I would like to reach the highest target from that.

(Interview 20)

And, another three expected them to take responsibility for their own learning. One supervisor elaborated on what it meant to take own initiative in learning:

I expect them, in the class, to participate in the lesson, ...to be active, to communicate with the teachers and students. Then, if they have any questions, to clarify them so that they will know. Otherwise, if they keep quiet, sometimes when they go home, they don't have people to ask. And, ... also I expect them to work to get good results.

(Interview 13)

The expectations were communicated and reinforced too:

Once a student reaches this level we would know that such a student is capable of achieving this goal, so such a student is encouraged to maintain that level.

(Interview 18)

We are asking students to show their best performance. That's why, after analyzing the results, we always show them, we share with them, with their

parents and we always encourage them [students]. Students also know that we want them to do their best.

(Interview 19)

#### **4.3.5 Holistic Emphasis**

School goals should be aligned with national goals. This is a feature of successful schools (Harris, 2002; Hopkins, 2007).

Educating children was seen by many staff as a holistic endeavour. In their view, education was not just about academic learning alone, personal development and social and interpersonal skills were two main areas included in their conception of education.

Notions such as building confidence, being responsible, taking initiative or being able to lead, having self discipline, motivation and being productive, featured in their idea of personal development. And, in a similar way, notions such as respecting others and religious and moral values, participation, cooperation and communication featured in their idea of social and interpersonal skills.

Although this seemed a favourable platform from which to embark on educational activities, some staff agreed that much needed to be done in this regard.

If we educate somebody, ... it should be [a] holistic [endeavour; to produce] an overall student. That's what I believe... But still I feel that from our school's side, there are things that we need to improve in order to make the child a holistic child.

(Interview 16)

I should say still more work is needed to build their confidence. Some students, still they lack this part, may be because we don't have enough activities which will build their confidence.

(Interview 13)

Nonetheless, the school provided many opportunities for personal and social and interpersonal skill development: assembly addresses by the Head or the assistants;

lectures and /or seminars by people of national stature; and various displays in the school compound related to key messages.

Inculcation of certain values important to the overall development of the child was also a part of this holistic approach to education. In this regard, academic work was highly regarded with an emphasis on results and reading. Importance was also accorded to some ethical, moral and religious values. Ethical values included greeting, taking responsibility, caring and sharing; while moral values included good behaviour, rule abiding and respecting others. Fulfilling religious duties was the key aspect with regard to religious values. One main avenue where these values were reinforced was the school assembly where children were continuously reminded of them:

Assembly messages also mainly focuses on student's moral development and teaching them values.

(Interview 19)

We started this in the assembly... [a] common gathering every week... [where] we give these kinds of messages. Mostly building values in students...

(Interview 20)

Very often the principal, at the morning assembly, reminds students of these values. When young children are reminded continuously of such values, they get ingrained in them.

(Interview 5)

In addition to assembly messages, supervisors went to classrooms and talked to students about these values and reminded them of their importance:

Moral issues are addressed by teachers and senior management. Supervisors even visit the classes and talk to children on these issues.

(One Asst. Head)

Like what I have said: reminding them to go to prayers and then everyday telling them to greet when the teachers come.

(Interview 6)

### **4.3.6 Summary of the Theme: A Focus on Students**

Various activities of the school indicated that there was a strong focus on student learning. Thus, the key findings in relation to this theme were:

- There was a strong emphasis on academic work, especially improving students' academic results. In addition to this, there was also an emphasis on developing the whole child.
- Many activities were conducted to enhance student learning.
- Teachers had high expectation for students.
- Students were motivated to work hard and they were respected and cared for by all staff.

The above key findings were also supported by questionnaire data (see figure eleven). As could be seen from figure eleven, over three quarters of the teachers were in strong agreement that all of the six classroom conditions (mentioned previously, in chapter two) were favourable in the school. In particular, there was strong agreement by all twenty teachers who responded to the questionnaire that they were flexible in dealing with students' needs, used effective management strategies to create an appropriate classroom environment and used a range of classroom management skills in their lessons. Despite this level of agreement to many of the aspects, some exceptions could be noted. Their views about teachers using homework to reinforce student learning and teachers regularly observing each other's teaching were less positive; this latter was the least positive. Thus, indicating that two of the conditions 'planning for teaching' and 'pedagogic partnership' were a little less favourable than the other four conditions.

In the case of supervisors, they strongly agreed to two conditions: teachers had clear 'boundaries and expectations' and had 'authentic relationships' with students. In particular, all seven supervisors strongly agreed that teachers were fair and consistent in how they dealt with students and worked toward building trust with students and that teachers had a belief that all students could learn. Moderate agreement was there for three conditions and weak agreement to one. In particular, there was largely to

strong disagreement by all supervisors that teachers used homework to reinforce and extend learning and teachers regularly observed each other and provided feedback.

The third theme of school improvement identified in the data was 'a teaching and learning focus', which is the topic of the next section.

**Figure 11: Staff responses to questionnaire (classroom conditions)**

Teachers: (n* = 20)		Strong to largely agreement	Largely to strong disagreement
<b>Authentic relationships</b>			
1	Teachers conduct their relationships in the classroom in ways that demonstrate consistency and fairness and build trust	18	2
2	Teachers understand and show that communication with pupils involves listening as much as speaking	18	2
3	Teachers encourage students to be independent learners	18	2
4	Teachers in this school believe that all students can learn	17	3
<b>Boundaries and expectations</b>			
5	Teachers use active management strategies to create and maintain an appropriate classroom environment	20	0
6	Teachers show consistency, with flexibility, in responding to pupils and events	20	0
7	Teachers establish clear boundaries to, and expectations of, pupil behaviour	18	1
8	Teachers promote a system of rewards and sanctions that emphasise expectations and promotes pupil self-esteem and self-discipline	18	2
<b>Planning for teaching</b>			
9	Teachers employ strategies that enable pupils to find meaning in lesson	19	0
10	Teachers adjust classroom strategies in response to pupil feedback during lessons	17	3
11	Teachers build variety into lesson plans	16	4
12	Teachers use homework to reinforce and extend learning	8	12
<b>Teaching repertoire</b>			
13	Teachers demonstrate a range of classroom management skills in their lessons	20	0
14	Teachers employ various teaching strategies or models with their lessons	17	3
15	Teachers trial and refine new teaching models as part of their own professional development	15	5
16	Teachers reflect on their classroom practice	15	4
<b>Pedagogic partnership</b>			
17	Teachers discuss with each other the nature of teaching strategies and their application to classroom practice and schemes of work	19	1
18	Teachers establish specifications or guidelines for using new teaching strategies	17	3
19	Teachers agree on standards used to assess student progress as result of employing a range of teaching methods	17	3
20	Teachers regularly observe each other in the classroom and give each other feedback	5	15
<b>Reflection on teaching</b>			
21	Teachers use systematically collected classroom-based data in their decision-making	16	4
22	Teachers establish clear ground rules for the collection, control and use of school-based data	16	3
23	Teachers employ effective strategies for reviewing progress and the impact of classroom innovation on pupil progress	15	4
24	Teachers are widely involved in the process of data collection	10	10

\* 'n' is sometimes less. Below are such cases.

n = 19 for nos: 7,9,16, 22 & 23

**Figure 11 (continued): Staff responses to questionnaire (classroom conditions)**

		Strong to largely agreement	Largely to strong disagreement
<b>Supervisors: (n = 7)</b>			
<b>Authentic relationships</b>			
1	Teachers in this school believe that all students can learn	7	0
2	Teachers conduct their relationships in the classroom in ways that demonstrate consistency and fairness and build trust	7	0
3	Teachers understand and show that communication with pupils involves listening as much as speaking	6	1
4	Teachers encourage students to be independent learners	4	3
<b>Boundaries and expectations</b>			
5	Teachers use active management strategies to create and maintain an appropriate classroom environment	7	0
6	Teachers show consistency, with flexibility, in responding to pupils and events	7	0
7	Teachers establish clear boundaries to, and expectations of, pupil behaviour	6	1
8	Teachers promote a system of rewards and sanctions that emphasise expectations and promotes pupil self-esteem and self-discipline	5	2
<b>Planning for teaching</b>			
9	Teachers build variety into lesson plans	5	2
10	Teachers adjust classroom strategies in response to pupil feedback during lessons	4	3
11	Teachers employ strategies that enable pupils to find meaning in lesson	4	3
12	Teachers use homework to reinforce and extend learning	0	7
<b>Teaching repertoire</b>			
13	Teachers demonstrate a range of classroom management skills in their lessons	5	2
14	Teachers employ various teaching strategies or models with their lessons	4	3
15	Teachers trial and refine new teaching models as part of their own professional development	4	3
16	Teachers reflect on their classroom practice	4	3
<b>Pedagogic partnership</b>			
17	Teachers agree on standards used to assess student progress as result of employing a range of teaching methods	7	0
18	Teachers discuss with each other the nature of teaching strategies and their application to classroom practice and schemes of work	6	1
19	Teachers establish specifications or guidelines for using new teaching strategies	4	3
20	Teachers regularly observe each other in the classroom and give each other feedback	0	7
<b>Reflection on teaching</b>			
21	Teachers employ effective strategies for reviewing progress and the impact of classroom innovation on pupil progress	4	3
22	Teachers use systematically collected classroom-based data in their decision-making	2	5
23	Teachers establish clear ground rules for the collection, control and use of school-based data	2	5
24	Teachers are widely involved in the process of data collection	1	6

## 4.4 A Teaching and Learning Focus

### 4.4.1 Curriculum: The Content

The national curriculum was taught in all schools of the Maldives. Text books had been written on this curriculum and, for the most part, the school's main objective was to cover the curricular content specified by the syllabus. Although there were text books for every subject at this level, teachers were encouraged to use other resources (e.g. library, internet) to supplement and complement what was specified in the syllabus, as this teacher mentioned:

Students have to supplement personally the work given at school then only benefits will be seen.

School actually welcomes such initiatives by students. I know it because when I give additional information, [to supplement curricular areas] school recognizes it and assist in everyway it could, in order to prepare for the lessons.

(Interview 4)

The contents of the current curriculum were more, rather than less, “content-based,<sup>20</sup>” as indicated by the curriculum personnel and, in fact, one teacher remarked similarly:

I believe the current curriculum is based more on imparting knowledge. It should be made more activity- or skills-based.

(Interview 5)

Therefore, emphasis was laid on utilizing as many activities as possible in classroom teaching so that students would be able to relate what they learnt in school to their lives later. Being able to use what they had learnt at school later in their lives, was a view shared by many. One senior management team member mentioned thus:

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<sup>20</sup> See also Ministry of Education (1995). Education Master Plan (1996-2005): Part 2 of 3: Education sector review: Final report. Ministry of Education.

It's not only learning from books, you must be able to apply what you learn... So, ... we are trying to teach like that, more interactive and child-centered learning in the classes.

(Interview 19)

## 4.4.2 Curriculum: Delivery

### 4.4.2.1 *Planning For the Lessons*

In planning for the lessons, teachers mainly used schemes of work and text books.

In preparing the lessons, it is the scheme and textbook which are used mostly.

(Interview 4)

First thing is seeing what are the objectives of the lesson, given in the scheme and, then, to see what's given in the text book to see what notes are there and then a way that I can teach it actively.

(Interview 15)

However, the use of other resources (e.g. the internet and library resources) was on the increase.

When planning, I refer to the textbook and then if I want some more activities to be involved, then I always go to the library and see, for good activities.

(Interview 12)

We ... prepare the material ahead of time... I use textbooks, library books and also reference material from the Faculty of Education's material. The biggest help is the teacher's guide... Now I use the internet[, too]...

(Interview 5)

*R: What other processes do you use for getting information?*

P: The library books; the internet.

(Interview 7)

In planning their lessons, using varied resources, many teachers made a point of considering students' prior learning<sup>21</sup> because that was the foundation on which student's built new learning. In this regard, one teacher mentioned that sometimes she consulted experts in a given topic area in order to be well prepared for the lesson.

I obtain a lot of information about the topic... I also get advice and information on the topic from experts or learned people... I also check on students' prior learning.

(Interview 8)

First, I refer to the scheme and then I consider prior learning.

(Interview 7)

#### **4.4.2.2 Teaching Methods**

A variety of teaching methods were used to help students understand better, the concepts and other material that they were supposed to learn, a finding consistent with Hopkins' (2002) classroom conditions for teaching. What the school emphasized was succinctly put by the Head:

[Now,] more visual and hands on activities are carried out compared to the past years.

It was still the 'teacher talk' method that seemed to be the dominant mode of teaching, as mentioned by one participant. But, in general, this was changing, because there was so much emphasis on doing so.

Still teacher-talk seems to be the dominant mode of teaching with many teachers, but emphasis is on teachers to let them give more responsibility to students for their own learning.

(Interview 13)

P: Actually, student-centered learning is effective.

R: *It is used here!*

P: It is used though not very commonly. But we are emphasizing a lot on this and teachers are applying it in classrooms.

(Interview 11)

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<sup>21</sup> See Levin & Nolan, 2004.

I have noted that work performed in groups or group activities helps students to learn more than when they work individually. In such group work, weaker students are able to clarify things from their friends who can do better than them. We stress a lot on carrying this type of work in classrooms, but still we have not being able to bring over this change to an acceptable level.

(Interview 13)

The student-centered learning, that is, involvement of the student, we stress on this approach a lot. In this approach, practically even they do [things]. So when they do they will learn. Even if they do it incorrectly, we can correct it ... We have been telling the teachers to have at least [some] group activities or a peer activity in the class and we have been observing them ...

(Interview 6)

Many teachers were trying more 'visual and hands-on' activities in their lessons and it was working according to some of them.

Now I am trying to change my current way of teaching, using chalk and board; this is an old way to teach.

(Interview 7)

We do active learning a lot now. And I think that is quite successful because before students did not do this well. But now students do much better than when they started.

(Interview 15)

We have been encouraged, from the management side and also from the training institutes, to do more active learning because, ... [in]doing [so], students learn more.

(Interview 9)

In one of the lessons that I observed, there was a 'visual and hands-on activity' in action: the teacher was using cut outs of a process for students to rearrange to bring the logical order in that concept. One supervisor also told me about a similar activity carried out by a teacher:

He also had an activity with students in which he gave paragraphs and asked them to cut it by sentence and rearrange it in different ways to bring sense.

The use of PPP (power point presentation) was also gaining ground in the school.

Before, we didn't use the LCD ... projector, [or] the power point presentations... It is very easy for me to explain certain things by using power point presentations. Especially in an English lesson where grammar components are taught, it is good and a useful teaching aid.

(Interview 5)

P: Power Point presentations; they are quite good.

R: *Have you used it?*

P: Yes, for my revision periods.

(Interview 7)

Using real objects found in the environment as teaching aids, had helped to improve the creative writing ability of students, as one supervisor explained:

He asked the students to bring different types of fruits. Then, in the class, he let students cut the fruits and ... feel the texture of the fruits. He then asked them to write about it. And then most students were able to elaborate more.

Other strategies included, helping in extra classes (Interview 21), using bilingualism to help weaker children (Interview 12), giving challenging work, for example, in Maths, to further develop capable minds (Interview 12) and even attaching weaker students to better students (Interviews 13 & 16).

#### ***4.4.2.3 Presentation of Lessons***

Twenty three teachers took part in the study of whom eleven gave consent to observe them while teaching. And, as one teacher was on leave during the time I had all observations scheduled, I managed to observe ten lessons: eight from grade seven and two from grade three. Of these ten, I have reported here the eight lessons observed from all the six classes in grade seven. I used a qualitative observation technique or a descriptive form of observation (Glickman, 1990) in which

The observer goes into the classroom with a general focus, or no focus at all, and records events as they occur. The events are not made to fit into a specific category, nor are they measured. Only after the recording of events does the observer rearrange his or her observations into themes. (p. 239)

Furthermore, Glickman goes on to say that “it is impossible to record all that could be possibly seen and heard in a classroom [and, therefore,] the observer must constantly scan the entire classroom and decide what is significant.” (p. 241).

Although I did not have a predetermined set of items to look for, I was, nevertheless, influenced by the works of Beresford (2003), Doyle (1978) in D. Hargreaves and Hopkins (1991), Glickman (1990), Montgomery and Hadfield (1989), and VanTassel-Baska (2004), among others, and my own experience as a supervisor observing teachers teaching, when I took the notes during the observation. (Observation notes of a Science lesson is given in Appendix 13)

Afterwards, I looked at the categories or items included in the observation forms used by both internal and external supervisors of the school and settled on a set of categories to look for in the observation notes, not losing sight of the above mentioned works. Comments (extracted from the observation notes – see Appendix 13) were then written for each category. Based on these comments, a rating (very good, good, satisfactory or ‘could do better’, unsatisfactory) was given to each category to gauge the effectiveness of the lessons (see Appendix 14).

Because I was not able to observe more than one lesson of each teacher, such that I could make a more objective comment about their effectiveness, I compared mine against the school’s supervisors, and the fact that I used more or less the categories used by the school made this comparison possible. Although it was a comparison made of different lessons, it was, nevertheless, an observation of the same teacher who had taught a similar lesson. Table eight below shows this comparison.

**Table 8: A comparison of lesson observations**

<b>Lesson observed</b>	<b>My rating on my observations</b>	<b>My rating on Supervisors' observations</b>
Teacher 1	Good	Good
Teacher 2	Good	Good
Teacher 3	Satisfactory	Good
Teacher 4	Good	Good
Teacher 5	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory / unsatisfactory
Teacher 6	Good	(Did not get a copy to rate)
Teacher 7	Borderline case	Good / satisfactory
Teacher 8	Borderline case	Good

Note: For lessons 5 & 7, supervisors provided notes of two lessons, the number I actually requested.

As can be seen from the above table, in terms of effectiveness, I found four lessons (and, by implication, four teachers out of the eight,) that could be considered as 'good', meaning, having presented the respective lessons effectively, given the objectives of the lessons; one, as satisfactory; and, two, as 'borderline' cases in terms of their lesson's effectiveness. There was one lesson that I was not confident enough to rate as being even satisfactory (see Appendix 14 for 'comments and rating' of an observed lesson).

#### **4.4.3 Curriculum Assessment: Assessing Students' Work**

The usual way teachers assessed students work was by asking questions during the lessons. Some teachers gave tests, too.

At the end of the lesson, usually I ask some questions. Even through the explanation, I keep on asking and drilling some things onto them which I ask later on and usually they answer the questions.

(Interview 15)

Normally I give tests or else I conduct question and answer sessions more like a quiz. That's how I do it.

(Interview7)

I do ask questions. At times I give papers based on the lesson. That is, if I give a grammar component, I explain. Then I give the paper to do. So, if they do it then I would assume that they have got something... Mostly it is like questions, checking on their work.

(Interview 5)

At the end of each unit (smallest content unit on which students were assessed on a formal basis), unit tests were given and teachers marked them. And, because the top management placed such a high emphasis on systematic monitoring of student progress, teachers valued the importance of the diagnostic function that these unit tests served.

Those unit tests are very useful because we can trace the children who are having difficulties and in that week itself we can start extra classes for these children.

(Interview12)

*R: What kind of information do you seek on students' learning?... Do you collect marks?*

P: Yes I do.

*R: What do you use that information for? Do you use that information for other lessons?*

P: Yes, in the level of [test] paper. If they have scored a little bit higher, the majority, then we ... make the paper a ... little bit [more] higher in standard. So likewise it is done...

(Interview 5)

Teachers also checked students' books regularly.

Students' exercise books will be marked once a week. Once this marking is done, it will be possible to know how much students have achieved.

(Interview 4)

Everyday the books are being marked ... and a small evaluation ... given ... So I will know the children who are studying or not. And about 80% of the class always complete the work. That is the average.

(Interview 21)

Further, supervisors too, did a random check on how students' books were marked and provided feedback to teachers.

Supervisors go through students books. Apart from just correcting students' work they also check on the quality of work and completion of work.  
(school head)

I have to observe teachers' lessons and check students' work.  
(Interview 11)

This became a kind of quality assurance measure for teachers on how they assessed students' work.

#### **4.4.4 Summary of the Theme: A Teaching and Learning Focus**

The data from this study suggested that teaching and learning took the centre stage in this school. The following key findings attested to this fact.

- Despite a set curriculum that was required to be taught, all teachers were encouraged to use other resources and, in fact, some used them.
- Activity-based learning in classrooms was emphasized.
- It was not only academic learning that was emphasized, social and personal development skills were also given heed. Said differently, education was seen as a 'holistic endeavor', according to many staff.
- Coordination meetings were conducted to see that teachers prepared their lessons and past lessons were discussed. In addition, teachers' lessons were observed and feedback provided. Furthermore, students' work was checked regularly by teachers and randomly by supervisors.
- Assessment of student learning was given a high accord by staff at all levels, especially the Head, who personally monitored their performances and shared the information regularly with staff.

All of the above suggested that teaching and learning took the centre stage at the school. There was further support to this finding from questionnaire data (see figure twelve). In this regard, there was strong agreement by both teachers and supervisors

to a set of statements related to teaching and learning. More than three quarters of the teachers agreed that they talked about quality of teaching in school, made time to review classroom practice, shared their experiences about the improvement of classroom practice and that the focus of staff development was mainly on teaching and learning. Supervisors, on the other hand, agreed strongly to teachers in relation to teaching and learning. There was unanimous agreement that staff shared their experiences about the improvement of classroom practice and that focus of staff development was on improving teaching and learning. Five of the six supervisors also strongly agreed that in school they talked about quality of teaching and teachers made time to review their classroom practice.

Furthermore, Hopkins, West, Ainscow, Harris and Beresford (1997), in Beresford (2003), advocated the presence of a set of student behaviours that would enhance their learning: self-assessment; independent learning; affinity to teachers; learning repertoire; and, adjustment to school. The student questionnaire asked them (students) to rate these behaviours. Figure thirteen shows their responses.

**Figure 12: Staff responses to questionnaire (school conditions)**

		Strong to largely agreement	Largely to strong disagreement
<b>Teachers: (n = 20*)</b>			
<b>Teaching and learning</b>			
1	In this school we talk about the quality of our teaching	17	3
2	Teachers make time to review their classroom practice	17	3
3	In this school the focus of staff development is on improving teaching & learning	17	3
4	We share experiences about the improvement of classroom practice	16	4
<b>Leadership</b>			
5	In the school we review and modify our plans	17	3
6	Senior management take a lead over development priorities	16	4
7	Staff in the school have a clear vision of where we are going	15	5
8	Our planning processes encourage good working relationships	14	6
9	We get tasks done by working in teams	14	6
10	Staff taking on coordinating roles are skillful in working with colleagues	13	7
11	Our long-term aims are reflected in the school's plans	12	6
12	As a school we review the progress of changes we introduce	11	9
13	Everyone is fully aware of the school's development priorities	10	10
<b>Staff development</b>			
14	Professional learning is valued in this school	12	7
15	In devising school policies emphasis is placed on professional development	12	7
16	Staff undertaking leadership roles are given appropriate support	11	7
17	The school's organization provides time for staff development	11	9
18	Staff are given opportunities to take on leadership roles	5	14
<b>Involvement</b>			
19	This school takes parents' views into consideration when embarking on changes	12	7
20	Staff are kept informed about key decisions	11	9
21	Staff and SBM work in collaboration to decide on future directions for the school	9	11
22	I feel able to express my views freely about school policies and practices	9	11
23	We ask students for their views about various aspect of the school's functioning	6	14
24	We make effective use of outside support agencies in our development work	6	14

*SBM = school board members*

*\* 'n' is sometimes less. Below are such cases.*

11. n = 18

12. n = 19

13. n = 19

14. n = 19

18. n = 18

24. n = 19

**Figure 12 (continued): Staff responses to questionnaire (school conditions)**

		Strong to largely agreement	Largely to strong disagreement
Supervisors: (n = 6)			
<b>Teaching and learning</b>			
1	In this school the focus of staff development is on improving teaching & learning	6	0
2	We share experiences about the improvement of classroom practice	6	0
3	In this school we talk about the quality of our teaching	5	1
4	Teachers make time to review their classroom practice	5	1
<b>Leadership</b>			
5	Our planning processes encourage good working relationships	6	0
6	Everyone is fully aware of the school's development priorities	6	0
7	Staff taking on coordinating roles are skillful in working with colleagues	6	0
8	As a school we review the progress of changes we introduce	5	1
9	We get tasks done by working in teams	5	1
10	Staff in the school have a clear vision of where we are going	5	1
11	Senior management take a lead over development priorities	5	1
12	Our long-term aims are reflected in the school's plans	4	2
13	In the school we review and modify our plans	4	2
<b>Staff development</b>			
14	Professional learning is valued in this school	6	0
15	The school's organization provides time for staff development	6	0
16	Staff undertaking leadership roles are given appropriate support	6	0
17	In devising school policies emphasis is placed on professional development	5	1
18	Staff are given opportunities to take on leadership roles	5	1
<b>Involvement</b>			
19	I feel able to express my views freely about school policies and practices	3	3
20	We make effective use of outside support agencies in our development work	3	3
21	This school takes parents' views into consideration when embarking on changes	2	4
22	Staff and SBM work in collaboration to decide on future directions for the school	2	4
23	We ask students for their views about various aspect of the school's functioning	1	5
24	Staff are kept informed about key decisions	6	0

*SBM = school board members*

It could be seen by eyeballing the student responses shown in this figure (figure 13) that, on the whole, these six conditions were rated favourably by the students. In particular, the majority of the students who filled out the questionnaire agreed that teachers were helpful, they got on well with teachers, teachers taught new ways of working and they had access to books and other learning material. Further, the majority of the students believed that they worked hard, behaved well and attended school regularly. However, there were some aspects of these conditions that were rated not so favourably. Students did not seem to ask teachers about how they could improve, as only one student agreed to the statement, "I ask teachers how I can

improve my work". Similarly, there was only a weak agreement by students that there was variety in lessons and adequate group work was given.

In the next section, 'investing in staff' is discussed. This was the fourth major theme of school improvement identified in the data.

**Figure 13: Students' responses to questionnaire (the student conditions)**

(n = 13*)		Strong to largely agreement	Largely to strong disagreement
<b>Self assessment</b>			
1.	I know how well I am doing in school.	9	3
2.	At some time during the day I think about what I have learnt.	7	5
3.	I am serious about reporting the work that I do at school to my parents.	6	6
4.	I ask teachers how I can improve my work.	1	11
<b>Independent learning</b>			
5.	I can find the classroom books and equipment I need for lessons.	12	0
6.	We do problem-solving in lessons.	5	7
7.	I use books at home or in libraries to do research.	5	7
8.	We do group work in lessons.	4	7
<b>Affinity to teachers</b>			
9.	I get on well with teachers in this school.	12	0
10.	Teachers in this school are helpful.	12	1
11.	Teachers in this school make us want to work.	9	3
12.	We discuss with teachers what work we should do.	7	6
<b>Learning repertoire</b>			
13.	We are taught new ways of working; e.g., how to work well in groups.	11	2
14.	Lessons in this school are interesting.	10	3
15.	I cope with the different teaching styles that teachers use.	8	5
16.	Lessons in this school are varied, and don't follow a pattern.	4	9
<b>Orientation to learning</b>			
17.	I work hard in school.	12	1
18.	I look forward to lessons.	10	3
19.	I put lots of effort into my homework.	9	4
20.	Hard work is rewarded in this school.	7	6
<b>Adjustment to school</b>			
21.	My behaviour in school is good.	12	1
22.	My weekly attendance at school is good.	11	2
23.	I can see the sense of having school rules.	8	5
24.	Teachers in this school are firm but fair.	7	6

\* 'n' is sometimes less. Below are such cases.

1- 7: 'n' = 12

8: 'n' = 11

9 & 11: 'n' = 12

## 4.5 Investing In Staff

### 4.5.1 Staff Development: Forms, Opportunities and Relevance

Staff development in this school took many forms. Workshops and seminars seemed to be the most common form. Furthermore, a lot of training was provided in-house where the staff developer or the presenter of information could either be a resource person from outside or someone from within. But there were training opportunities provided from outside of the school, including some overseas training as well. So, in general, school placed a lot of emphasis on professional development and, therefore, a variety of opportunities were provided to its staff.

In almost every term, there is a workshop that is conducted by the school, or someone from outside comes and conducts these workshops.

(Interview 13)

Many in-school staff development programmes are conducted for the teachers. Depending on the availability, such opportunities from outside of the school are also provided for staff.

(Interview 18)

Recently, end of last year, we had a workshop. We brought a person from Malaysia to conduct a workshop on time management.

(Interview 6)

In addition to these more formal workshops or seminars, school provided opportunities for professional talk, as one form of staff development. In this regard, the Thursday's 'performance discussion' sessions and the 'coordination meetings' were two very appropriate avenues for staff to talk about the practice of teaching and, indeed, they were regular staff development activities (See Appendix 23 for a sample of notes taken from these two meetings).

Every week, Thursday, we have this session ... [where] ... sometimes somebody from outside will come and share things or somebody from the school would. Even the Head will share some thing. So these kinds of sessions, [...] every session is a professional development [activity].

(Interview 20)

Even among ourselves we can do staff development by sharing ... lessons [and] ... ideas. Even at coordination meetings we discuss now in detail, the activities that we could carry out. I think that is also staff development...

(Interview 13)

'Demonstration lessons' were also becoming one form of staff development that staff found useful:

At the discussions we hold on Thursdays, teachers who have taken effective lessons during that week are sometimes asked to demonstrate that lesson to other teachers. This also gives them lot of encouragement.

(Interview 2)

Well taught lessons are demonstrated to other teachers as examples.

(Interview 4)

During Thursdays' sessions, quite often we see different lessons being demonstrated by different teachers.

(Interview 8)

Finally, there was a glimpse of possible partnerships, both at the group and at the individual levels:

This year, an activity was conducted with the initiative of the SMT members of three schools. It was about working with a focus on people's and one's own perception.

(Interview 18)

In arranging [preparing] my lesson, I used to get help from a[n outside] personnel. I always keep contact with him because I am helping him in ... revising the [name] curriculum.

(Interview 21)

Regardless of what form staff development took, school tried to make staff development as appropriate and relevant as possible to the needs of the staff. In this

regard, staff needs were identified, in addition to school needs, before embarking on a development programme.

We talk to teachers and identify their needs. We also keep records of our observations from which we generate staff development priorities.

(Interview 6)

If we want to have a staff development activity, most of the time[s] the teachers are asked, “what do they want”, “which areas do they want on staff development”. That is one way ... The other way is, there are areas which the teachers might not recognize, but ... supervise[ors] ... might see ... So depending on those things we carry out staff development.

(Interview 16)

First, we have discussions with teachers and we find out what are the areas they want to have staff development in... and ... sometimes when the school feels that an area is needed for improvement, school conducts.

(Interview 22)

Further, the staff themselves talked about the usefulness of their training, particularly, training which provided them with skills which, upon utilization, had a direct impact on students. This had been evidenced by the answers provided by nine teachers who were asked, “Which staff development activity impacted their teaching most?” Although different staff mentioned different programmes that they had participated in, seven out of ten teachers mentioned that it was training related to classroom practice that had most impact on them.

After those sessions, I started realizing that there are certain things we should mainly focus on ... The way we did the test papers, assessment[s], assessing them, those sessions were really good... Because of those sessions, we actually got a very clear idea about what we are testing and why we are testing all students.

(Interview 12)

The most useful one was a two-day workshop conducted in school where key resource persons in the area of language teaching were brought to give us presentations.

(Interview 4)

While teachers found that training related to classroom practice had most impact on their work, supervisors reported that, for them, training related to personnel development and management skills were the most useful. This could be understood given the varied tasks involved in their job for which these skills were important, if not vital. In the past three years, training on personnel development was considered to be the most useful training received by five of the eight supervisors while time management was found to be the most useful training for three. Two among this latter also mentioned that curriculum related training was equally useful.

The recent one where we had, I mean, being effective on our own, that workshop. It has actually helped me a lot. It gave me a chance to meet myself; ... to think about...[self] that's what I mean. So when I knew those things, I could help those whom I have to help.

(Interview 16)

The workshops conducted [on] management and how to manage time, these have helped me a lot... The curriculum workshop [on] how to write objectives and making test papers and table of specification also helped...

(Interview 13)

When any new initiative was embarked upon, it was preceded by appropriate training even though it might be a seminar type, briefing session or many hours long workshop. In other words, teachers were not left on their own to find out a way to implement what was being required of them.

*R: Was there any training given to staff in conducting the Reading Camp?*

P: A briefing was given... [and it] consisted of preparing materials, showing the material to all and discussing with teachers on how to run the programme. The principal gave the briefing...

(Interview 10)

I gave a briefing on how this [Vocabulary building] programme will be conducted... I also gave a sheet to each teacher on how it will be conducted ...

(Interview 13)

## 4.5.2 School Being Supportive of Staff Development

While talking of staff development activities, many staff mentioned that the school was very supportive of staff development.

This school has been quite supportive of staff development. I mean, if we want to have a staff development activity, most of the times the teachers are asked, “What do they want”, “which areas do they want on staff development”.

(Interview 16)

If they can do anything for us to learn ..., they try their best.

(Interview 7)

It is really one thing that our top management does: encourage ongoing learning and staff development.

(Interview 20)

It did so by providing various opportunities to develop professional capacity, such as conducting workshops, releasing teachers for their own studies, sharing professional material, encouragement from the top management to keep on learning and targeting both academic and non-academic staff:

To promote ongoing learning, school conducts workshops. This year they have conducted two workshops so far and, in addition, a session of 45 minutes on writing.

(Interview 14)

Our school, I would say, support teachers' learning because if a teacher on her own applies for a course, the school gives leave and also if somebody is interested in attending a workshop somewhere, the school gives leave.

(Interview 22)

The senior management team members collect information and share it with us.

(Interview23)

Staff are encouraged to read academic related articles ... [and ] relevant articles are shared with teachers [at] Thursday[’s] discussions...

Careful thought is given to develop staff working in all departments. That includes senior management staff, teachers, administrative staff as well as service staff.

(School head)

### **4.5.3 Teacher Encouragement**

Teachers were given feedback about their lessons as one important way of encouraging them to do good work. All ten teachers interviewed agreed that supervisors observed their lessons and provided feedback. Four teachers mentioned that feedback provided by supervisors was helpful to the extent that they identified areas for improvement and provided encouragement on positive aspects.

Always I get feed back when someone observes me.

(Interview 12)

They give feedback. Sometimes they give us a chance to comment ...

Sometimes, when we hold activities and she's not happy with something she's gonna give it in the feedback and then in the next lesson ... I will know which area I have to improve ...

(Interview 9)

After observing a lesson ... they [supervisors] prepare a sheet for both to sign and on which it would be noted good points and those that need improvement.

(Interview 4)

Two teachers were pleased about the way supervisors provided feedback.

I am very pleased about how they give feedback. Mostly they will talk about positive things first and then mention negative aspects as well, but in a positive way... I take their comments as positive ones and I am very happy about it.

(Interview 7)

I appreciate very much how they give feedback to not-so-good points in the lesson. It is done in a constructive way. They also comment on good points as well. I'm very happy about the way they give feedback.

(Interview 8)

But none said anything negative about the feedback provided except one who said that observations were few in number.

Lesson observation by supervisors is few. But they do give feedback.

(Interview 14)

The usual procedure for obtaining feedback, it seemed, was for teachers to go and ask for it immediately after the observation. That is, if they were free the next period or, as soon as they were free. In this way they were able to get feedback the same day. If not, at least the next day, even though one teacher said that it might take a little longer.

We have to go and ask for the feedback. Usually they will also say that to come and get feedback when we are free. If it is just right after the lesson and if we are free, we can go and get the feedback.

(Interview 15)

Generally they would give the feedback the same day and sometimes if we have a free period next, feedback is given just after observation. At the latest, the next day they would give feedback.

(Interview 8)

Even the same day they give [feedback] or else, as soon as possible, during the week.

(Interview 23)

Although it was obvious that, for the most part, feedback was provided verbally, it was also provided in written form.

The supervisors give feedback directly to us, both verbally and in written form.

(Interview 5)

They prepare a sheet for both to sign and on which it would be noted good points and those that need improvement.

(Interview 4)

In addition to giving direct feedback about their lessons, other forms of encouragement were provided for teachers in order to bring out the best in them. For example, although not widespread, instances of peer coaching prevailed in the school:

[In my] management training[, I] ... never did supervision. So I base my work on the help that I receive from a very senior staff. She's very helpful and a very good coach.

(Interview 6)

Furthermore, whatever good work that was done by teachers was always identified and recognized, sometimes even publicly:

When I give additional information [to supplement curricular areas] school recognizes it and assist in every way it could in order to prepare for the lessons.

(Interview 4)

If we do a positive thing, they praise us and, if we do something negative, they would tell us to correct it... Sometimes on special days, like the Teachers' Day, we might be given a certificate of appreciation...

(Interview 7)

If someone does something good, it is always appreciated...

If you do something good they will say, "This is very good." They might say so in front of other teachers also ...

If we do something good, they will never let it go unnoticed. That is something I like here.

(Interview 12)

However, there was one teacher who disagreed:

Sometimes ... you feel that you've worked very hard and it's not appreciated.

(Interview 9)

#### 4.5.4 Leadership Opportunities

One of the things that a good leader did was to create or build leaders for the future. Another thing was to spread leadership to others so that maximum benefit could be obtained from what ever work that was done, because, a single person alone could not do this in today's organizations for their work was too complex. Hence, the school tried to nurture future leaders by providing many leadership opportunities to as many staff as possible, as the Head mentioned:

Every teacher has the opportunity to take the initiative, work for school improvement ...

... Supervisor[s] ... are [also] encouraged to use their knowledge and skills and make a difference to the work they do...

Five teachers were of the view that their school provided opportunities for leadership:

There are many opportunities to take leadership roles. For example, if you want to discuss or present something at a meeting, you could do that.

(Interview 23)

School would allow us to take initiatives in various activities. For example, I can bring students to quiz practice when I want. School would never say "No, you can't bring them".

(Interview 14)

Even training was provided in this area, said one, among these five:

They have some teacher development programme[s] regarding leadership qualities and those things.

(Interview 7)

Two said that such opportunities were not plentiful:

*R: What opportunities are there for teachers to develop leadership skills?*

P: Not so many, I would say; but to some extent there is, because, nowadays mostly we get orders.

*R: [You cannot initiate something of your own!]*

P: Yes we can...

(Interview 12)

Some even contradicted what they said first but, in the end, it appeared, opportunities were available:

We are not given opportunities to take leadership roles usually, but the school assigns roles, like for sports and other activities...

We usually can't initiate an activity but sometimes can, like, we are doing for the literary competition...

We can do whatever we want in school, there's nobody to stop us. In teaching, we are encouraged to do it.

(Interview 15)

#### **4.5.5 Summary of the Theme: Investing in Staff**

The case study school accorded a high priority to develop its staff. Features that made staff development an important component of the school's development were:

- The school management was very supportive of and, placed a lot of emphasis on, professional development. Hence, a variety of opportunities were provided for the staff.
- Professional or staff development took many forms of which workshops and seminars were the most common.
- Both in-house and outside training, including, at times, overseas, were provided.
- Staff were encouraged to do good work by providing them with regular feedback on their lessons and through recognition of good work.
- Many opportunities were provided for staff to take leadership roles and training was also given in this regard.

The above features of the case study school suggested that investing in staff was highly regarded. The questionnaire data also lend support to this fact (see figure 12). In this regard, there was largely agreement by teachers and strong agreement by supervisors to a set of statements related to staff development. However, there was one exception: nearly three quarters of the teachers disagreed either largely or strongly, that they were given opportunities to take leadership roles; whereas five of the six supervisors who responded to the questionnaire said, such opportunities were

provided for the teachers. ‘Strong leadership by the Head’ is the theme that is discussed next.

## **4.6 Strong Leadership by the Head**

The Head provided strong leadership for the school. This was evident, above everything else, in her active involvement in school matters.

### **4.6.1 Building a Shared Vision**

“A good vision can often be expressed succinctly in motto or slogan form” (Louis & Miles, 1990, p. 219). Although a vision *per se* was yet to be developed, the school had a motto that depicted excellence in education that was closely followed:

We do not have a mission statement at the moment. [Excellence in education is depicted in] ... our motto. With every work we do we try to uphold the school motto.

(Interview 2)

Normally the work of this school is related to our motto... We work in this spirit in order to get good results for each and every student.

(Interview 4)

This vision was articulated by the Head. Thus, there was a high priority accorded to academic excellence: setting of the high target, 80% average pass rate for students; enforcing the policy to re-work with students who did not achieve the required level to reach this target; taking a personal interest in reviewing the students’ results continuously to monitor this target; and, her active participation in review meetings to clarify whether targets were achieved or not, all attested to this priority.

We are very much focusing on students’ results... Right now, we have a target, 80%. So we try to achieve that target as much as possible.

(Interview 11)

School's results are improving, so that's a big achievement. Now the principal looks into this matter personally and, therefore, this has become a driving force and an incentive for us to pursue our efforts on improving results.

(Interview 10)

The keeping of the slogan visible, further helped to communicate and strengthened the need for academic excellence.

**“What can you do to make sure that student passing in one grade ALSO passes in the other grades?”** Heading of seven charts/graphs put on the glass pane of the Supervisors' Office and also on the staff room notice board

(Excerpt: Field Notes of 1/6/2005)

In symbolic terms, all written communications carried the school motto, signifying the importance accorded to excellence. [Some samples are given in Appendix 15]

Although academic excellence was given the highest accord, the vision did not sideline the personal and social development of students; thus, there was, in the terms of many participants, a 'holistic emphasis' incorporated in the vision (see the section on 'holistic emphasis').

#### **4.6.2 Emphasis on Proper Planning**

The Head had a strong determination to plan all school activities. The comments she made about some of the decisions made by the central office attested to this fact.

*R: Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you would like to add?*

P: Yes. It would be very easy for the schools if MOE would plan,... have a proper plan and then work in harmony with the school, considering schools' needs instead of having a totally different agenda

An example of such an unplanned activity unfolded while I was there (see the following excerpt):

Just after the meeting with a person from the curriculum department who was briefing all the Maldivian staff about a new educational TV programme that

they were going to start the following week, I met the Head briefly to talk about how to obtain some information and also to fix a time to meet the administrator. She just highlighted the ad-hoc activities that MOE puts forward.

*OC: This relates to what she said the other day in her interview: programmes are not planned well-ahead of time and school's priorities are not taken into consideration: So here's a good example of what she said.*

[Field Notes: 28/4/2005].

Furthermore, the Head herself said the following about planning, indicating that the school's priorities should take precedence over everything else:

Now we identify the needs of the school and plan and work accordingly...

We still have meticulous planning and work to do. However the focus has changed to the needs of the school and not to the needs of outside agencies. We now have the opportunity to focus on students' academic as well personal development that is necessary to develop a whole child.

Many participants agreed that everything was systematically planned now; and planned well ahead of time. Further, roles and responsibilities were identified and a position description or job description given to all staff (Appendix 16 shows a sample copy). Hence, work had become easy for them.

In this school there is proper planning done for everything... things won't come just like that; we will know everything ahead of time. For example, the Study Camp is on Friday, we knew that right from the first of May and we are getting ready for it.

(Interview 12)

When I compare now and previous years [five year ago], I could say now things are done more systematically. It is more organized and what everyone has to do has been written down. Activities are well planned ahead of time...

(Interview 18)

When I was working five years ago, the responsibilities were not that very clear... It was not very clear which direction I have to go. But now it is very

clear cut, like, I know what my duties are, what I have to do and it is very easy for me to work now, [and] to plan my work.

(Interview 19)

For curricular planning, one of (if not) the most important functions in any school, specific mechanisms existed: the scheme preparation which was held once a term and coordination meeting which was held once a week.

Staff development, another key area in school life, was conducted in consultation with teachers (see the section on staff development). And, generally, a staff development plan was drawn for the following year before the current year ended:

Most of the times what happens is we plan ahead. For next year we will have planned these kinds of staff development activities.

(Interview 20)

A daily work schedule was drawn and put up on the notice board for staff to see their additional duties. (Appendix 17 shows a sample copy).

### **4.6.3 Creating a Learning Culture in the School**

The principal tried to create a learning culture in the school. First and foremost she modeled being the 'head learner' (Barth, 1990). In this regard, she attended professional development workshops, read professional material and kept selected ones accessible to teachers. Important articles were shared at staff meetings, highlighting key issues. In one of the meetings that I attended, she shared an article on correcting students work (see the following excerpt):

First meeting (Afternoon-session teachers)  
Thursday, 5<sup>th</sup> May 2005: 12 pm – 12.50pm

#### Agenda item two: Sharing of an article with teachers

The Head shares an article about 'marking' with the teachers. She highlights an example given in the article and then assigns a task to teachers with an example from the school. She gave time to read and think about it and asked how to mark. One teacher suggests the following: Spelling, grammar and

punctuation 4 marks; content 6 marks. Another teacher says, “ask the Head,” another says, “develop a marking scheme, discuss this and then mark”. To this latter, the Head says, “that’s better”. The Head also brought to their notice the point that different teachers might mark the same thing differently...

(Field notes: 5/5/2005)

A high priority was given to train staff, as had been indicated previously in the section on staff development. Further, despite schools difficulties in getting fully staffed, policies relating to staff taking temporary leave to study were kept as flexible as possible.

If we want to participate in a course we are able to do it...

If they can do anything for us to learn ..., they try their best. Even though they have teacher shortages now, they are sending some to the Faculty of Education.

(Interview 7)

Furthermore, everything possible was done to refresh current staff and new staff were given an orientation about their work, as the Head mentioned:

Like any other year, this year’s first meeting included introduction of staff [to] their role[s] and school’s expectations.

Finally, school had provided internet access to all teachers for them to acquire new knowledge and, as mentioned earlier, at key points in time, such as meetings, she reiterated the importance of learning.

#### **4.6.4 Being People-Oriented**

Staff were treated with respect and care. She was even empathetic towards them.

The current head does things with teachers’ consent mostly and in such a way that workload for teachers does not become unduly heavy.

(Interview 14)

But a notable aspect about her according to one teacher was that she maintained impartiality in the sense that all were treated equally and fairly.

What I found in her was that she was quite friendly with everyone and there were no favourites.

(Interview 21)

While teachers were required to treat students similarly as stipulated in the Handbook, “Avoid favouritism and be impartial” and “Develop good relationship with students and show love and care”, the Head modeled the way. For an example, on many instances when I followed her to various meetings, she smiled to passing students, at times, asked a question and, at other times greeted them for which they too returned the greeting. Sometimes students greeted first, to which she greeted back.

It is not only the academic staff who were treated in this way but every staff. One of the decisions that she took regarding the running of school canteen indicated how she cared about maintenance staff (see the following excerpt):

The Head states that canteen is now run by the school’s own maintenance staff. This provides some income for these staff who are the most disadvantaged in terms of income.

[Field Notes: 24/4/2005]

Kouzes and Posner (1987, p. 10) wrote: “Leaders ... *enable others to act*” [their emphasis]. In this regard, staff talked of the ease with which they were able to get resources for teaching and learning.

What ever we need, they will provide. Even if we ask for something that is expensive, still they will try to provide it.

(Interview 12)

If we wanted to use the video, school organizes it or, if we want to print some notes for students, it also would be done ...

(Interview 4)

For the smooth facilitation of these resources, the Head kept a close working relationship<sup>22</sup> with the school administrator, one who had significant influence in providing resources, often a conflict ridden relationship in some of Male' schools.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, every available opportunity was made use of to recognize and praise good work done by both staff and pupils.

#### **4.6.5 Personal Involvement in Monitoring and Evaluation**

##### ***4.6.5.1 Monitoring of Students' Work***

The last two regimes of the school placed a high emphasis on systematic monitoring of student progress. Even though this emphasis started during the previous regime as indicated by many, it was the current head, who was then the assistant, who did the actual analysis.

Three or four years back nothing much was done by way of analysis. Now we even analyse the class level assessments... The former head ... started sharing and displaying these analyses...The [current] head, ... former assistant head, ... was the person actually working on the analyses ...

(Interview 13)

And, now being the Head herself, she was ever more determined to continue this trend. As such, she described how this was done in the school currently:

Every week I go through the results of the assessments given at the presence of teachers and supervisors involved in the particular grade. Similarly at review meetings held with senior management, supervisors report on aspects such as students' behaviour, incompleteness of work etc. Therefore monitoring and intervention takes place throughout.

(School Head)

(See Appendix 22 for a sample of notes taken of a weekly review meeting and the format used by supervisors to report past week's work to the Head).

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<sup>22</sup> In the interest of confidentiality, I have refrained from quoting directly.

The school used the self-reference criterion<sup>23</sup> to monitor progress over time and this was because there were no national standards against which to base the performance level. The school level yard sticks, according to the 'School Handbook' were: "Those who achieve a final aggregate of 85% would get "Commended reports" and those who achieve 90% would get "Honour-listed reports".

We don't have something [like] a national exam to measure us against other schools. So only we can say that our 'Honour List' is this much; our 'Commended [List]' is this much...

(Interview 16)

We have been comparing [results] every year. Even this year we are comparing with the last years marks and the previous years marks ...

(Interview 22)

#### ***4.6.5.2 Evaluating School Performance***

Personally the Head was involved in evaluating school's performance. As such, she was well informed about classroom teaching through her attendance at weekly review meetings (see the following excerpt):

##### Weekly Review Meetings (Sundays)

The principal meets all supervisors together with the two assistant heads. In this meeting the supervisors report a summary of their work for the previous week which includes their main activities and concerns. This summary is not a descriptive write-up, but a jotted down points based on a set format and yet it is an informative meeting for head with regard to student learning and the teaching of teachers.

(Field notes: 15/5/2005)

Also, she had knowledge about the capabilities of individual teachers and was ready to assert professional authority when the need arose. Asking a supervisor to tell a teacher who seemed not to be doing good work to prepare detailed lesson plans and show the supervisor for a month, was a bold pronouncement in this regard. But she was confident in saying so. I was observing this meeting.

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<sup>23</sup> See Baumgart, 2001; Stoll & Fink, 1996.

#### **4.6.6 Visible Presence**

The Head was in the school most of the times. Literally, she was visible almost all the time due to the location of her room and, above everything else, the door was kept open almost always. It must be noted that the school functioned on double shifts and, except for the Head, there was a second set of staff for the second session. Unless she had a meeting to attend outside the school, which was not very common, she was in the school the whole morning session. However, she took a break in the early afternoon and returned back to school and stayed on until after the second session was over. And, during session breaks, she always came out so that teachers, parents and students could see her. Occasionally a parent might come near her to say something; this informal channel was always open. This was her routine. I was given a desk in one of the rooms close to her office, from where I could see her leave and come into the office. Because the lessons I observed and most meetings I attended were held in the morning session, I was in the school up until two in the afternoon most of the days and sometimes I had to come back in the afternoon for scheduled interviews or collect documents from afternoon staff.

#### **4.6.7 Empowering Others**

A lot of effort was made to empower others. The 'role/task designation' chart signified this effort (see Appendix 18). To bring out the best in staff, specific roles were assigned to them according to their capabilities.

Work is assigned based on their ability, competence, experience and knowledge. For example, supervisor looking after English Language has good command of the language.

(School head)

Her responsibility did not stop there; she monitored the leadership exercised by them and, when necessary, changed the task to suit the person. In this regard, she mentioned, during an informal conversation, about a recent swap: One supervisor strong in providing leadership support was put in charge of one grade, while the previous one in charge, being not so good at providing the leadership help, was put in charge of one subject area in which she was stronger than the other, across two grades. As mentioned earlier, staff were given training in leadership and management and

they were encouraged to take leadership roles as appropriate for them in discharging their duties.

Finally, senior staff could authorize staff training and teachers themselves could recommend training as one participant mentioned:

Principal told us to organize workshops for teachers on our own then she'll do the funding for us...

Even if they need to conduct a workshop and if they think a certain resource person is good for them, they can always inform the school.

*R: Who are "they" you are referring to?*

The teachers. They can inform us or SAP who would then arrange the workshop.

(Interview 17)

This had another significance as well: there was a high level of trust that the Head placed in her staff. Trusting staff in this way would enhance collaborative work (Blasé & Blasé, 2006; Hopkins, 2007) and, as Hopkins (2007) mentioned, staff did their best when they were trusted.

#### **4.6.8 Building Allies or Creating Partnerships**

Fullan (1997a) argued that school leaders should try to build allies through school related activities or projects with at least five groups: senior level administrators, peers, teachers, parents and other stakeholders. In this study, 'senior level administrators' was the Ministry of Education (the central office) and 'other stakeholders' included professional institutions and other organizations. To the extent that building allies or creating partnerships was about relationships, data on these relationships have been presented in the next section on 'culture' under 'relationships'. However, data on communication, the means through which the Head maintained these relationships, is presented here.

Various channels for communication were put in place for all staff to know what was going on. One participant made this comment:

There is a mechanism for letting teachers know what's going around in school... They circulate [information]. We are made aware of cases.

(Interview 5)

As mentioned earlier, key responsibilities were provided in written form and there were many avenues, such as weekly 'coordination meetings' and Thursdays' 'performance discussion' meetings (see Appendix 19) for staff to talk about important issues. In addition, teachers gave written feedback at the end of each year.

Furthermore, for important events or activities, staff views were elicited, although staff feelings were mixed on this issue.

Sometimes some decisions are made from the management without speaking to the supervisors or without speaking to the teachers...

(Interview 9)

She invited all teachers to give their views and ideas about the school.

(Interview 21)

For staff development, staff were consulted, as mentioned earlier and, finally, the principal's door was always kept open for teachers to meet and discuss any issue with their seniors.

Senior management is very supportive; we can talk to them anytime. Even if we have personal issues we can talk to them.

(Interview 12)

If teachers have an issue they normally take the matter to the Head through the grade supervisor. But they can also go directly to the principal; there are no restrictions.

(Interview 4)

#### **4.6.9 Summary of the Theme: Strong Leadership by the Head**

The Head provided strong leadership for the school by being actively involved in school matters. Areas in which her active involvement were most notable were:

- Paid attention to building a shared vision
- Emphasised proper planning
- Maintained an academic focus
- Kept teaching and learning at centre stage
- Personally got involved in monitoring and evaluation
- Fostered a learning culture in school
- Took a people-oriented approach in work
- Empowered others
- Worked towards building allies or creating partnerships

Data from the questionnaire, for the most part, supported the above findings (see figure 12). In this regard, there was strong agreement from both teachers and supervisors to a set of statements related to leadership. More than three quarters of the supervisors either strongly or largely agreed to all the statements. In particular, all six supervisors strongly agreed that the planning process encouraged good work relationships, everyone was made fully aware of development priorities and senior staff were skillful in working with colleagues. In the case of the teachers, more than half either strongly or largely agreed to all the statements. However, unlike supervisors, there was only moderate agreement by teachers that they were made fully aware of development priorities.

Furthermore, in terms of involvement, there was only weak agreement by teachers that their views were elicited while supervisors moderately agreed on this issue. And, with regard to communication, teachers and supervisors were more divided in their views. While there was moderate agreement by teachers that they were informed of key decisions, all six supervisors strongly agreed on this issue.

The last of the themes (but not the least) identified in the data was 'school culture'. This theme is taken up in the next section.

## 4.7 School Culture

### 4.7.1 Introduction

'Friendly' was the most common word used to describe the schools' culture by most participants. It was a culture in which teachers were supported, helped and cared for.

*R: How would you describe the culture of your school?*

P: A very friendly culture and a very supportive one as well.

(Interview 22)

I would describe it as a very friendly environment.

(Interview 18)

There is also a caring and [a] friendly culture in the school.

(Interview 2)

I think that we have a very friendly atmosphere. Here, everybody helps each other a lot.

(Interview 15)

Thus, there was an indication that the school exhibited a strong culture, an important aspect for school improvement efforts. However, culture is not easily observed; rather, it is expressed most commonly in three interrelated dimensions: Structures, norms, supporting teaching and learning and, working relationships.

### 4.7.2 Structures (Policies, Systems and Strategies)

There were appropriate structures or frameworks for teachers and other senior staff to do their work. As mentioned earlier, roles and responsibilities were clearly laid out and, in written form, given to all staff (see the section on "Emphasis on proper planning"). In addition, the 'School Handbook' specified in detail what was expected of everyone. Furthermore, a daily roster, signed by the Head, was put up on the notice board that indicated to staff what they were supposed to do in addition to their teaching duties.

### *Planning and preparation of lessons*

A well established structure existed for planning, preparation and review of lessons, the key activity for majority of the staff; that is, the 'coordination meetings'. Weekly coordination meetings were scheduled for discussing the following week's curricular work in detail and also to shed light on the current week's work.

There will be a coordination meeting once a week in each subject. In this meeting, all the lessons for the coming week will be planned, including the most appropriate method and whatever teaching materials that would be needed.

(Interview 4)

The coordination meetings help a lot, because we usually discuss ways in which we can teach actively.

(Interview 15)

One could say that these were meetings for professional talk. It was professional in the sense that a lot of interaction took place as regards what's the most meaningful way to get the message across to students. It was very lively and informal, and, yet to the point. I observed four of these meetings. (See Appendix 19)

Before the beginning of each term, a 'Scheme of Work' for every subject was developed by the subject teachers and the respective supervisor. The 'Scheme of Work' was actually the break down of the syllabus into smaller teaching units, as one teacher explained:

Before each term begins, main topics in the subject area would be identified, that is, the scheme of work. Topics come from the syllabus.

(Interview 4)

Scheme preparation had been an ongoing activity since the school started. According to one supervisor, each year the scheme was updated. This was understood given the fact that our national curriculum had not completely changed, although gone through many revisions<sup>24</sup>, since its inception in 1984.

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<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Baumgart, 1994; Ministry of Education, 1995, 2000.

To monitor what went on in the classrooms, supervisors had a certain number of lessons to observe and to randomly check a certain number of students' exercise books during the week and give feedback to teachers.

*R: What are your responsibilities?*

P: ... Teacher observation and providing feedback. Observe at least three lessons per week and give feedback.

... Checking of students' books.

...

(Interview 10)

All teachers were attached to supervisors, as their senior colleagues, to contact for information, advice and help.

[I] conduct coordination meetings for teachers. This is where we discuss lessons, both forthcoming and past ones. Also sharing with them any relevant information/issue discussed with the assistant principal or deputy principal at other meetings.

(Interview 10)

### **4.7.3 Cultural Norms: Norms Supporting Teaching and Learning**

Norms are the unspoken rules governing the daily actions of teachers and administrators (Stoll, 1999) and that the presence of certain norms would aid in improvement (Saphier & King, 1989). Further, if these norms existed in the school, it would reside in teachers' and administrators' beliefs and their daily actions would reveal these norms (ibid). 'Catch phrases' have been identified that portrayed these norms because, norms are manifest beneath the level of artefacts and cannot be identified easily (Edwards, 2003; Stoll and Fink, 1996; Stoll, 1999).

#### **4.7.3.1 A Common Goal – 'Education Should Be a Holistic Endeavour'**

Having strong beliefs about things let one's energies be diverted toward those things. The motivational force springs from such beliefs and people worked towards achieving those things. The common belief among the staff was that education was a basic need for everyone and that it should include not only academic skills, but also personal and social development skills, so that every child would be able to lead a

normal life and contribute to society. Thus, in their terms, 'to develop a holistic child' had become an ideal shared by many.

I believe that the purpose of education is to develop the whole person ... Emphasis needs to be given to academic and personal excellence, self discipline, motivation, tolerance etc. The education we provide should assist the students in developing skills that would help them to become independent and self sufficient adults who will succeed and contribute responsibly to the community.

(School Head)

If we educate somebody, ... it should be holistic; an overall student. That's what I believe ...

(Interview 16)

Imparting the necessary knowledge and skills to students so that they become capable adults to lead the society should be a purpose of education.

(Interview 5)

The Head played a role in strengthening these beliefs. For example, the Head's desire to show that these students could achieve, through making results transparent, was one of them. In this regard, some examples of what current head did included discussing of students' results in staff meetings and putting up on display, an 'eye-catching' slogan.

Thinking in behavioural terms, many participants shared the fact that what children learnt at school, they should be able to utilize later.

*R: Can you just elaborate a little on what you mean by 'a good citizen'?*

P: Not only to know knowledge, but they should be able to use it when they grow up; be with others; work with others.

(Interview 13)

It's not only learning from books .... [Students] must be able to apply what [they] learn. ... So we have to encourage and help students [know] that that's the purpose of learning.

(Interview 19)

And, it was to this end that, using student-centred learning or activities-based learning as much as possible in classroom teaching, became a goal shared by many staff.

We have been trying to bring about this change [that] we initiated this year: That is, in teaching, to use more student-centered activities. We have been trying to change it, but still I won't say we have totally succeeded. But still we are working towards it...

(Interview 16)

Actually, student-centred learning is effective...

It is used though not very commonly. But we are emphasizing a lot on this and teachers are applying it in classrooms.

(Interview 11)

Thus, planning activities for students was talked about frequently in all curriculum related discussions: Thursday's meetings and coordination meetings were notable in this regard, as one participant explained:

We take the pass percentages and discuss among the teachers of the grade ... at the coordination meetings... plus [in] the [Thursday] sessions, [too.] We ask what are the difficulties teachers' face... We found out that some teachers [were] teaching the same component ... in different ways, sometimes using not so easy methods when in fact there ... [were] easy methods. So we have decided not to come to any conclusions with a particular method at coordination meetings, but to leave up to the teacher to decide...

(Interview 6)

#### **4.7.3.2 *Hard Work – 'Teachers Are Working Hard On It'***

Achieving curricular objectives was the main aim of all teachers. And, because there was so much focus on making students' results transparent, teachers were really working hard to achieve that target.

The school is always concentrating on students' results so much that we are forced to work with that in our minds... If 80% pass is not there we have to work with the students again...

(Interview 12)

Conducting quizzes, as mentioned earlier, was one of the programmes the school initiated in order to help students achieve their curricular objectives. Teachers put a lot of effort in conducting these quizzes. Here is what one supervisor said:

Actually teachers help a lot to get prepared for the quiz. They have to bring them at extra time and then make them learn everything ... Teachers have done a great job, I would say. They spent a lot of time with the students

Besides this main function of teachers, many were put in charge of other activities.

There are many things which we have to be involved in other than being the class teacher. For example, football, carnival, quiz practices, drama practices, etc.

(Interview 12)

I have also been put in charge of a club, that is, the Environmental Club.

(Interview 7)

After struggling to accomplish curricular content within the class period, teachers then spent almost all of their free periods looking into pupils work or checking their books in the staffroom. I spent five full periods on different days observing staff interactions and the work that they did in the staffroom (see Appendix 20). There were always a couple of teachers who were correcting some books, working at the computers or preparing for the next lesson. They were hardly seen idling or relaxing. On top of these, when days for special marking came, they were even busier. The following excerpt, taken from an introductory note given at a staff meeting by the Head, indicated this:

[The Head] thanked teachers for working for Children's Day... She said, "Teachers worked beyond their duties" and how much she appreciated...

(Field Notes: 19/5/2005)

And, sometimes, they were busy to the extent that their own family was missed, as this comment from one of the participants indicated:

Now, because we are involved so much in school activities, sometimes we tend not to give attention to our own kids. So that is actually a problem. Even this time, in the Children's Day activities, I could not participate in any activity of my child's school.

(Interview 12)

So, hard work had become a norm in this school.

#### **4.7.3.3 Competitive Spirit – 'We Can Do What Others Do'**

Being competitive or having competitive thinking was a trend or notion that affects many aspects of school life because it shaped how staff approached their work. In this notion, comparisons were made about different things in different ways, but most importantly, about academic work.

I feel that our children would be equally strong as children from other schools because already we have started different programmes.

(Interview 22)

[In] all the other schools, ... usually in the third term, first and second term's work are included, but in this school they do not have it.

(Interview 15)

This notion was held not only by staff, but it had become a mindset of parents and pupils as well.

Sometimes what we give in the school is different from other schools. So they [parents] compare. Since they don't know what is in the curriculum they can always compare and say this school is giving more work or high standard of work.

(Interview 13)

Even there is parent to parent competition with regard to their children's performance[s] and this competitive thinking is also seen to some extent, in students, too.

(Interview 5)

Even the students expect to score good marks because now students are being very very competitive compared to 5 years back.

(Interview 9)

What was significant about this notion was that it puts people into action. As mentioned earlier, the school had increased its efforts to improve student academic results as one of its strategies to show to parents that this school could achieve. So, when the results were made transparent, it became a point for both teachers and students to see where they stood:

At Thursday's 'discussion meetings' we can see an improvement in marks of my class in comparison to other classes. The classes that I go to teach my subject are usually above other teachers.

(Interview 15)

And, hence, the idea of comparison triggers them into action.

We have started showing results to students. So that has, I think, created a competitive spirit among students. And displaying of those results as you can see now, 'Commended' and 'Honour List', that has created a lot of learning spirit in them, competitive spirit I would say.

(Interview 22)

At the end of each term, test papers from all primary schools [in Male'] are brought to this school and the subject teachers go through them, looking for their standards or levels, whether high or low and keep monitoring ours against them.

(Interview 4)

This kind of competitive thinking seemed to arise from the strong belief that staff hold for students in this school: that is, this school too, could achieve, regardless of who pupils were.

How teachers perceive students' ability to perform has changed. This is the most significant change that I have seen.

(School Head)

This competitive spirit was expressed by staff in different ways. Some were outright in saying that such competition existed among other schools and, as such, our motive would be to challenge other schools.

In all the primary schools they have this idea of comparing schools. Even though people don't say so, they do compare schools.

(Interview 20)

It is always 'challenging other schools' which tend to be our motive.

(Interview 4)

Others were not so explicit but firmly believed that competition was there, as indicated by this comment:

I think all schools will be competing with each other. Though it is not mentioned, I think there will be competition.

(Interview 17)

This phenomenon was so wide spread that there were signs of people falling into this thinking even unwittingly:

Even in academic terms, challenging work given is not enough. This is an area that we need to give more emphasis on. May be I am comparing our position with other schools.

(Interview 18)

There was another facet to this spirit which came in an implicit fashion, from the work of secondary schools, but placed quite an impact on the school activities.

Now secondary schools [the receiving schools] check on their intake's performance by subject and by feeder schools. This implicit competition is also one of the reasons why these changes [focusing on results] have come about.

(Interview 5)

Competition in its own right was not a bad thing although excess would have negative effects. But what was of importance to this study was how the notion unfolded and shaped how staff approached their work and how it ultimately affected students.

#### ***4.7.3.4 Sense of Responsibility – ‘It’s Everybody’s Responsibility’***

Most teachers liked to continue as a teacher although some desired to change; yet these latter, too, showed enthusiasm to teach by stating that they would continue teaching if they were unsuccessful in getting a transfer to another job.

I am hoping to stay on till I receive my pension. Teaching is the only thing I wanted to do.

(Interview 8)

I want to teach, but if I get a chance I will be joining the management ...

(Interview 5)

P: I might change field at the end of the year.

R: *[If you are not ...?]*

P: Then I’ll continue doing what I do as best as I can.

(Interview 4)

Some were even passionate about teaching.

Teaching children is something I like very much. Teaching is something that I am passionate about.

(Interview 23)

For example there is one teacher; I would say she is one of the best in our school. She is so very active in the class: she teaches with action, with words and with different activities.

(Interview 20)

Alongside these teachers, who were enthusiastic and passionate about teaching, there were all the supervisors who were very committed to see that work done by teachers had positive effects on students. Their commitment was expressed in how they mentioned the focus of their responsibility.

It's actually the coordinator's responsibility to check on teachers [and] to see whether the students have understood. So, if I don't achieve that target, that means I have failed...

(Interview 11)

I ... had to be more alert. I also should be more focused when it comes to student-centered activities. I have to be ... prepared to see whether those things are there, whether I could provide it, whether I could borrow it, and, ... I ... have to be prepared for all that.

(Interview 16)

I have to make every effort possible to see that students are assessed fairly and effectively... I check the question papers before they are finalized ... [to] see whether all the questions are based on the topics taught and nothing is beyond their level.

(Interview 6)

#### ***4.7.3.5 Continuous Learning – 'We Can Always Learn'***

Many staff with whom I spoke aired their intention to continue their studies, as Barth (1990) rightly says, unless adults learn their students will not!

I'm concentrating more on studying; updating my self development, my profession, because I don't won't to remain stagnant. I always want to be active, go on learning.

(Interview 9)

The thing is I really want to do this degree as well as come back and work again in this school.

(Interview 5)

If a get the opportunity to do a degree or higher studies ..., I will very much focus on that.

(Interview 11)

One senior staff member who wanted to leave school life altogether, shortly, said she would change her mind if a possibility arose for her to continue studies.

I don't know; I have two minds for that. One is something personal... But if I get a good opportunity, my mind might change.

(Interview 19)

The drive to keep on learning came, in part, from the Head, as mentioned by this participant:

In almost every meeting, our head encourages them and always say that we can always learn.

(Interview 13)

She also tried to become, in Barth's (1990) terms, the 'head learner'. And, as mentioned earlier and, among other things, she tried to keep abreast of major developments in her field by reading professional material, making them available to staff and sharing with them, important material. Also, she attended workshops and seminars on professional development.

I read materials related to school improvement, leadership and management...

Staff are encouraged to read academic related articles and ... relevant articles are shared with teachers [i]n Thursday discussions. Important and relevant materials [are] also put up in the staff room as well as staff canteen in the hope that teachers may develop an interest to pursue further.

I also take part in workshops organized by other schools and agencies. Last weekend I got the opportunity to attend one ... on Stephen Covey's Seven Habits. Very soon I'll be attending a workshop on Transformational Thinking.

(School head)

#### **4.7.3.6 Support – 'Everyone Helps Everyone'**

This norm was more related to personal than professional help. Teachers talked of help that they received from supervisors, their senior colleagues. Teachers could meet supervisors for any matter almost anytime.

The SMT's assist us a lot in every respect, be it an academic issue or a student disciplinary issue.

(Interview 8)

Senior management is very supportive; we can talk to them anytime. Even if we have personal issues we can talk to them.

(Interview 12)

Furthermore, if there was a need, the Head was always accessible.

The principal herself also willingly talk to us about any issue that we want to discuss.

(Interview 5)

Sometimes, if it involves the principal, we straight away go to her as well.

(Interview 15)

Helping occurred not only vertically, but horizontally, too. A supervisor mentioned how she was helped by another supervisor and, similarly, one teacher mentioned how she got help from another teacher.

I did management training in ... [country], but never did supervision. So I base my work on the help that I receive from a very senior staff. She's very helpful and a very good coach.

(Interview 6)

I work very closely with [teacher] ... He also assists me a lot.

(Interview 14)

#### ***4.7.3.7 Appreciation and Recognition – ‘We Are Praised For Doing Good Work ’***

Good work done by teachers and students was always recognized and most of the time publicly. Staff felt being valued because their work was given due recognition.

Good work is always appreciated. For example, today the principal congratulated the students who won an award in the National Quran reciting Competition and at the same time she thanked all the staff who worked on it.

(Interview 14)

*The Head addressed briefly, to students of the afternoon session...*

*She then congratulated all students, teachers and the assistant head for the drama presentation on Saturday. She asked all to give a clap for all...*

(Field Notes: 8/5/2005)

#### **4.7.4 Relationships**

In his book, Leading in a culture of change, Fullan (2001b) wrote: “Relationships, relationships, relationships” (p. 51). He has argued that the fact that success of an organization is attributable to its people is “only partially true: it is actually the *relationships* that make the difference” (ibid). [His emphasis] According to A. Hargreaves (1997), Culture is seen mostly in three types of relationships: one, among the professional; another, among the professionals and the pupils; and, the other, among professionals and the various stake holders in the larger society.

##### **4.7.4.1 Staff Relationships**

One of the strongest features of the school was that it had a strong relationship among its staff.

I strongly believe that this school is one of the schools which has a strong relationship between teachers, even management ... they all work together. They help each other.

(Interview 13)

The relationships among staff ... is very strong, I would say. It is a very good relationship that we all teachers have.

(Interview 5)

It is, according to many, a friendly atmosphere or environment in which they worked.

This is the best school ... to work. There is a friendly environment among teachers.

(Interview 7)

There is a very friendly atmosphere in the school... now I look forward to each day of the school and I enjoy teaching here.

(Interview 12)

Helping each other and extending cooperation and support, both professionally and otherwise, but more importantly professionally, and caring, were the key aspects of this relationship.

I think that we have a very friendly atmosphere. Here, everybody helps each other a lot.

(Interview 15)

Everyone respects everyone; cares for others feelings; No personal attacks on others. A close relationship exists among all.

(Interview 6)

Professional help was extended in many ways: assistance in terms of enlightening others on areas in which one had strengths, assisting with classroom management, obtaining information for lessons and helping to handle marks during exam time, were some examples.

The staff in this school are very friendly and they help one another in everything. For example, since I teach a lot of students, they help me with the marks during tests.

(Interview 8)

They are aware of their individual responsibilities, but at the same time they help each other. If somebody is good at computer work, she will teach the rest.

(Interview 2)

In my first year, ... my colleagues comforted me and supported me very much in ... [difficult classroom] situations. Some even came to my classroom when they were free and assisted me in managing the class.

(Interview 7)

Team spirit was also high, especially among subject groups; that is, all teachers teaching the same subject to same year level.

Actually the team which I'm working in is very helpful, very caring; that's one thing I enjoy.

(Interview 11)

It is a very good relationship that we all teachers have, specially the grade seven teachers. We do things together a lot.

(Interview 5)

There was also encouragement in times of difficulty, as this participant mentioned:

If any body is struggling or in difficulty, we..., everybody helps. It is not only moral support but financially as well...

(Interview 22)

Although friendly atmosphere seemed to be the most common way of expressing staff relationship, some staff used specific terms to express this relationship, for example, one participant commented:

We are quite bonded together. We help one another a lot.

(Interview 16)

Further, as was noted earlier, there was no hierarchical separation between teachers and the senior management team; all senior staff were approachable including the Head and, furthermore, it was not only academic matters that were discussed, but also the door was kept open for all matters pertaining to staff well-being.

#### ***4.7.4.2 Staff-Student Relationship***

Staff had a good relationship with students and their attitude toward them was also a positive one.

I enjoy working with children and for them. I talk to them a lot. When I am on duty also I talk to them a lot. And they don't hesitate at all talking to me anytime when they see me. So, I am very pleased about this relationship.

(Interview 10)

I enjoy my attachment with the students as I love each and every one of them. I'm very attached to them.

(Interview 9)

One teacher described the extent to which she tried to help a weak student:

I was so sorry for him because he has been in my class for two years and there was nothing I could do in class. So I told him to come to my place during the second term holidays as it was coming soon and I thought that I would make use of these ten days .... I had teaching aids at home made for my kids. I told him I would teach him how to write, read, add, subtract.... I was willing to do that. I told his parents to send him to my place and I gave my phone number.

(Interview 12)

Their relationship was evident in the lessons that they took. Students were treated with respect. For example, no critical comments were made when they were off task. In one lesson that I observed, the teacher apologized to a student when she did something not right.

When students came to the Supervisor's Office, they were spoken to softly:

Supervisors show care to students when they come to supervisor's office for various errands. This is common among all supervisors. At no time have I heard anyone saying anything to a student loudly. The two instances today reminded me of this.

(Excerpted from Field notes: 12/5/2005)

Further, their call 'Excuse me' was answered promptly by a 'Yes' from any one of the supervisors.

The data from the student questionnaire also lent support to this relationship. In the student questionnaire that was administered, there were two statements which related to this relationship: 'I get on well with teachers' and 'Teachers in this school are helpful'. Students were asked to respond 'rarely', 'sometimes', 'often' and, 'nearly always'. Twelve students responded to first statement of whom four said 'nearly always' and eight said 'often'. Thirteen students responded to the second statement of whom eight said 'nearly always', four said 'often' and one said 'sometimes'.

#### **4.7.4.3 Stakeholder Relationships**

##### *Relationship with the central office (the Ministry of Education)*

The closest ties a school should or would have is with the central office for they were the people who set broader educational goals, provided resources for executing these and set guidelines for overall running of the school. There were different sections in the Ministry of Education that dealt with schools but, in relation to this study, there were two sections that dealt directly with this school: the schools' section which dealt with all matters pertaining to the overall running of the school except maintaining educational quality which was the mandate of the ESQIS (Educational Supervision and Quality Improvement section), the other section. Yet, except the Head, few mentioned these relationships. The general attitude toward MOE was good as indicated by the fact that the school tried to follow their guidelines and following guidelines was actually part of their culture according to one SMT member:

[The] Ministry [of Education] sets guidelines for various activities and they are sent to schools in the form of circulars, memos, handbooks, etc. At times, a certain school may deviate from a particular guideline, but we try to follow these as closely as possible.

Following of MOE guidelines closely is a part of this culture...

(Interview 18)

However, there was an isolated case which gave some serious concerns for the school, as one senior member mentioned:

There is a lot of unhappiness among school personnel as well as parents about teacher shortage and student enrolment.

If you look at this school's grade ..., [a lot of] ... students ... cannot read and write in English. It will take more than one year to help these students come up to the expected standard. Therefore I can predict a decline in the pass percentage this year in [this] grade ... and next year in [the following] grade ... [and so on].

Without considering its effects on schools, the ministry decided to give placement to all in service teachers who applied to study in Faculty of Education. Ten teachers from this school applied too. Since there was already

a shortage of teachers, ministry couldn't find a way to release these teachers to study full time. At the end of the day, they had to teach and study full time...

The other section, the ESQIS, as the name suggests, had the mandate to see how effective schools were in achieving their curricular objectives. But because quality improvement section was part of the Ministry of Education, perhaps, staff would not have mentioned this relationship in any specific way. Another reason might be, as indicated previously, earlier versions of supervision did not work very well, at least to the extent that a mutual relationship was created. However, it was only recently that they started this new whole school approach to supervision. Hence, it is a bit early to comment on the effectiveness of this approach. The ESQIS personnel described how this approach worked:

The whole school supervision approach that we started in 2004 is a type of situational analysis. Under this approach, independent teams visit schools for about two weeks (in case of Male' schools) and they study various aspects of the school's functioning: from teaching and learning to management to building maintenance. The schools are then given feedback in the form of a report on the basis of which the schools prepare an action plan and submit to us. The schools then follow through this action plan and we monitor this follow through. In this monitoring process we also review material documented by the school in this regard. Hence, this whole school supervision programme acts as a support service to schools in so far as it assists schools to set new targets or modify existing ones and to work toward achieving them.

It appeared that this could be the emergence of 'critical friend' role in our schools, which at the moment was nonexistent and yet a vital relationship for school improvement efforts.

### *Professional Institutions*

Obviously one would expect schools to have some relationship with sector organizations or professional institutions such as the Educational Development Centre (EDC) or the Faculty of Education (FE), MCHE. But, here again, none said that there was any direct influence from these two professional institutes although some mentioned their indirect influences.

We also don't know much about marking because in our training at ITE [Institute for Teacher Training, now, the Faculty of Education, Maldives

College of Higher Education] we were not taught how to mark children's books or how to mark essays ...

And, managing time is also a problem for us ... They tell us how to make lesson plans, but ... we don't know anything about time managing, planning ahead and [so on].

(Interview 6)

In arranging [planning] my lesson I used to get help from a Ministry personnel. I always keep contact with him because I am helping him in ... revising the curriculum.

(Interview 21)

However, it was interesting to note that, both the curriculum and the teacher education personnel's idea of what had to be taught in schools was quite similar to that of the school's personnel. In short, they too supported the holistic development of the child.

The real core is academic... [and] to foster the academic achievement for the children ..., we need to think of aspects like psychological, the social aspects that are in the school... A school's improvement is dependent on this academic component while the other issues play a supportive role.

(Curriculum personnel)

School improvement for us is how much the school actually helps the child to improve... help improve in his own work or his or her own work, learning, discipline, skills, attitudes and so on.

(Teacher education personnel)

However, the curriculum personnel seemed to err on the academic side more than the teacher education personnel, and believed that all aspects related to teaching and learning should revolve around the curriculum.

I think probably we would have to be the change agent in this regard, because the teaching, the teacher training, assessment, school management and school construction and all those things revolve around what we decide to do: The National Curriculum.

(Curriculum personnel)

So, his idea was that there should be a professional relationship between schools and not only curriculum department, but also with teacher education, the central office and among other schools as well.

We need to establish a network of communication channels not between schools and EDC only, but among schools, EDC, Education Ministry, Faculty of Education, ESQIS and also all the stake holders in the sector.

(Curriculum personnel)

However, at the moment, it appeared that such relationships were minimal.

The teacher education personnel also believed that there should be a professional relationship with schools.

As half of our teaching staff are abroad, overseas, and when we receive our staff we would actually like to go to the schools and give them more support in their efforts to improve their teaching and learning.

(Teacher education personnel)

And, in fact, it had been helping schools although, as he noted, “by mandate we ... do not have the in-service teacher education with us, with FE [Faculty of Education]”.

### *School – parent relationship*

Any parent body in any school anywhere, would have parents who were very cooperative and supportive and some, or perhaps a few, who were not so. The case study school was not very different in this regard. This generalization aside, many participants believed that parents played a role in assisting students at home. But some teachers were of the view that parents didn't have a role to play within the school.

They are involved at home not in school.

(Interview 12)

We teach students in class and when they go home parents look into their work.

(Interview 23)

I don't think parents are directly involved... They will be dealing with students at home, looking at their books and talking to them. May be that's the way they are involved but not contributing to the classroom environment, like coming and helping very much.

(Interview 5)

Yet there were some instances where parents had penetrated into school life, even into academic areas. One teacher said that a parent took a session on writing skills.

A session taken by a parent on writing composition is worth noting. To write compositions, he asks a series of questions, like: what happened then? What next? What next? And so on. By answering these questions students will find it easy to write compositions. I use this information in my lessons.

(Interview 14)

A supervisor mentioned how she got parents help:

They helped me last year with remedial students...

Last year, some teachers who were expatriates, they actually got parents to help them in the Dhivehi [Quiz]. So like that we can get parents help as well.

(Interview 16)

Furthermore, in one of the staff meetings (Thursday's session, which I, the researcher, attended) there was a parent who gave a presentation (See the following excerpt):

Thursday, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2005: 12 pm – 12.50pm

Today's session is on a presentation by an undergraduate student from the Faculty of Education (a former teacher of this school and now a parent, too.)...

SAP introduced the meeting... then introduced the presenter. The presenter started off by mentioning the days' topic: 'Self esteem in children'...

(Field Notes of 12/5/2005)

Formal and informal channels for nurturing this relationship existed, too. The Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings were the most regular and formal means of

building this relationship. The PTA meeting which I was fortunate to attend suggested that there were parents now who were actually debating issues. I was sitting in the court yard, some distance away (particularly because it was my first week at the school) from where the groups discussed different issues. From where I sat, I could hear one group talking seriously about student issues (see the following excerpt):

These parents formed circles and started their deliberations. The Head went from group to group while I sat a few yards away from the group as I did not want to interfere in any way.

Very soon the sound of discussions began to be heard.

Parents seem to get very involved in this activity. These two grades closest to me evidenced this. There were outspoken parents giving really good suggestions and raising concerns. For example she said, "There'll be parents who would need to know exactly what to do because for some it may not be very clear".

(Excerpted from Field Notes on PTA Meeting held on 27/4/2005)

Having attended such meetings as a parent, I could recall that, a few years back, except for fund raising issues, for which parent-school relationship was notable, such debates were almost non-existent especially in relation to student issues, at least in the primary schools.

In addition to PTA meetings, which were held among a selected group of parents, there was also the parent-teacher meetings where individual parents met subject teachers with their children. The following excerpt suggested its significance:

Little by little parents are coming with their children. Teachers have taken their designated places before parents started coming.

At this meeting the teacher talks to the parents about progress or otherwise of students in that particular subject. The parent also is given a chance to talk about his/her child(ren)'s work at home. On an average, this meeting takes 3-5 minutes per parent although, sometimes, it might take more than 5 minutes.

*OC: This is a very important meeting for both the teacher and the parent because both are able to know first hand, information about the child's work.*

(Field Notes of 29/5/05)

The communication channels for parents have been widened in this school, an initiative of the current Head. Again, I should recall that, as a parent, I was never asked to fill a questionnaire. That is, in this school, they had obtained written views through a questionnaire that was administered to parents, as opposed to verbal views obtained in meetings in the past. According to the Head, the parents had indicated their satisfaction.

In addition to these formal channels, there were many avenues where parents informally talked to teachers.

When parents come to get their children very often they ask teachers whether there is anything to discuss or solve or attend to. In addition to this, sometimes they even phone to ask if there is anything.

(Interview 23)

In the parent survey questionnaire that the school conducted recently, there was a question asked of parents whether staff were approachable. Their answers, too, suggested that the relationship was a positive one: 62 percent said 'very good', 22 said 'good' and 10 said 'satisfactory'. Only 3 percent were not happy, while another 3 were unsure.

#### **4.7.5 Summary of the Theme: School Culture**

Culture is not easily observed; rather, it is expressed most commonly in three interrelated, generic dimensions: Structures, norms that supported teaching and learning and, working relationships (A. Hargreaves, 1997). Key findings with regard to the school's culture were:

- Data from this study revealed that there were appropriate structures that enhanced staff performances: Clearly stated roles and responsibilities; various meetings to discuss curricular; and, established policies to review both curricular and professional work.
- To the extent that norms were the unspoken rules governing school personnel's actions, seven cultural norms operated in the case study school that aided teaching and learning.

- Three types of working relationships seemed to have contributed toward the recent improvements evident in the school.

There were data from the questionnaire that supported to a greater extent the above findings about school's culture. For example, many statements in Part I (the 'school conditions') of the staff questionnaire (see figure 12, statements one, five, fourteen and twenty one in 'supervisor responses' section and statements three, eight, fourteen and nineteen in 'teacher responses' section) depicted policies, strategies or systems for work; in other words, 'structures' for work. By eyeballing these statements, one could see that, for the most part, staff had rated them favourably. Therefore, to the extent that these statements were rated positively or favourably by staff, was an indication of the presence of appropriate work structures.

In terms of working relationships, the responses of four of the six supervisors to one of the open-ended questions which asked about the current strengths of the school, strongly confirmed that a close working relationship existed among staff. Here are their responses. One of them did not answer:

*R: What do you see as the current strengths of this school?*

S1: The comfortable and friendly environment of the school.

S3: Everybody works together to achieve goals.

S4: Unity among colleagues.

S5: Very cooperative teachers.

In the case of teachers, seven did not answer and, of the thirteen who responded, six said good relationships among staff, one said good relationship with parents, three said working to improve results, one said trying to develop teaching strategies and one said the school was well-organised. In addition, to some of the statements in 'school conditions' section of the staff questionnaire, which depicted working relationships, teachers largely agreed while supervisors strongly agreed that a favourable working relationship existed (see figure 12, pp. 154-5, teacher responses, statements one, two, four, five, nine and twelve; and, supervisor responses, statements two, three, four, eight, nine and thirteen). So, on the whole, questionnaire data lent support to interview data, suggesting that a strong working relationship existed among staff.

All the above-mentioned themes of school improvement emerged against the backdrop of various stakeholder influences and contextual factors which is the topic of the next section.

## **4.8 Stakeholder Influences and Contextual Factors**

### **4.8.1 Introduction**

Schools exist within a context of potential partners (or stakeholders), parents, community, educational and various other organizations and levels of government (Stoll & Fink, 1996) and each school is affected by the climate set by them (Brighouse & Woods, 1999). The case study school has been influenced by many stakeholders. Key influences included those from the central office (the Ministry of Education), professional institutions, parents, various other organizations and the school itself, that is, its context. In the previous section on 'culture', the relationship of the school with the central office and professional institutions had been discussed. Therefore, in this section, these relationships would be mentioned only briefly.

### **4.8.2 Stakeholder Groups**

#### ***4.8.2.1 The Central Office (Ministry of Education)***

The relationship with the central office seemed to be generally good as indicated by the fact that the school tried to follow their guidelines and, following their guidelines, according to a SMT member, was part of their culture. But there was one isolated case (mentioned earlier) which had made the school staff, especially top management people, unhappy<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> It should be noted that this reaction is directed toward the Schools Section of the MOE, not the ESQIS.

#### ***4.8.2.2 Professional Institutions***

One would expect schools to have some relationship with sector organizations or professional institutions such as the EDC and FE, MCHE. But no participants said that there was any direct influence from these two institutions although some mentioned their indirect influences. Although the views of these institutions and that of the school's were similar about educating children a mutual working relation was yet to be developed.

#### ***4.8.2.3 Parents and Their Influence***

Parents had needs, demands, interests and other forms of influence which the school was willing to cater for as best as it could. Many parents influenced the school in a positive way, although there were a few who went the other way.

Now our parents are quite well-educated, not all parents, but still we have a group of them. So it is actually a positive impact on our school, if we can have people who can back up when we need them.

(Interview 16)

Some parents are very much involved in it. They just go through their books everyday and see how they are doing as well and they help them, guide them, they even ask them questions. Other parents..., they just let it go; they don't even care about what students are doing.

(Interview 15)

Regardless of this influence being positive or negative, it had made the school more accountable and able to justify what it did.

*Parental awareness:* As mentioned earlier, many participants agreed that there was an increased awareness in parents. This was, in part, due to the emphasis on students' results which let parents know of their children's achievements and what they had to do; and, in part, due to the system which had produced more educated parents. This increased awareness naturally led to high expectations.

*Parental expectations:* In general, parental expectations were high.

*R: Do most of them [parents] expect high of their children?*

P: Yes, definitely. That is why most parents spend a lot of money on giving tuition to their children.

(Interview 18)

They expect students to perform well in all the subjects.

(Interview 2)

Now there are parents who want ... not only studies, they want their students to participate in extra activities and get good places in that... they want their students to be selected as best-all-rounder as well...

(Interview 16)

Thus they demanded a lot from schools. Some even had extra ordinary demands. One teacher was even doubtful whether the school could meet some parental expectations.

Parents, I think, expect us to teach them and get them good results. Parents even expect us to make them do their homework, make them learn.

(Interview 15)

Some parents have suggested giving weekend assignments and holiday assignments as well. [But] I realize that this is not the consensus of all parents.

(Interview 2)

Because the cognitive ability of children differs, some may not perform according to parental expectations.

(Interview 4)

Finally, a very common perception that some teachers had about the expectations of some parents was, 'school had to do everything'.

Some parents, they just feel that school should do everything.

(Interview 12)

They [parents] don't take their part of the responsibility, they leave everything to us.

(Interview 6)

*Parental attitudes:* Although the majority of parents were cooperative and supportive of the school, there were a few who were 'not-so-good' parents. This negative attitude of theirs exerted a lot of pressure on the already stretched teachers and the senior management team. The shades of their attitudes are worth noting because that's the 'terrain' teachers had to 'travel' almost daily.

Some students don't have enough books for each subject... Some don't have any books at all! ... If parents are actually worried, I'm sure that problem will not be there; at least ... that they can check, Can't they? And they are not even coming to meet us when we call.

(Interview 12)

Some parents don't even want them to study at home, because if we say that they haven't completed this work, they'll say, "you can keep them and make them complete the work," as if that is also our duty...

(Interview 15)

Some parents also value our work ... although there are a few who say that we work for money.

[Also,] many parents don't like to hear about their children's real character, especially regarding discipline cases.

(Interview 7)

These children who are having difficulties, their parents are not cooperating with us. So they don't bother whether the students go on to the next grade with a knowledgeable education or whether they go with automatic promotion. So long as they are transferred, they don't bother... They say it is our job to teach.

(Interview 6)

#### **4.8.2.4 Other Organisations**

##### *Sports organisations*

Up until recently, schools were very much influenced by sports organizations, especially to hold interschool sports competitions. On the positive side, such activities brought fame to some schools and to those few students who were selected

and won places, a boost to their morale. On the negative side, however, a lot of valuable time and effort were taken away from school personnel which otherwise would have been spent on academic work, the key function of any school.

Five years ago, ... academic issues were left a bit aside. We had a lot of inter-school activities... And more focus was given on ... winning the games. I'm not saying that it is not important. [But] more focus was on that area and there was no balance ...

(Interview 19)

A senior personnel mentioned another negative aspect.

Now a lot of children take part in activities organized by other bodies. Some of these activities are organized by various [sports] associations. In such circumstances, these organizations cannot give the kind of attention that a school would give. So at times, schools get blamed for various incidents, [especially] when things go wrong and, thereby, affecting negatively to school....

(Interview 18)

Now these activities had been limited, although a few teachers seemed concerned:

What I feel is that school should have some competitions. Students should be given a chance in competitions outside otherwise they will hesitate later. There are talented students. SMT doesn't see that there are talented ones. We may not win but participation is important in outside activities. It may help academically later.

(Interview 9)

However, the majority felt that the school could now concentrate on academic learning.

At ... [that] time, the school focus was more on winning interschool competitions, whether it [was] sports, singing etc. However now ... the focus has changed to the needs of the school and not to the needs of outside agencies. We now have the opportunity to focus on students' academic as well personal development that is necessary to develop a whole child.

(Interview 2)

I think ... they stopped extra activities and sports and that has really affected school: [less] work load for teachers, and we get more time for our own activities.

(Interview 22)

[Previously] we [gave] more focus on extra activities.... Now we focus more on their [students'] academic issues ...

(Interview 19)

### *Non-sports Organisations*

It was the social development of children that these non-sports organizations catered for. Some of them held non-sports competitions, for an example, one teacher mentioned about the Environmental Council. For the World Environment Day, the Council sometimes held art competitions for school children or conducted some environmental related activity. These were not time- and effort-intense activities and, therefore, had more of a positive than a negative effect.

There's an Environment Day, and I think every year they did something for that. They hold competitions like art competitions. Students take a lot of interest in them. They do some activity: sowing a plant or something or make a re-us[able] item.

(Interview 9)

Social development of the children was also catered for by both the Boys' Scout and Girl Guides' Associations.

*R: What outside agency involvement has been helpful?*

P: I think scouting and guiding. May be they contribute equally, because it is related to students. So they all focus on students' skills and competence.

(Interview 5)

P: The Scout Association [and] Girl Guide association[s,] ... they have an impact on us.

(Interview 16)

Finally, some health-related organizations, too, assisted schools in conducting various check-ups like eye and dental care for children.

There [are] health related organizations that help the school in dental ... and eye [care] check[s].

(Interview 2)

### **4.8.3 The School Context**

In the industrialized world, 'social class' is a factor considered in school improvement initiatives (Gray et al., 1999; Harris, 2002; Stoll & Fink, 1996). However, in the developing countries, social class differentiation is not as well established as it is in the industrialized countries (Fuller, 1987; Scheerens, 2001). Yet, Harris (2002), among others, argued that every school is different in terms of its context and it comes into play in significant ways in any improvement initiative. Data from this study suggested that there were four areas in the case study school's context that affected its improvement initiatives: School's history, student characteristics, teachers' concerns related to some of their work conditions and some institutional concerns.

#### **4.8.3.1 School's History**

The move by the current government to universalize primary education was the main reason why so many schools were built around the country, including this school, during the 80's. The location of the school was chosen because that was the most suitable spot available then given the scarcity of land and the need to distribute schools evenly across the island.

It was a perception<sup>26</sup> of many people living in Male' that most well-off people lived in the central part of the island and, by implication, other areas did not have such people. This perhaps might have been or would have been the case four or five decades ago. But now, if one were to take any section of the island, (most common would be the existing divisions- four wards of Male') one would not find well-off people concentrated in one ward, because people who migrated to Male' from the atolls,

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<sup>26</sup> See interviews 2, 4, 10, 13, 20 & 22. Further, a recent study (Manik et al, 2000) has also noted similarly.

settled in various parts of the island and some were quite well off now. Further, modern houses and tall buildings appeared in almost every street and the ever increasing amount of commercial activities throughout the island, were enough evidence to support this position. In short, children of these people were no different in any way from other children who lived in other wards or parts of Male’.

#### **4.8.3.2 Student Characteristics**

There is no IQ test done so far which otherwise would have indicated the ability levels of these children. Furthermore, data obtained from the MOE did not suggest that these children were weak in academic terms (see, for example, Manik et al., 2000, pp. 26-27, for a recent comparison). In fact, one teacher said:

They do ... very creative work. They complete the work with their talent. I must say that they have talent.

(Interview 21)

And, in non-academic areas, one only needs to look at the long list of special awards received.

In terms of personality, one teacher described them as very cooperative

As far as students are concerned, they are a very cooperative lot. Even though a few might be there who have idiosyncratic ways.

(Interview 14)

Another said they were friendly:

Now, even the students, they are very friendly

(Interview 13)

Their discipline was regarded as good.

The students here are well disciplined I would say, because I was teaching in (name) school and it was like hell for me

(Interview 12)

In lower grades, especially grades one, two and three, discipline is not a problem may be because they are small. However, in grades six and seven there's some. But this year it is minimal to almost non-existent.

(Interview10)

Having said thus, the situation of some children studying in this school was worth considering. Some students received very little help at home as one staff member mentioned:

I expect them, in the class, to participate in the lesson. Then, if they have any questions, to clarify them, so that they will know. Otherwise, if they keep quiet, sometimes when they go home, they don't have people to ask.

(Interview 13)

Many children attended additional tuition classes. Taking tuition acts as a double-edged sword: on the positive side, students were helped to understand what they found difficult to learn at school, while on the negative side, going to tuition added to the already stretched schedule of the student, making him or her over burdened with work as this participant mentioned:

I think children are over burdened with many activities. We have to give time for students if we want them to learn.

(Interview 14)

One teacher summarized the main difficulties students face:

The management decided to get all the children that are not doing the work at home and ask from them the difficulties they are having. Their replies were that they don't have space at home, they don't have anyone to help them, and students don't get a chance to go to tuition because they are poor.

(Interview 21)

#### **4.8.3.3 Teachers' Work Conditions**

Although a few teachers mentioned that, with the arrival of the current head, their workload decreased, still many aired concerns, most of which were related to increased workload. Two main reasons for this were (i) some teachers had to do a lot to help weak students and (ii) teachers had to attend extra duties, especially in the evenings and at weekends.

It was quite normal to have weak students in any class any where; but the fact was they could not be left alone; they too should be catered for, just like any other student or, at least, in a way that they too achieved specified objectives. So it was important to note the issues related to weak students such as: how many were there? How did they become so? What was possible to make them better? Were there any serious consequences? Sometimes it was hard to reach solutions because these types of issues were not isolated ones, but were interconnected. For example, students not completing homework might be due to lack of parental support. So, would the solution be to push students to finish home work or to try to obtain parental support or perhaps both?

Student problems arising from lack of support from some parents included: students not finishing home work; getting someone at home to complete the work for them, not bringing required materials to school or even bringing material that they were not supposed to bring and causing unnecessary trouble for staff.

If we give any work to do at home some of them come without completing and some won't even attempt. So it is difficult to know whether the problem was one of not knowing or of carelessness. We meet parents and tell them to at least see if the child gives a try to do the work. When this is done, some students get another person at home to do the work. So it is very difficult to deal with these kinds of children.

(Interview 6)

Yesterday we met some parents because some children were coming to school with lots of make-up. They said they were coming to school and doing the make-up because some one was bringing make-up from home. So now I have asked teachers to check the girls' bag as well. Earlier we checked only boys' bags because they bring a lot of 'supari'<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> Flavoured beetle nut, an imported product.

(Interview 17)

*Observer Comment: The supervisor's point here is that some parents don't see or check what their children are bringing to school. There are certain things that children are not supposed to bring.*

English being the second language, the language ability of many students was not up to the required standard and this issue was further exacerbated by some English teachers having difficulties themselves in their ability to use English effectively.

We are trying to improve the English standard of students. Overall, that is the biggest challenge we face now, because it is the second language for the students.

(Interview 10)

There are some English teachers whose English Language ability is not up to the mark.

(Interview 18)

Given that all Male' primary schools had English as the medium of instruction, this issue seemed to be a valid one.

Weak students in class occur due to many reasons:

*Automatic promotion:* First, there was the automatic promotion policy which had been in effect for quite some time. As such, some students were pushed to the next grade irrespective of them having fully achieved the objectives of the previous grade.

*Open enrolment:* Second, under the open enrolment policy, which was quite a recent one, students were recruited to various grades of Male' schools only after testing them in English, according to one teacher. She was of the view that testing English alone was not enough; Dhivehi and Math, too, should be tested. This regulation created an unlevel playing field, according to her, especially when they had to achieve a class average of 80% in all subjects.

The school's expectation is that all classes should get above 80% in all the subjects. But this is not a very valid expectation, I would say, because, ... they

have classified children according to their English marks and they have distributed the children equally; English marks is not enough. That's what I am saying. Maths and Dhivehi marks also should be considered. If we are to get 80% from all the classes, then equal number of weak students should be there in every class. But it is not like that. For example, in my class, there are 5 students who are getting zero in Maths, in all tests. But in some of the grade 7 classes there are only one or two students like that. So this difference is there.

(Interview 12)

*An isolated case:* Finally, the MOE recruited many students from various atoll schools under the open enrolment policy to fill some of the available spaces in the school.

Actually in my grade there are ... [many] students who came fresh from the islands and joined this year... They were enrolled at the beginning of this year because ... [of] additional ...[space].

(Interview 20)

Although this was just an isolated case, the Head was concerned that the level of these students could not be brought to normal easily. So this was an issue that would be with the school for the next few years.

If you look at this school's grade ... alone, ... [a lot of] students enrolled to [this] grade ... cannot read and write in English. It will take more than one year to help these students come up to the expected standard. Therefore I can predict a decline in the pass percentage this year in [this] grade ... and next year in [the following] grade ... etc.

(Interview 2)

#### **4.8.3.4 Institutional Concerns**

Many 'institutional concerns' or 'challenges for improvement', the backdrop against which any improvement effort had to be mounted, (Gray et al. 1999) had been noted from participants' conversations. However, a researcher needed to select those issues most related to the study's aims or questions. Perhaps an example might help the reader. Lack of a proper or formal appraisal scheme was one such concern and, by itself, a valid one for school personnel. But its absence did not seem to constrain the

school's effort to improve. Some less formal means of appraising, such as providing feedback about teachers' lessons, existed in the school which, to some extent, served a development purpose even though it might not fully work for promotional (or even demotional) purposes. Only one participant referred to appraisal process:

We do appraise staff, OK. I mean, as a supervisor, I also write down that teachers are doing this and this, we do acknowledge. But I think we should have a better, written down appraisal for teachers where we can refer back. If we are going to promote, give a promotion or something like that, a good appraisal form should be there. I think school needs to develop a proper appraisal...

(Interview 16)

Concerns raised by teachers that had most significance to this study included:

(a) Teacher shortages:

Teacher shortages, right! That's a very difficult issue. We even receive teachers straight from schools. Sometimes we have to go into classes to teach.

(Interview 6)

(b) The presence of teachers who were studying and teaching both on fulltime basis:

Without considering its effects on schools, the ministry decided to give placement to all in service teachers who applied to study in Faculty of Education. Ten teachers from this school applied too. Since there was already a shortage of teachers, ministry couldn't find a way to release these teachers to study full time. At the end of the day they had to teach and study full time.

(Interview 2)

(c) The need to improve the English language ability of students including some English language teachers, too; (see above)

(d) The need to pursue MOE's agenda irrespective of school's needs:

It would be very easy for the schools if MOE would plan,... have a proper plan and then work in harmony with the school, considering schools' needs instead of having a totally different agenda.

(Interview 2)

(e) Automatic promotion policy and its consequences:

What happens is we have the automatic promotion policy which means even if students do not accomplish the level of the grade they are in, they could go on to the next grade in the following year.

(Interview 6)

(f) And, the 'isolated case' (mentioned above) which was related to the recent open enrolment policy.

#### **4.8.4 Summary of Stakeholder Influences and Contextual Factors**

The school had been influenced by many stakeholders. Key influences included those from the central office (the Ministry of Education), professional institutions, parents, various other organizations and the school itself, that is, its context.

(i) The stakeholders influenced the school in a variety of ways:

- The relationship with the central office seemed to be generally good although a recent isolated case had raised some concerns for the school staff. However, a working relationship was yet to be developed between the school administration section and ESQIS of the MOE with the school.
- There was no direct influence from the two key sector organizations or professional institutions, the curriculum department and teacher education, and a mutual working relation was yet to be developed.
- Parents influenced school in a variety of ways: the increase in their awareness about education in general, had raised and broadened their expectations.
- The majority of parents were cooperative and supportive of the school. A very few, however, exerted a lot of pressure on the already stretched teachers and the senior management team.
- Up until recently, some sports organizations influenced schools to take part in interschool sports competitions. This had more negative than positive effects on the school for it diverted valuable time and effort away from academic work, the key function of any school. A recent policy change had relieved the schools of this issue.

- All non-sports organisations, for the most part, have had good relations with schools.

(ii) The most influential contextual factors had been the school's history and student characteristics, teachers' concerns related to their work conditions and some institutional concerns. Key findings related to each factor were:

*(a) School's history and student characteristics:*

- A misperception of many people living in Male' was that most well-off people lived in the central part of the island. This had implications for students in other schools in other parts of the island.
- Data suggested that children in this school were no different in anyway than children in any school in wards of Male'. Data also suggested that their performances in both academic and non-academic areas were similar to that of other schools.

*(b) Teachers' concerns, related to some of their work conditions:*

- With the arrival of the current head, teachers' workload had decreased, but still many aired concerns about increased workload.
- There were two main reasons for this: (i) some teachers had to do a lot to help weak students and attend to other student-related problems. Weak students in class occurred due to two reasons: the automatic promotion policy and the recent 'open enrolment' policy. Other student-related problems seemed to arise from lack of support from their parents; and, (ii) teachers had to attend to extra duties, especially in the evenings and at weekends.

*(c) Institutional concerns:*

- Many 'institutional concerns' or 'challenges for improvement', the backdrop against which any improvement effort had to be mounted (Gray et al. 1999), were noted. Those that had most significance to this study included: teacher shortages; presence of teachers who were studying and teaching both on fulltime basis; the need to improve the English language ability of students including some English language teachers, too; the need to pursue MOE's agenda irrespective of school's

needs; consequences of automatic promotion policy; and, the 'isolated case' which was related to the recent open enrolment policy.

## **4.9 Summary**

Six major 'themes of improvement' which were prevalent in the case study school, have been identified from the data and presented in this chapter. They were: a focus on change, a focus on students, a teaching learning focus, investing in staff, strong leadership by the Head and influencing the school's culture. It should be noted that these themes emerged as having significance to the school's 'improvement journey' against the backdrop of many stakeholder influences and contextual factors, discussed in the last section of this chapter. In the next chapter, the researcher discusses these themes in relation to the relevant literature reviewed in chapter two.

## CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Introduction

This study set out to find out how an urban primary school in Maldives dealt with the issue of school improvement. A review of related literature enabled the researcher to identify three interrelated, key concepts undergirding school improvement efforts: change, leadership and culture. The main components of these concepts have also been identified (see the conceptual framework, p. 65). Hence, in this chapter, I have presented the findings of this study in relation to the above mentioned concepts and components and also how the findings relate to the extant literature on school improvement.

### 5.2 Leadership

#### 5.2.1 Introduction

In almost every study of school effectiveness or school improvement, leadership by the head has been a prominent feature (see, for example, Mortimore et al., 1988; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Sammons 1999; Scheerens, 1992; Teddlie and Stringfield, 1993, among others). In fact, Gray claims that no study of an effective or improving school has been reported that did not feature leadership of the head as prominent (Gray 1990, in Sammons, 1999). Some studies of Dutch schools, however, are exceptions. But in this case, too, there are signs of the trend being reversed (see, for example, Van de Grift & Houtveen, 1999).

Although school literature is replete with this leadership feature operating in schools, scholars differ, to some extent, in how they describe effective leadership. The most cited dimensions of effective leadership in schools are: building a shared vision and planning; being achievement-oriented in terms of student learning; being committed to colleagues as well as one's own professional growth; empowering colleagues to take leadership roles; risk taking or having courage and seeking to influence school culture. (See, for example, Blase & Kirby, 1992; Collins, 2000, cited in Fullan, 2003;

Edwards, 2003; Kouzes & Posner, 1987; McEwan, 2003; Senge, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1991; Smith & Piele, 2006; Spillane et al., 2004).

It was previously identified that change is complex and, for schools to bring about change, they have to work toward become learning organisations. In this regard, Fullan (1997a) and Fullan and A. Hargreaves (1991) have identified some leader actions conducive to creating a learning organization. These leader actions have much in common with the views associated with ‘distributed leadership’ (Spillane, 2004) and ‘sustainable leadership’ (A. Hargreaves & Fink, 2003, 2006b) which are some recent additions to leadership thinking. Essentially, distributed leadership involves sharing of leadership among as many personnel as possible and learning and working together collaboratively (Graham, 2006), while sustainable leadership refers to the development of an initiative within an organization without compromising other ongoing developments and not necessarily to whether a change initiative lasts in that organization (A. Hargreaves & Fink, 2003, 2006b). Data from this study revealed that there were a number of leader actions that facilitated this process: working toward becoming a learning organization.

### **5.2.2 Building A Shared Vision**

“A vision is an image of the future” (Kouzes & Posner, 1987, p. 85) which articulates an attractive but a realistic future for the organisation that is better in some important ways than the current situation (Kouzes & Posner, 1987). Several authors (Briggs & Wohlstetter, 2003; Harris 2002; Hopkins, 2001; Leithwood et al., 2006; Mulford, 2006; Stoll & Fink, 1996) have underscored the importance of vision building for school improvement. Further, Lambert (2003) describes vision as “the touch stone for all other actions” (p. 50). The case study school, likewise, has an image for the future: its motto; “a good vision can often be expressed succinctly in motto or slogan form” (Louis & Miles, 1990, p. 219).

This vision is first created in the minds of the leader but then it is communicated so that others “come to see what the leader sees” (Kouzes & Posner, 1987, p. 100). The Head’s articulation of the vision includes both the content of the vision and the process involved in ‘getting there’ (Fullan, 1997a) through appropriate actions and

words (Sergiovanni, 1991). Thus, there is a high priority accorded to academic excellence: setting of the high target, 80% average pass rate for students; enforcing the policy to re-work with students who do not achieve the required level to reach this target; taking a personal interest in reviewing the students' results continuously to monitor this target; and, her active participation in review meetings to clarify whether targets are achieved or not; all attest to this priority. The keeping of the 'eye-catching' slogan visible and, having all written communication carry the school motto, further helps to communicate and strengthen the need for academic excellence.

The Head's motive to keep the focus on the set target and establishing ways to bring back on track those who run off target were noteworthy features of the school. Thus, these actions of the Head render vision a key element of the case study school because they have set a strong sense of overall purpose and direction for the school (Briggs & Wohlstetter, 2003; Mulford, 2006).

### **5.2.3 Emphasis on Proper Planning**

Planning is a notable feature in effective or improving schools (Harris, 2000, 2002; Hopkins, 2001; Hopkins et al., 1994; Stoll & Fink, 1996). The Head of the case study school has a strong determination to plan all school activities. One incident indicated to the researcher the emphasis she laid on proper planning through her displeasure (however subtle it appeared to be) shown towards one of the ad hoc decisions made by the central office. The researcher also noted how relieved the Head and many staff were due to recent scrapping of the interschool competitions because now the school could focus on more important things and plan work accordingly, as the Head mentioned:

We still have meticulous planning and work to do. However, the focus has changed to the needs of the school and not to the needs of outside agencies... Now we identify the needs of the school and plan and work accordingly.

Many agree that now everything is systematically planned and planned well ahead of time and, therefore, work has become easy for them. Planning is evident in the following ways: roles and responsibilities have been identified and a position description or job description given to all staff. Making staff aware of policies and

procedures and giving them job descriptions are two important actions to improve performance of teachers (Montgomery & Hadfield, 1989). Further, the school handbook specifies clearly all the procedures related to work and a daily work schedule is drawn up and posted on the notice board for staff to see their additional duties. For curricular planning, one of (if not) the most important functions in any school, specific mechanisms exist: the scheme preparation, which is held once a term and coordination meetings which are held once a week. Having structures such as these, enables staff to carry out their day to day work effectively (Leithwood et al., 2006). Furthermore, staff development, another key area in school life, is conducted in consultation with teachers, suggesting “broad participation ... in the planning process” (Leithwood et al., 2006) and a staff development plan is drawn for the following year before the current year ends.

One important aspect of the principal’s planning is that she keeps the students’ interest at the forefront (MacBeath & Stoll, 2001) and affirms to staff that these students, too, can achieve. This enables her to get started quickly on various activities instead of making the planning so elaborate, so as not to lose the interest of staff (Fullan, 1997a).

As is evident from the above, the Head has a strong determination to properly plan all school activities. Further, the researcher was struck by the instances in which the importance of planning was mentioned by the staff, giving enough evidence that, prospective leaders emerging from this school would be well versed in planning school activities. Thus, it was evident from the data that emphasis on proper planning was vital for sustaining this school’s improvement efforts; thus, adding to research evidence that, planning is a necessary internal condition for school improvement (Harris, 2000, 2002; Hopkins, 2001; Hopkins et al., 1994; Leithwood et al., 2006; Stoll & Fink, 1996).

#### **5.2.4 Maintaining an Academic Focus**

A student focus, with a special emphasis on improving student’s results, is a key feature of effective schools or improving schools (Harris, 2002). Numerous studies of schools confirm this finding (see, for example, Gray et al., 1999; Mitchell et al., 2002;

Mortimore et al., 1988). The data from the case study school resonates with this finding, too: that is, as stated earlier, the school has an elevated focus on improving students' results, with a specific target of achieving a class average of 80% pass and anyone failing to reach this target is asked to work again with students till the level is achieved.

Schools studied by Gray et al (1999) and Mitchell et al (2002) kept this momentum by conducting various academic programmes pitched at different levels: 'tactics', 'strategies' and 'capacity building' (Gray et al., 1999, p. 145). Data from this study suggest that, at the level of 'tactics', that is, some obvious things that were needed to improve performance, examples included the extra classes, student 'contracts' and literary activities. At the level of 'strategies', that is, focusing systematically on particular areas of weakness or strengthening an area of importance, examples included the reading programme, conducted to address the issue of language ability of students, an area of weakness identified by the school. The Head's efforts to create a culture of evaluation (Edwards, 2003) (discussed later) depicts one of the capacity-building level activities of the school; an activity purported to influence the school's culture and, thereby, affecting the creation of a learning organisation.

Although there is debate about whether high expectations lead to improvement or improvements lead to high expectations, the important thing is that high expectations for students is a feature in schools doing good work as many review studies of effective schools attest (see, for example, Edmonds, 1982, in Beare et al., 1989; Levin & Lezotte, 1990, & Sammons et al, 1995, in UNESCO, 2005; MacBeath & Stoll, 2001; Purkey & Smith, 1983, among others). Keeping the 'academic bar' high and regular monitoring of students' work by the Head has made teachers keep their expectations of students high, too; a finding similar to that of two schools studied by Gray et al (1999). Mitchell et al's (2002) study of ten New Zealand schools also concluded similarly: "teachers and principals held high expectations for student achievement" (p. 17). More than half the staff interviewed in this study agreed that the school had very high expectations although one teacher raised doubts about how realistic this expectation was.

There is no argument about the fact that pupil's learning is enhanced when teachers motivate them (see, for example, Beresford, 2003; Levin & Nolan, 2004). It was evident from the data that teachers motivated students in a variety of ways: The school analyses unit test results and some of these are displayed as graphs and simple charts and are shown to students to make them aware of how they are progressing, what needs to be done next and to encourage them; both supervisors and teachers talk to individual students about their performance and encourage them to work hard. They provide feedback in such a way as to boost self confidence in students; various reward systems are put in place to reinforce students positively and this includes, among other things, awarding of certificates and badges for both academic and non academic work; and finally, success is publicly acknowledged, a common feature of the school.

Many scholars who have studied improving or effective schools (Mortimore et al., 1988; Gray et al., 1999, MacBeath & Stoll, 2001, among others) have noted that emphasis on academic work was a strong feature in the schools they studied. Given the history of the case study school and the competitive spirit among Male' schools, as indicated by many staff members, maintaining an academic focus was important for the school. Despite concerns from some staff about the set target being too high, the Head had put various measures in place to ensure that this focus was maintained. In fact, most staff mentioned that students' results have improved by maintaining the academic focus in this way.

## **5.2.5 Keeping Teaching and Learning at Centre Stage**

### ***5.2.5.1 Curriculum: Content***

The National Primary Curriculum is taught in all primary schools of Maldives. Text books have been written on this curriculum and, for the most part, the school's main objective has been to cover the curricular content specified in the syllabus or texts. Although there are text books for every subject at this level, many teachers use other resources (library, internet, etc) to supplement and complement what is specified in the syllabus. The content of the current curriculum concerned some curriculum

personnel and one teacher remarked: “I believe the current curriculum is based more on imparting knowledge. It should be made more activity- or skills-based”. Therefore, emphasis is laid on utilizing as many activities as possible in classroom teaching (Leithwood et al., 2006) so that students will be able to link what they learn in school later in their lives (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995); in Hopkins’ (2007) terms, for learning to have, “enduring and intrinsic value” (p. 58).

#### **5.2.5.2 Curriculum Implementation: A Holistic Emphasis**

School goals should be aligned with national goals, a feature of successful schools (Harris, 2002; Hopkins, 2007; Leithwood et al., 2006) (see figure 14 for the three most related goals in this regard).

**Figure 14: National Educational Goals<sup>28</sup>**

<p>To develop capable individuals with useful occupational skills, knowledge and attitudes for national development with a sense of dignity of labour and for preserving the nation’s environment resources.</p> <p>To provide facilities for life-long education for all citizens so that each individual becomes a self-learner and continue to apply his intellectual capacity; technical skills and learn to cope with new technologies and discoveries and develop an appreciation and understanding of changes now occurring in the social and economic life in Maldives.</p> <p>To strengthen national consciousness, and to preserve the nation’s cultural heritage by promoting desirable cultural values, traditions and the national language.</p>
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*Source: Ministry of Education, 1985, p. 9*

In line with this thinking, educating children is seen by many staff as a holistic endeavour. In their view, education is not just about academic learning alone but personal development and social and interpersonal skills are included in their conception of education. Notions such as building confidence, being responsible, taking initiative or being able to lead, having self discipline, being motivated and being productive feature in their idea of personal development. And, in a similar way, notions such as respecting others, participation, cooperation and communication, feature in their idea of social and interpersonal skills. Furthermore, inculcation of

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<sup>28</sup> These are only the relevant goals to the topic of discussion

certain values, ethical, moral and religious, that are important to the overall development of the child, is also a part of this holistic approach to education. Ethical values include greeting, taking responsibility, caring and sharing while moral values include good behaviour, rule abiding and respecting others. Fulfilling religious duties is the key aspect with regard to religious values. This conception of education, held by staff, resonates with Beare et al's (1989) concept of "develop[ing] ... the whole child" which includes "intellectual, social, psychological, ethical, moral, spiritual, physical, cultural and aesthetic" development (p. 60).

Although this seems a favourable platform from which to embark on educational activities, some staff agree that much needs to be done in this regard. However, the important thing is that the school provides many opportunities for personal, social and interpersonal skills development and values inculcation: assembly addresses by the Head or the assistants; supervisors' visits to classrooms to talk to students about these values and to remind students of their importance; lectures and /or seminars by people of national stature; and various displays of key messages in the school compound. Furthermore, a variety of sports and extra-curricular activities are offered to students, as Brighouse and Woods (1999) note: the provision of curriculum enrichment, the usual extra-curricular activities like sports, drama, club activities and the like held in schools and extension opportunities, study opportunities provided during non-teaching time of the school day (i.e., before, after and in-between sessions), all provide a real opportunity to prepare for life long learning.

### ***5.2.5.3 Curriculum Delivery: Teaching***

Teachers are urged to use a variety of resources in planning their lessons and they are required to discuss lesson planning at coordination meetings. Many make it a point to consider students' prior learning because that is the foundation on which student's build new learning (Harris, 2002; Hopkins, 2007; Levin & Nolan, 2004).

Harris summarizes aspects of effective teaching as follows: "effective teachers structure the content by beginning with an overview, outlining objectives, calling attention to the main ideas, summarizing sub-parts as the lesson progresses and review main ideas at the end" (2002: 94). Lessons taken by teachers had structure in

the sense that they tend to follow the above steps: see also, the “*tactical plan*” suggested by Montgomery and Hadfield (1989, pp. 79-80) [their emphasis]. Further, Hopkins (2007) and Mortimore et al (1988) found that having structure in lessons benefited students.

From the few lessons observed by the researcher, it was evident that teachers created a ‘work-centered environment’ (Mortimore et al., 1988, p. 252) in their classrooms in that they spent more time in discussing the lesson than attending to mundane activities. And, as a result, as indicated by the responses to two questions by students (see Figure 13, p. 158), they seemed to enjoy school and look forward to new lessons (ibid).

A variety of teaching methods are being used to help students understand concepts and other material that they are supposed to learn (Hopkins, 2002; Levin & Nolan, 2004; Leithwood et al., 2006). What the school now emphasizes is succinctly put by the Head: “[Now,] more visual and hands-on activities are carried out compared to the past years”. Many teachers are now trying more ‘visual and hands-on’ activities in their lessons. One supervisor also told me about such an activity in which a teacher was trying a new idea (Levin & Nolan, 2004); that is, he was using real objects found in the environment as teaching aids and this helped to improve the creative writing ability of students. In addition to hands-on activities, other notable strategies include the “use [of] technology in learning”, a useful way for “structuring learning experiences” (Blasé and Blasé, 2006, p. 55) and giving challenging work (Levin & Nolan, 2004).

Finally, teachers are provided with regular feedback on their lessons as a way of encouraging them to persevere (Blasé & Blasé, 2006). Sparks and Horsley (1989) contend that observing teachers and providing them with feedback about the lesson being observed helps an individual to reflect on his or her work such that s/he can improve student learning.

#### 5.2.5.4 Curriculum Assessment

Assessing students' work is a key aspect of effective teaching (Harris, 2002; Stufflebeam, 2003) because it is through assessing their work that staff can "improve their understanding of the needs of their students and how much they are learning" (Stufflebeam, 2003, p. 776). Assessing is done basically by providing on-going and regular feedback and correcting mistakes (Doyle, 1987 in D. Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1991) and regular testing and reviewing (Creemers, 1994, in Harris, 2002). In the case study school, the usual way teachers assess students' work is by asking questions during the lesson. Some teachers give tests, too. At the end of each unit (the smallest content unit on which students are assessed on a formal basis), 'unit tests' are given and teachers mark them. Because the top management places such a high emphasis on systematic monitoring of students' progress, teachers value the importance of the diagnostic function that these unit tests serve. Teachers also check students' books regularly. Further, supervisors, too, do a random check on how books are marked and provide feedback, a finding similar to Ofsted (1994): Heads<sup>[29]</sup> of department ... monitor[ed] the quality of work in their subject by visiting lessons, examining exercise books, scrutinizing homework diaries and so forth" (pp. 20-21). This becomes a kind of self-check for teachers on how they assess students' work. "One of the simplest ways of improving assessment is through systematically monitoring children's exercise books ... [for they] represent a cumulative record of pupils' work and also indicate to a third party, such as the school head, the volume, style and progression of work set by the teacher" (Hawes & Stephens, 1990, p. 174).

As can be noted from the above discussion, there are many measures put in place to keep teaching and learning at the centre stage. However, one point that stands out is, as Hawes and Stephens (1990), Hopkins (2007) and Newmann and Wehlage (1995) assert, the school's efforts to link classroom learning to the students' lives outside the school. To this end, the use of hands-on activities or using activities-based methods in classroom teaching is given a high accord although one SMT member mentioned: "We have been trying to ... use more student-centered activities..., but still I won't say we have totally succeeded. But still we are working towards it..." Nonetheless, it is noteworthy how the school is trying to engrave this value in teachers; it has

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<sup>29</sup> In the Maldives, the supervisors in the primary schools are the counterparts of heads of departments in secondary schools.

become one of the subjects of discussion in the two key, weekly, curriculum related meetings of the school: the coordination meetings and performance discussion meetings.

### **5.2.6 Personal Involvement in Monitoring and Evaluation**

Systematic monitoring of pupils' progress enables a school to determine whether it is achieving its goals (Levine & Stark, 1981, in Purkey & Smith, 1983; Stufflebeam, 2003) and to identify what works well and what needs to be improved (Stoll & Fink, 1996; Stufflebeam, 2003). Hence, regular monitoring of pupils' work is high on the agenda of improving schools (Harris, 2002; Mitchell, et al., 2002; Mortimore et al, 1984; Scheerens, 1992; Stoll et al., 1996; Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993). Many participants in the current study indicated that the school recently has started laying emphasis on the systematic monitoring of students' progress. Although this emphasis was started during the previous regime, it was the current head, who was then the assistant, who was doing the actual analysis. And now being the Head herself, she is ever more determined to continue this trend: that is, in terms of Edwards (2005), "taking active steps to firmly embed a valuing of evaluation as a significant part of the prevailing culture of the school" (p. 5). As such, she described how this was done in the school currently:

Every week I go through the results of the assessments given at the presence of teachers and supervisors involved in the particular grade. Similarly, at review meetings held with senior management, supervisors report on aspects such as students' behaviour, incompleteness of work etc. Therefore monitoring and intervention takes place throughout.

The school uses the self-reference criterion (Baumgart, 2001; Stoll & Fink, 1996) to monitor progress over time and this is because there are no national standards against which to base the performance level. The school level yardsticks, according to the School handbook are: "Those who achieve a final aggregate of 85% would get 'commended reports' and those who achieve 90% would get 'honour-listed reports'". Schools studied by Mitchell et al (2002) also compared the results of the current year with that of the past year for prompting discussion on what the school was doing to improve achievement.

Mortimore et al (1988) found that headteachers in their study were knowledgeable about what went on in the classrooms in terms of pupil progress because they were involved in it. Personally the Head is involved in evaluating the school's performance. As such, she is well informed about classroom teaching through her attendance at weekly review meetings<sup>30</sup>. At these meetings, the Head meets all supervisors together with the two assistant heads. The supervisors report a summary of their work for the previous week that includes their main activities and concerns. This summary is not a descriptive write-up but jotted down points based on a set format and, yet, it is an informative meeting for the Head with regard to student learning and the teaching of teachers. Her attendance at these meetings makes her knowledgeable about the capabilities of individual teachers and she is ready to assert professional authority when the need arises, as was found by Mortimore et al (1988): “[headteacher] influenced the teaching strategies of teachers, but only selectively, where they judged it necessary” (p. 250).

To the extent that student learning is the ultimate target of a school, what better tool could a school's head have than possessing a thorough knowledge of students' performance levels and teachers' ability to deliver lessons in order to monitor the said target? The Head's role-modeling is at its highest in dealing with this aspect. In this regard, working at the computer, personally, to prepare performance analysis charts comprehensible to all teachers, and discussing these with them on a regular basis, are sound indications of the Head's personal involvement in students' learning and her determination to embed a valuing of evaluation as a normal part of the school's daily life (Edwards, 2005). One SMT member commented on the Head's involvement as thus: “Now the principal looks into this matter personally and, therefore, this has become a driving force and an incentive for us, to pursue our efforts on improving results.”

### **5.2.7 Fostering a Learning Culture in the School**

Focusing on fundamentals, one of the ‘leader actions’ as mentioned above, also includes the fostering of a professional culture (Fullan, 1997a). First and foremost,

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<sup>30</sup> A sample of review meeting's notes and the reporting format is given in Appendix 22

the principal tries to create a learning culture in the school by being a role model: “a leader of learning” (Brighthouse & Woods, 1999, p. 83) or, in Barth’s terms, the ‘head learner’ (1990, p. 49). Blasé and Kirby (1992) found that, in their study of effective principals who were trying to bring out the best in teachers, ‘principals consistently *model*[led] appropriate behaviour” (p. 33). [their emphasis] Fiore and Chip (2005), too, have found that staff “*do* look to the school leader as role models” (p. 14). [their emphasis] In this regard, the Head attends professional development workshops and reads and shares professional material with teachers (Blasé & Kirby, 1992). “Sharing (i.e., giving others instructional materials and resources)” in this way and, “showing others (i.e., demonstrating how to perform important professional tasks)..., takes on profound meaning for personal and professional growth, individual efficacy, and career success” because teaching is “an intensely human endeavour” (Blasé & Blasé, 2006, p. 81). Furthermore, Joyce and Showers assert: “observing other professionals work is a valuable learning experience in itself...” (1988, p. 76). My observations of the ‘Discussion meetings’ in which demonstration lessons occur, suggest that they tend to be useful for staff as a learning opportunity.

According to Newmann & Wehlage (1995), one of the main ways in which leaders try to foster a learning culture is through staff development. Hence, teacher learning has to be a goal and an intermediate outcome of schools (Stoll & Fink, 1996). To this end, a high priority is given, in the case study school, to staff development and, despite the schools’ difficulties in getting fully staffed, policies relating to staff taking temporary leave to study are kept as flexible as possible.

Staff development is a key feature in improving schools (Brighthouse & Woods, 1999; Cohn & Rossmiller, 1987; Harris, 2000, 2002; Hopkins, 2001; Hopkins, et al., 1994; Levin & Lezotte, 1990; Mitchell et al., 2002; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Stoll & Fink, 1996). Further, if one were to equate ‘staff development’ with ‘teacher quality’, then, Fuller (1987), Fuller and Clarke (1994) and Lockheed and Levin (1993), too, agree on this finding, although they do not specifically state “staff development” per se. Finally, it is the personal and professional growth of teachers that impact more on student development than any other activity in the school (Barth, 1990; Brighthouse & Woods, 1999; Glickman, 2002).

Staff development in this school takes many forms: workshops and seminars are the most common. Both outside and in-house training opportunities are provided to staff, as Stoll and Fink (1996) rightly state: “traditionally, staff development has implied external workshops... However, teacher development needs to take place within schools [too]” (p. 152). In addition to these more formal workshops or seminars, the school has provided opportunities for professional talk as one form of staff development. In this regard, the Thursday’s ‘discussion’ sessions and the ‘coordination’ meetings are two very appropriate avenues for staff to talk about the practice of teaching (Brighouse & Wood, 1999; Little, 1981, in Hopkins et al., 1994) and, indeed, they are regular staff development activities.

Finally, there is a glimpse of possible partnerships, both at group and individual levels, because an individual school cannot meet the needs of all pupils; they have to go beyond the walls of the school (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Stoll & Fink, 1996)

Regardless of what form staff development takes, the school tries to make staff development as appropriate and relevant as possible to the needs of the staff. In this regard, staff needs are identified (Brighouse & Woods, 1999; Harris, 2002; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Swap, 1987), in addition to school needs, before embarking on a development programme.

Moreover, staff themselves talked about the usefulness of their training. While teachers found that training related to classroom practice had most impact on their work (see, for example, McLaughlin, 1991), supervisors reported that, for them, training related to personnel development and management skills were the most useful. This is understood, given the varied tasks involved in their job for which these skills are important, if not vital, as Fullan (1992) states, “professional development must become ... job-embedded” (pp. 76-7).

While everything possible is done to refresh current staff, consideration is given to orient new staff to the school as soon as possible (Montgomery & Hadfield, 1989). Finally, the school has provided Internet access on three computers in the staffroom for teachers to access new knowledge (Brighouse & Woods, 1999) and, as mentioned

earlier, at key points in time, such as meetings, the Head reiterates the importance of learning.

In summary, student learning is the ultimate target of any school. Further, many scholars (Barth, 1990; Brighthouse & Woods, 1999; Glickman, 2002, among others) have convincingly argued that it is the personal and professional growth of teachers that impact more on student achievement than any other activity in the school. Thus, the tenacity of the Head to stay current in her field and, at the same time, role-modelling this act and ensuring that a variety of learning opportunities, including both school-based and teacher-initiated professional development activities (Clarke & Dempster, 2006) are provided for the staff, are the hallmarks of the Head's (leader's) action to foster a learning culture in the school.

### **5.2.8 Being People-Oriented**

Organisations are inhabited by people, humans. And, as humans are interdependent (Stoll & Fink, 1996), trust becomes paramount for this relationship to exist (Covey, 1989, in Stoll & Fink, 1996). Further, Bryk & Schneider (2002), in Fullan (2003), contend that trust is a social resource that facilitates positive attitudes and behaviours in teachers that would affect student learning and advocate four elements that build trust: respect, competence, personal regard and integrity.

In the Head's dealings with the staff, these elements are evident: staff are treated with respect and care. She is even empathetic towards them. According to one teacher, she maintains impartiality in the sense that all staff are treated equally and fairly. Further, she is always ready to intervene in curriculum matters when appropriate. It is not only the academic staff who are treated in this way but also every staff member. One of the decisions that she took regarding the running of school canteen indicated how she cared about maintenance staff.

Effective principals show respect and care for students and expect staff to follow suit (Blase & Kirby, 1992). While teachers are required to treat students similarly, as stipulated in the 'School Handbook', "Avoid favouritism and be impartial" and "Develop good relationship with students and show love and care", the Head models

the way for staff “do look to the school leader as role models” (Fiore & Chip, 2005, p. 14). [their emphasis] Finally, every available opportunity is used to recognize and praise good work done by staff (Blasé & Blasé, 2006) although one teacher mentioned that hard work was not appreciated.

Furthermore, Kouzes and Posner (1987, p. 10) write: “Leaders ... *enable others to act*” [their emphasis]. Thus, in a school, enabling others (teachers) to act, involves, among other things, providing the needed resources for them to perform their duties. This, according to Hord, 1988, in Blasé & Kirby, 1992, is a critical leadership function in effective schools, and several research studies have shown gains in student achievement when the principal effectively fulfils the resource-provider role (see, for example, Blasé & Kirby, 1992).

Staff talk of the ease with which they are able to get resources for teaching and learning. For the smooth facilitation of these resources, the Head<sup>31</sup> has kept a close working relationship with the school administrator, one who has significant influence in providing resources, often a conflict-ridden relationship in some of Male’ schools.

In a centralized system, such as the one that prevails in the education system of the Maldives, there are limitations in terms of rigid procedures and limited resources that hinder a school head’s ability to cater for the diverse needs of all staff members. However, the Head makes up for these limitations through one of the social resources available to her: trust. Trust, according to Bryk and Schneider (2002), in Fullan (2003), is a social resource that facilitates positive attitudes and behaviours in teachers that in turn affects students positively. Although one member of staff mentioned that hard work was not appreciated, data suggest that the Head respects all her staff and treats everyone equally and fairly. These two traits have enabled her to establish a high level of trust with her staff who in turn are motivated and committed, as a result, to make school improvement work.

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<sup>31</sup> Direct quote is omitted for confidentiality reasons

### **5.2.9 Empowering Others**

From the perspective of leaders using their power to get things done rather than having it over others (Sergiovanni, 1991), empowerment is about sharing power (Edwards, 2003), as Brighouse & Woods (1999) rightly assert, “the first rule about leadership is that it is shared” (p. 45). Sharing power in this way expands the group’s power to get things done (Blasé & Kirby, 1992; Edwards, 2003). Sharing power has been advocated to another effect; that is, to challenge the singular view of leadership (Stoll & Harris, 2006). This is because, organisations that exist in today’s complex and fast-paced world, are faced with unpredictable and sometimes overwhelming demands which cannot be catered for by the intelligence of a single person (A. Hargreaves & Fink, 2003, 2006b).

In addition to creating synergy (Edwards, 2003), empowering others fulfils another important function of leaders; that of developing leadership capacity in others (Lambert, 2003). This is done by providing professional development (Smith & Piele, 2006), “support, encouragement, and growth opportunities” (Sergiovanni, 1991). And, in doing so, leaders harness potential leadership in others (Brighouse & Woods, 1999) or create future leaders: the concept of ‘leadership succession’ as advocated by A. Hargreaves and Fink (2003).

A lot of effort is made by the Head to empower others. “Every teacher has the opportunity to take initiative, work for school improvement ... Supervisor[s] ... are [also] encouraged to use their knowledge and skills and make a difference to the work they do...” (School Head). The role/task designation chart further signifies this effort (see Appendix 18). Furthermore, to bring out the best in staff, they are given training in leadership and management and specific roles are assigned to them according to their capabilities: “Work is assigned based on their ability, competence, experience and knowledge. For example, supervisor looking after English Language has good command of the language ... All supervisors are given training on leadership and management skills” (School Head). Furthermore, her responsibility does not stop there; the Head monitors the leadership exercised by staff, signifying her efforts to harness leadership potential in others (Brighouse and Woods, 1999; Lambert, 2003).

Developing leadership capacity in others is an important leadership function (Brighouse & Woods, 1999; Lambert, 2003), but more so in the Maldives, because, frequent changes of school heads is not uncommon, as was noted by Qasim (2007) in her study of one secondary school in the Maldives: “principals and assistant principals may be asked to move from school to school, sometimes on a yearly basis” (p. 4). So, given this situation, the Head’s work in this regard needs to be commended for she assigns tasks based on staff abilities, provision is made for appropriate training, supports and monitors their work and, when necessary, brings changes to suit task to people or vice-versa. All these are indications of the Head’s forward thinking in creating future leaders from within the school by empowering them. However, it should be noted that, creating the *next* leader in the case study school, which is the crux of ‘leadership succession’, is not completely in the hands of the current Head for ‘hiring and firing’ are done centrally.

#### **5.2.10 Visible Presence**

Blasé and Blasé (2006), Blasé & Kirby (1992) and Leithwood et al., (2006) consider the visible presence of the head as one of the roles that has a positive effect on students. Further, Blasé & Kirby (1992) assert: “as a principal’s visibility increases, so too do his or her opportunities to model effective behaviour” (Blasé & Kirby, 1992, p. 106). Literally, the Head of the case study school is visible almost all the time due to the location of her room and, above everything else, the door is kept open almost always. This visibility was important in the case study school for the Head was modelling one important leader behaviour: reading professional material (Blasé & Blasé, 2006; Blasé & Kirby, 1992). Further, the fact that she is in school most of the time and tours around the school several times a day (Blasé & Kirby, 1992; Leithwood et al., 2006; Montgomery & Hadfield, 1989) adds to her visibility.

The significance of the Head’s visibility is that it sends an important message to teachers and parents, those closest to students, about the working relationships that exist between the Head and them. To teachers, this is an indication that support is available (Blasé & Kirby, 1992; Leithwood et al., 2006) and, to parents, the Head is approachable.

### **5.2.11 Building Allies or Creating Partnerships**

Effective schools or improving schools try to create a positive relationship with their wider community (Fullan & D. Hargreaves 1991; Harris, 2002; Hopkins, 2001; Hopkins et al., 1994; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995) through their involvement in order to help create a climate that is supportive of learning. Connecting with the wider community is done not only to create a supportive learning climate but also to bring some coherence to the lives of students, to gauge reality from as close as possible (Stoll & Fink, 1996) and because schools alone cannot sustain a supportive learning climate (Stoll, MacBeath & Mortimore, 2001, p. 203). Furthermore, schools exist within a context of potential partners (Stoll and Fink, 1996) and each school is affected by the climate set by them (Brighouse and Woods, 1999). These potential partners have their own agendas (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Stoll and Fink, 1996) that, at times, might “undermine organizational capacity” (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995, p. 4). So, “the goal should be to have these forces act in ways which are complementary and mutually supportive” (Stoll and Fink, 1996, p. 133). In this regard, Fullan (1997a) argues that school leaders should try to build allies through school related activities or projects with at least five groups: senior level administrators, peers, teachers, parents and other stakeholders. In this study, ‘senior level administrators’ includes the Ministry of Education (the central office) and ‘other stake holders’ include professional institutions and other organizations. Data suggest that the school Head maintains these relationships, although at varying levels, with these five groups. Many avenues exist in the school for the Head to involve these five groups in school related activities or specific projects.

First, with school staff, various channels for communication that are put in place in the school enable them to know what is going on within and outside of the school. For example, key responsibilities are provided in written form and there are many avenues, such as weekly ‘coordination’ meetings and Thursdays’ ‘discussion’ meetings, for staff to talk about important issues. In addition, teachers give written feedback at the end of each year. Furthermore, for staff development, staff are consulted and for other important event or activities, staff views are elicited, too, although one member of staff did not agree on this latter issue. Finally, the Head’s door is always open for teachers to meet and discuss any issue with their seniors.

“They can also go directly to the principal; there are no restrictions” (Participant). Second, with parents, communication is mainly through the PTA meetings, parent-teacher evenings, invitations to parents to give presentations and to help with specific academic activities; Third, with senior colleagues, communication takes place mostly, on a case by case basis or when a need arises; and finally, with peers and other stakeholders, when the need arises.

The importance of a learning culture within a school has been mentioned earlier. Schools alone cannot sustain such a climate of learning (Stoll, Mac Beath & Mortimore, 2001). As such, Fullan’s (1997a) suggestion, that of creating partnerships with at least five groups, (senior level administrators, peers, teachers, parents and other stakeholders) through school related projects, becomes important for the schools. Further, to the extent that communication is the main vehicle through which these vital relationships<sup>32</sup> are kept alive, the above discussions suggest that the Head has put in place “sound procedures for communication” or “structured communication opportunities” which are essential “in order for a school to organise itself to accomplish its goals, maintain in good working order and, at the same time, adapt to changing circumstances” (Hopkins, et al., 1994, p. 171). Furthermore, the Head’s ‘open door’ policy and her readiness to talk about differences seemed to be a strengthening force for these partnerships.

To summarise what has been discussed on strong leadership by the head, the data have revealed that there were a number of ‘leader actions’ conducive to creating a learning organisation. These actions included:

- Building a shared vision,
- Emphasising proper planning,
- Maintaining an academic focus,
- Keeping teaching and learning at centre stage,
- Maintaining personal involvement in monitoring and evaluation,
- Fostering a learning culture in school,

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<sup>32</sup> These relationships are discussed more fully in the next section on ‘culture’, under ‘working relationships’.

- Being people-oriented,
- Empowering others,
- Building allies or creating partnerships.

Table nine summarises major dimensions of leadership and how it relates to the leader actions and examples from the school. These leadership actions of the leader, that help in creating a learning organization, are among the three key concepts (change, leadership and culture) identified in this study as undergirding school improvement efforts. Next, how the concept of culture assists in bringing improvement is discussed.

**Table 9: Leader actions to create a learning organisation**

Most cited dimension of effective leadership <sup>33</sup>	Leadership actions to create a learning organisation	Key aspect of the leadership action	Examples from the school
Planning	1. Get started quickly (avoid elaborate planning) and plan small wins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Think of what is important to get started; some amount of planning is also needed.</li> <li>● Develop ownership by more ‘doing’ than ‘planning’</li>   <li>● Plan small wins</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Keeps student interest at the fore front. Affirms to staff that these students too can achieve</li> <li>● Involving key and other staff in termly and weekly meetings: Termly meetings set the broad objectives for the term, while at weekly meetings, specific tasks are set and previous ones reviewed</li>   <li>● Staff are praised at these meetings for work accomplished successfully</li> </ul>
Being achievement oriented in terms of student learning	2. Focus on fundamentals: curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Select few priorities</li> <li>● Try to achieve something related to core educational goals</li> <li>● This will show leader commitment and support</li> <li>● The development of a professional culture</li> <li>● Decide on what not to do through: maintaining focus; make priorities known to boss; manage time; and, get used to say ‘no’.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● On the academic side: achieving the target of 80%; reading; and, writing (in terms of vocabulary building). On the social development side: greeting others; using polite language; Confidence building through extra curricular activities</li> <li>● Analysis, communication and display of students’ results; Trying to create a culture of evaluation. Provide staff training to enhance teaching repertoire</li> <li>● Read and share professional material; attend professional workshops</li> <li>● Maintain focus by executing instructional leadership (i.e., working with teachers on curriculum matters) and maintain public relations (i.e., instructionally focused public relations) and managing time by delegating tasks but performs key tasks: e.g. analysis of results</li> </ul>

<sup>33</sup> Blase & Kirby, 1992; Collins, 2001 cited in Fullan, 2003; Edwards, 1999, 2003; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985 cited in Hopkins, 2001; Hopkins 2001; Kouzes & Posner, 1987; McEwan, 2003; Senge, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1991; Smith & Piele, 2006; Spillane, 2004; Stoll & Fink, 1996.

Risk-taking or having courage	3. Practice fearlessness and risk-taking and know when to be cautious	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To bring about improvements, one needs to face organisation realities; that is, to practice fearlessness and risk-taking.</li> <li>● Three criteria for practicing fearlessness are: to be selective; attempt at small scale implementation; make only positive acts of courage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Remind staff that we should face the realities and quotes a scholar</li> <li>● Assert leadership where appropriate</li> <li>● As a positive act of courage, implicitly (in the sense, without outright rejection) indicating goal incongruence at times between the central office and the school</li> </ul>
Empowering colleagues to take leadership roles	4. Embrace diversity, empower others to take lead roles, support them to perform those roles and build relational trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Talk over difference of opinion. Expect this in schools</li> <li>● Assign roles including means (information &amp; resources) to fulfil them</li> <li>● Support them; that is, staying involved, reviewing progress and being able to meet them</li> <li>● Build trust, a 'social resource' (Bryke &amp; Schneider, 2002, in Fullan, 2003). It facilitates positive attitudes and behaviours in teachers that would affect student learning. Four elements to build trust are: respect; competence; personal regard; and, integrity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Head understands the issue of personal differences and acts tactfully</li> <li>● Lead roles are assigned to staff (e.g. leader for literary activities; leader for cubs, etc.)</li> <li>● Staff are given authority (access to vital information and resources) to perform these roles</li> <li>● Attend key curricular meetings; personally analyse student achievement data; and, maintain the open-door policy for consultation</li> <li>● Respect and trust others; show empathy but exercise firmness in her dealings</li> <li>● Stays current in her field and always ready to intervene in curriculum matters (i.e., teaching and learning)</li> </ul>
Building a shared vision	5. Build a shared-vision while emphasizing both content and the process of the vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Have and share a vision by letting others know what is important for them (Kouzes &amp; Posner, 1987); that is, children's interest!</li> <li>● Spell out clearly what is involved in getting to this vision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Vision is articulated and shared</li> <li>● School motto is upheld in every activity of the school</li> <li>● All written communication bear the school motto</li> <li>● Expectations for students are set high</li> <li>● Analysis of student results are shown to staff with a breakdown by individual class levels, clearly showing outcomes of labour and what needs to be done next</li> </ul>

Attending to influence culture	6. Build allies or create partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Keep an alliance, through school related activities, with senior colleagues, peers, teachers, parents and other stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Many avenues for discussing school related activities exists <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● With school staff – The communication systems, ‘sharing’ &amp; ‘coordination meetings’, in place enable the Head to have professional talk with staff</li> <li>● With parents – PTA meetings; parents are invited to give presentations; to help with specific academic activities</li> <li>● With senior colleagues – Mostly, case by case basis or, when a need arises</li> <li>● With other stakeholder – When need arises</li> <li>● With peers - When need arises</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Committed to colleagues’ and one’s own learning	7. Become the ‘head learner’ of the school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To keep pace with changes in the environment, become learners themselves</li> <li>● Critically evaluate new initiatives for promising and empty ideas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Stay current in her field through reading &amp; sharing professional material; attend professional workshops, sending a vital message to others: continuous learning is important.</li> <li>● Staff are reminded of the importance of learning at key points in time: meetings, assemblies</li> <li>● Maintain a critical view on outside initiatives</li> </ul>

## 5.3 Culture

### 5.3.1 Introduction

Culture forms the backdrop against which all improvement efforts unfold (Hopkins, 2002). Although important, culture has been a neglected dimension in school improvement efforts (Hopkins et al, 1994; Schein, 1992; Stoll & Fink, 1996). This has been one of the rationales for this study because previous studies done in the Maldives have neglected this aspect.

As culture is not identified easily and nor is it easy to express (Schein, 1992), many scholars have expressed what culture is in different forms. In this regard, some have expressed it in a more practical or identifiable form: structures, norms and relationships (see, for example, MacGilchrist et al., 1995, in Stoll, 1999; Stoll, 1999; A. Hargreaves, 1997). This form of expressing culture related more to the main research question of this study, as Schein (1992) notes: “not all parts of culture are relevant to any given issue the organisation may be facing; hence attempting to study an entire culture in all its facets is not only impractical but also usually inappropriate” (p. 148). This section, therefore, outlines cultural aspects of the case study school along the above mentioned lines: structures, norms and relationships.

As has been stated in the ‘Findings’ chapter, there were structures (policies, systems and strategies), norms supporting teaching and learning and, various forms of relationships, depicting the school’s culture, that contributed toward the recent improvements seen in the school. Tables ten, eleven and twelve show these three interrelated generic dimensions of the school’s culture and how they are expressed in the everyday life of the school.

**Table 10: The structures in place that aided in maintaining a culture conducive to teaching and learning**

Dimensions or aspects of culture	How the dimension or aspect manifests in school
Structure (policies, systems and/or strategies)	<p><i>General</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Roles and responsibilities are clearly identified and communicated in writing</li> <li>● School handbook specifies in detail staff expectations</li> <li>● Daily roster indicates additional (non-teaching) duties</li> </ul> <p><i>Specific (curriculum related)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Coordination meetings which deal with major curricular work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Scheme preparation</li> <li>○ Lesson preparation and follow-up discussion</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Lesson observation by supervisors</li> <li>● Random check of students exercise books by supervisors</li> <li>● Weekly 'review' meetings</li> <li>● 'Coordination' meetings</li> <li>● 'Performance discussion' meetings</li> </ul>

### 5.3.2 Structures (policies, systems and strategies)

A culture exists in every organization or school (Beare et al., 1989; Deal & Kennedy, 1982). It impacts powerfully on every aspect of organisational life (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Fiore & Chip, 2005) and, therefore, plays a crucial role in organizational success (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). The existing culture may either be weak (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Firestone & Wilson, 1985, cited in Leithwood, Begley & Cousins, 1994) or strong (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). In a similar vein, Fiore and Chip (2005) talk of negative and positive cultures. Some examples of principal behaviours associated with negative cultures are: they are not visible so often; communicate minimally and rarely empower others while, in positive cultures, principals communicate regularly and with purpose, empower others to act and are visible most of the time (ibid).

Therefore, in positive or strong cultures, employees perform better because they know exactly what they are supposed to do and, as such, they are more satisfied and work

harder in order to achieve organizational goals (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). Data from the case study school suggest that there are appropriate “organizational structures [or frameworks that] facilitate day-to-day work of staff” (Leithwood et al., 2006, p. 88). Bolman & Deal (1991) define structure as the arrangement of roles and relationships that an organization puts in place for the purpose of accomplishing its goals. In the case study school, roles and responsibilities are clearly laid out and, in written form, given to all staff. Some staff mentioned this as a positive thing because now they are sure as to what to do whereas it was not the case before. In addition, the ‘School Handbook’ specifies in detail what is expected of everyone. Furthermore, a daily roster, signed by the Head, is put up on the notice board that tells staff what they are supposed to do in addition to their teaching duties.

A well established structure exists for planning, preparation and review of lessons, the key activity for the majority of staff. First, before the beginning of each term, a ‘Scheme of Work’ (the break down of the syllabus into smaller teaching units) is developed for every subject by the subject teachers and the respective supervisor. Second, there are the weekly ‘coordination meetings’ for discussing the following week’s curricular work in detail and also to shed light on current weeks work. These are “staff working groups” (Hopkins et al., 1994, p. 167) or “work teams” (Briggs & Wohlstetter, 2003, p. 360) or “planning groups” (Brighthouse & Woods, 1999) that are carefully structured to elicit active participation by the staff in the preparation of lesson plans and teaching materials (Brighthouse & Woods, 1999; Hopkins et al., 1994). These staff working groups, which the schools in the IQEA Project used similarly, (Hopkins et al., 1994), provide opportunities for staff to share their ideas and help one another in their work (Brighthouse & Woods, 1999; Hopkins et al., 1994).

To monitor what goes on in the classrooms, supervisors have a certain number of lessons to observe and a random check of a certain number of students’ exercise books during the week and they give feedback to teachers. Observing teaching and scrutinizing students’ work in this way are two important practices, among others, advocated by Brighthouse and Woods (1999), that schools could use to monitor and evaluate teaching and learning

which ultimately would help teachers improve practice and, thereby, enhance student learning. Further, when teachers are provided with feedback in this way by a colleague, it “substantially increased teachers’ efficacy in their instructional practices...” (Rosenholtz, 1989, p. 433) (see also Balse & Blasé, 2006). Finally, all teachers are attached to supervisors as a senior colleague to contact for information, advice and help.

To summarise, the presence of explicit structures for staff to carry out their responsibilities, both general (e.g. the daily roster) and specific or professional (e.g. allocated time for coordination meetings), have made work more manageable and enjoyable for the staff of this school. This adds to the literature that has shown the importance of structure for organizational work (see, for example, Bolman & Deal, 1991; Deal & Kennedy 1982; Leithwood et al., 2006, among others).

In the next section, norms that support teaching and learning are discussed.

### **5.3.3 Cultural Norms: Norms Supporting Teaching and Learning**

It has been mentioned earlier that norms are the unspoken rules governing the daily actions of teachers and administrators (Stoll, 1999) and that the presence of certain norms would aid in improvement (Saphier & King, 1989; Stoll & Fink, 1996). Further, if these norms exist in the school, they will reside in teachers’ and administrators’ beliefs and their daily actions would reveal these norms (ibid). In this regard, Saphier and King (1989) and Stoll and Fink (1996) advocate some cultural norms that can either be enhanced or instituted, depending on their existence or non-existence, respectively, by the leader and the staff. Data from the current study suggest that there were a set of similar cultural norms that were operating in the school. ‘Catch phrases’ have been identified in the data that portrayed these norms because, as stated previously, norms are manifest beneath the level of artefacts and cannot be identified easily (Edwards, 2003; Stoll and Fink, 1996; Stoll, 1999).

### ***5.3.3.1 A Common Goal – ‘Education Should Be a Holistic Endeavour’***

Goal clarity is a feature of academically successful schools (Purkey & Smith, 1983; Rosenholtz, 1989). The common belief among the staff is that education is a basic need for everyone and that it should include not only academic skills but also personal and social development skills, so that every child would be able to lead a normal life and contribute to society. Thus, in their terms, ‘to develop a holistic child’ has become an ideal shared by many staff. To this end, many teachers share the fact that what children learn at school should have relevance to their future needs and that they should be able to apply or utilize this knowledge and skills later. One of the features of “authentic pedagogy” or “authentic instruction,” advocated by Newmann & Wehlage, (1995) is making “connections to the world beyond the classroom” (pp. 16-17). They describe authentic pedagogy or instruction as teaching that relates “academic learning to important, realistic problems” in addition to providing deeper understanding of the subject matter (p. 3). And, it is to this end that using student-centered learning or activities-based learning as much as possible in classroom teaching becomes a goal shared by many staff. Thus, planning activities for students is talked about frequently in all curriculum related discussions: Thursday’s ‘discussion meetings’ and ‘coordination meetings’ are notable in this regard.

### ***5.3.3.2 Hard Work – ‘Teachers Are Working Hard On It’***

Ofsted (1994) found “extremely hard work” by staff as one of the factors that contributed to the success of one high school that they studied (p. 16). Similarly, ERO’s (1994) study of 44 “good New Zealand” schools found that staff in these schools were “conscientious and dedicated professionals” (p. 28). The following indicates how dedicated staff are in the case study school: achieving curricular objectives is the main aim of all teachers. In order to help students achieve these curricular objectives, conducting quizzes is one of the programmes the school initiated. Teachers put a lot of effort in conducting these quizzes as one supervisor mentioned: “Actually teachers help a lot to get prepared for the quiz. They have to bring them at extra time and then make them learn everything ... Teachers have done a great job, I would say, they spent a lot of time with the students”.

Further, because there is so much focus on making students' results transparent, teachers are really working hard to achieve that target. Furthermore, after struggling to accomplish curricular content within the class period, teachers then spent almost all of their free periods looking into pupils' work or checking their books, mostly done in the staffroom.

Besides this main function (teaching) of theirs, many teachers are put in charge of other activities (Eltis et al., 1984; McLaughlin, 2005). And, on top of these, when days for special marking (for example, the International Children's Day, May 10) come, they are even busier; sometimes to the extent that other important commitments in life are neglected, as one teacher said:

When I enter the school I can't even remember about my family. When I go out, I can remember, "yes, outside also I have a family, and I had to attend to them also."

So, 'hard work' has become a norm in this school.

### ***5.3.3.3 Competitive Spirit – 'We Can Do What Others Do'***

Being competitive or having competitive thinking is a trend or notion that pervades the entire school. It affects many aspects of school life because it shapes how staff approach their work. In this notion, comparisons are made about different things in different ways but most importantly about academic work. Not only staff hold this notion but it has become a mindset of parents and pupils as well.

Three sources seem to contribute to this notion: the school has increased its efforts to improve student academic results as one of its strategies to fight against the misperception of the public. So, when the results are made transparent, it becomes apparent to both teachers and students where they stand and what needs to be done. Secondly, the strong belief that staff hold for students in this school, that is, 'this school too could achieve regardless of who pupils are', triggers this competitive spirit in them.

Finally, secondary schools compare results of different feeder schools and, even though they do it confidentially, the primary schools know it. This places quite an impact on them, as one teacher mentioned: “Now secondary schools ... check on their intake’s performance by subject and by feeder schools. This implicit competition is also one of the reasons why these changes [focusing on results] have come about”.

What is significant about this notion is that it puts people into action. For example, this school examines curricular material (schemes of work and test papers) from all other primary schools. As Clarke (2000) notes, schools that continue to improve, “need to communicate and examine what other schools are doing” (quoted in Stoll, MacBeath & Mortimore, 2001, p. 203). Although access would have negative effects, competition in its own right is not a bad thing; after all, it is, according to Edwards (2005), one among many important values that guides people’s work.

#### ***5.3.3.4 Sense of Responsibility – ‘It’s Everybody’s Responsibility’***

According to organisational social psychologists, highly motivated people closely associate their feelings with how they perform their job and, likewise, teachers who are internally motivated show, among others, the following signs: “work investment” and a “desire to remain in the profession” (Rosenholtz, 1989, p. 422). Internal motivation is defined as “the basic conditions that promote high performance motivation and commitment to work (ibid). Most teachers whom I interviewed expressed their desire to continue as a teacher and some were even passionate about their work. However, there were a few who wanted to change; yet these latter, too, showed enthusiasm. Alongside these teachers, who are enthusiastic and passionate about teaching, all supervisors are very committed to see that work done by teachers has positive effects on students. Their commitment is expressed in how they mention the focus of their responsibility, as one of them mentioned: “It’s actually the coordinator’s responsibility to check on teachers, to see whether the students have understood. So, if I don’t achieve that target, that means I have failed. I am not able to do my work”.

### ***5.3.3.5 Continuous Learning – ‘We Can Always Learn’***

Many staff to whom I spoke aired their intention to continue their studies; as Barth (1990) rightly says, unless adults learn their students will not! The drive to keep on learning comes, in part, from the Head: “In almost every meeting our head encourages them and always says that we can always learn”. She also tries to become, in Barth’s (1990) terms, the ‘head learner’ or, “the leader of learning”, as Brighthouse and Woods (1999, p. 83) call it. In this regard, among other things, she tries to keep abreast of major developments in her field by reading professional material, making these items available to staff, sharing with them important material and attending workshops and seminars on professional development; all indicating that she is fulfilling one of her “professional obligation[s:] ... to grow professionally” (Stoll & Fink, 1996, p. 112).

### ***5.3.3.6 Support – ‘Everyone Helps Everyone’***

This norm is more related to personal than professional help. Teachers talk of help that they receive from supervisors, their senior colleagues, and that they could meet them for any matter, almost at any time. Further, if there is a need, the Head is always accessible. ‘Support’ was a norm in the Canadian schools studied by Stoll & Fink (1996), in which the administrators, despite their busy schedules, made themselves available to teachers to talk about important issues to them. Administrators made themselves available by being visible (ibid). The Head’s visibility in the case study school has been discussed previously. Furthermore, according to Blasé and Kirby (1992), helping teachers with discipline matters is one important way of providing support and another important form of support is helping teachers inside the classroom (Hopkins et al., 1994). When teachers know that help is at hand, their sense of efficacy is enhanced (Glidwell et al., 1983, in Rosenholtz, 1989). One teacher summarized how this norm unfolded in her experience:

It is very easy to work here... I never have to wait because I don’t have some information or I don’t know how to do something. Help is always at hand, ... you just need to mention that ...

My colleagues comforted me and supported me very much in ... [difficult classroom] situations. Some even came to my classroom when they were free and assisted me in managing the class...

Now I can take lessons effectively, class management is not an issue for me now...

### ***5.3.3.7 Appreciation and Recognition – ‘We Are Praised For Doing Good Work’***

Good work, done by teachers and students, is always recognized and, most of the times, publicly. Blasé & Kirby (1992) found that praising teachers in this way was one of the most effective ways that school leaders influenced teachers’ work. Further, staff talk of being valued (Stoll & Fink, 1996) because their work is being given due recognition. “Recognising how praise positively affected them, teachers often modeled the practice ... with students” (Blasé & Kirby, 1992, p. 14). In some of the *Good New Zealand Schools*, widespread use of praise was made in order to develop positive attitudes in students. (ERO, 1994).

To summarise, norms are the unspoken rules governing the daily actions of teachers and administrators (Stoll, 1999) and the presence of certain norms aid in improvement (Saphier & King, 1989; Stoll & Fink, 1996). Further, if these norms exist in the school, they will reside in teachers’ and administrators’ beliefs and their daily actions would reveal these norms (ibid). Because norms are manifest beneath the level of artefacts and cannot be identified easily (Edwards, 2003; Stoll and Fink, 1996; Stoll, 1999), ‘catch phrases’ have been identified, in this discussion, that portrayed these norms. Norms operating in this school are shown in table 11:

**Table 11: Norms operating in the school**

<b>Norms (supporting teaching and learning)</b>	<b>'Catch phrases' used to denote the norms</b>
A common goal	'Education should be a holistic endeavour'
Hard work	'Teachers are working hard on it' (improving results)
Competitive spirit	'We can do what others do'
Sense of responsibility	'Its everybody's responsibility'
Continuous learning	'We can always learn'
Support	'Everyone helps everyone'
Appreciation and recognition	'We are praised for good work'

### ***5.3.3.8 The Significance of the Cultural Norms in Operation***

The norm of 'continuous learning', aligns with Barth's (1990) assertion that, unless adults learn, their students will not, and this is being clearly modeled by the Head. Further, the norm of 'support', prevalent in the school, aligns with Glidwell et al.'s (1983), in Rosenholtz (1989), assertion that, when teachers know that help is at hand, their sense of efficacy is enhanced. Both these norms seemed to fuel the school's improvement efforts. These two norms are further supported by the norm, 'a common goal,' that is shared by the staff. That is, 'education is a holistic endeavour', which aligns with Hawes and Stephen's (1990), Hopkins' (2007) and Newmann and Wehlage's (1995) assertion that, classroom learning should be linked to students' lives outside of the school.

Moreover, the norm 'competitive spirit', that is, 'we can do what others do' has a special significance to this school, given this latter's history. This norm aligns with Clarke's (2000), in Stoll, MacBeath and Mortimore (2001), assertion that, improving schools need to see what other schools are doing. Data from this study suggest that competitive spirit puts people into action, as Edwards (2005) states, competition is one among many important values that guides people's actions. So, if as staff say, 'we can do what others do', none other than 'hard work' and having 'a sense of responsibility' (the other two norms) would accomplish the goal of doing what others are doing.

In the final section of this 'culture' aspect, relationships conducive to work is taken up.

### **5.3.4 Working Relationships**

Three types of working relationships exist in cultures conducive to effective development: one, among the professionals; another, among the professionals and the pupils; and, the other, among professionals and the various stake holders in the larger society (Hargreaves, A. 1997). Table 12 summarises these relationships and their examples from the school.

#### ***5.3.4.1 Relationship Among Professionals***

This group includes school staff and peers.

##### *Relationship among staff*

One of the strongest features of the school is that it has a strong relationship among its staff. It is, according to many, a friendly atmosphere or environment in which they work. Helping each other and extending cooperation and support, both professionally and otherwise, but more importantly professionally, and caring are the key aspects of this relationship. Team spirit is also high especially among subject groups; that is, all teachers teaching the same subject to same year level.

**Table 12: The relationships: one of the interrelated, generic dimensions of culture**

Type of relationship	Key aspects depicting the relationship and/or salient features with regard to this relationship
Staff relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff help each other; extend support and cooperation, both professionally and otherwise, including helping in difficult times</li> <li>• Team spirit is high especially among subject groups</li> <li>• Senior staff are approachable; no hierarchical divide</li> <li>• Open door policy adopted by head</li> <li>• School climate is expressed as ‘friendly atmosphere’</li> </ul>
Staff-pupil relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good relationship with students</li> <li>• Positive attitude toward students</li> <li>• Go beyond duty to help students in need</li> <li>• Students are treated with respect and are cared for</li> <li>• Students agree that teachers are helpful</li> <li>• Students get on well with teachers</li> </ul>
Relationship with MOE	<p><i>School Administration Section</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally good or positive as indicated by one SMT member: “following MOE guidelines is part of the school’s culture”.</li> <li>• No apparent* disagreement; yet a mutual relationship based on professionalism is yet to be established (*see the isolated case).</li> </ul> <p><i>Quality Improvement (previously supervision) Section</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A whole school model of supervision has taken effect recently as previous models did not work</li> <li>• This section has the potential of being the ‘critical friend’</li> <li>• Both the section and schools have started working on this new model but too early to comment on its effectiveness or what type of relationship would evolve</li> </ul>
Relationship with professional institutions (Curriculum development and teacher training)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutions have schools on their agenda</li> <li>• Schools do ask for assistance and for which the institutions cater</li> <li>• A regular working relationship is yet to be established; the potential is there!</li> </ul>
Relationship with parents	<p><i>Formal channels</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PTA meetings</li> <li>• Parent-teacher meetings</li> <li>• Parents are invited to give presentations and assist in specific academic activities (e.g. quiz, extra classes)</li> <li>• Elicit parents’ views through survey (a recent development)</li> </ul> <p><i>Informal channels</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When parents come to collect their children</li> <li>• If teacher is not in class informal ‘drop by’ by parents is possible</li> <li>• Parents phone to teachers to talk about student issues</li> </ul>

Professional help is extended in many ways: assistance in terms of enlightening others on areas one is having strengths, assisting with classroom management, obtaining information for lessons and helping to handle marks during exam time are some examples. There is also encouragement in times of difficulty. "It is not only moral support but financially as well...." Although 'friendly atmosphere' seems to be the most common way of expressing staff relationships, some staff use specific terms to express this relationship. "We are quite bonded together" (Interview 16), "familial" (interview 20), "togetherness" (Interview 2), etc. Beck and Murphy (1998) found that teachers in an elementary school they studied used such terms as "friendly" and "family" to denote this kind of relationship. Further, these words were used to denote this relationship as both personal and professional (ibid). The above suggest that there exist in the school, "*collaboration and mutual support* amongst staff" (Harris, 2002, p. 112 ) [her emphasis] which is nothing but a collaborative teacher culture, one that is conducive to learning (Angelides & Ainscow, 2000; A. Hargreaves, 1997; Hopkins et al., 1994; Stoll & Fink, 1996).

It is in an environment of such cooperation and collaboration that teachers talk about the practice of teaching (Little, 1981, in Fullan, 1985) which ultimately benefits students. Scholars, for example, A. Hargreaves (1994), Hopkins et al. (1994) and Stoll and Fink (1996), among others, who talk of teacher cultures, would be quick to suggest collaborative cultures for schools embarking on improvement initiatives. In fact, A. Hargreaves (1994) has argued that, one of the reasons why many school-based curricular initiatives have failed was the failure to build collegial working relationships. In the case study school, structures that are put in place alluded to earlier, have helped to maintain this vital relationship.

Furthermore, as has been stated previously, in the sections on 'people orientedness', 'empowering others' and 'building allies and creating partnerships', the Head conducts herself in ways that affirm relationship with teachers and supervisors.

### *Peers (other principals)*

There are no formal professional associations for principals in the Maldives as yet. However, the MOE conducts regular meetings for all principals in Male' schools in which they discuss general policy matters related to schools. Further, informally, school heads discuss school matters; the fact that three schools jointly organized a workshop recently indicates that the school tries to build allies among peers. However, to keep in line with Fullan's (1997a) suggestion, as mentioned above, this is an area that the school needs to strengthen further.

### ***5.3.4.2 Relationship Among Professionals And Pupils: Staff-Pupil Relationship***

Hopkins (2001, 2002) advocates six classroom level conditions that are conducive to learning and, among them, one is authentic relationships between teacher and pupils. Data suggest that staff have a good relationship with students and their attitude toward them is also a positive one. This relationship is evident in the lessons that they take. Students are treated with respect (Blasé & Kirby, 1992; MacBeath & Stoll, 2001). For example, no critical or negative comments (Montgomery & Hadfield, 1989; Mortimore et al., 1988) were recorded when they were off task. In one lesson that I observed, the teacher apologized to a student when she did something not right. Further, when students come to the supervisor's room, they are spoken to softly. Their call, 'Excuse me', is answered promptly by a 'Yes' from any one of the supervisors.

Finally, the data from the student questionnaire also lend support to this relationship. In the student questionnaire that was administered, there were two statements which related to this relationship: 'I get on well with teachers' and 'Teachers in this school are helpful'. Students were asked to respond 'rarely', 'sometimes', 'often' and, 'nearly always'. Twelve students responded to the first statement of whom four said 'nearly always' and eight said 'often'. Thirteen students responded to the second statement of whom eight said 'nearly always', four said 'often' and one said 'sometimes'. These responses indicate that students get along well with their teachers, as Beresford (2003) affirms: the

students' affinity to teachers is one of the student behaviours that enable them to learn better.

#### ***5.3.4.3 Relationship Among Professionals and the Various Stake Holders***

Included in this group are: the central office (the Ministry of Education), professional institutions, other organisations and parents.

##### *The Central Office*

The closest tie a school should or would have is with the central office for they are the people who set broader educational goals, including the curriculum, provide resources, both financial and human, for executing these, set guidelines for overall running of the school and monitor their progress. In the Maldivian context, there are two sections within the Ministry of Education that deal directly with schools: the schools' section which deals with all matters pertaining to the overall running of the school except maintaining educational quality which is the mandate of the ESQIS (Educational Supervision and Quality Improvement Section), the other section.

The general attitude toward MOE (the school's section) is good (see, Manik et al., 2000) but there was an isolated case that has given some serious concern for the school (this has already been mentioned). This indicates that this office can influence the school in any way regardless of the school's view: a clear example of a partner's agenda undermining a school's organizational capacity (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995).

As the name suggests, the ESQIS has the mandate to see how effective schools are in achieving their objectives. However, as indicated previously, earlier versions of supervision did not work very well, at least to the extent that a mutual relationship was created. It is only recently that they started a whole school approach to supervision. Hence, it is too early to comment on the effectiveness of this approach. However, it appears that this could be the emergence of 'critical friend' role in our schools, which at the moment is nonexistent and yet could be a vital relationship for school improvement

efforts (Brighthouse & Woods, 1999; Harris, 2002; Hopkins et al., 1994; Stoll & Fink, 1996; Stoll, MacBeath & Mortimore, 2001).

### *Professional Institutions*

Obviously one would expect schools to have some relationship with professional institutions (Fullan, 1997a) such as the curriculum department or teacher education. Schools studied by Mitchell et al (2002) maintained close relationships with such organizations. In the case study school, however, few mentioned that there was any direct influence from these two professional institutions although some mentioned their indirect influences. Yet, it is interesting to note that their idea of what has to be taught in school is quite similar to that of school personnel. In short, they, too, support the holistic development of the child. Furthermore, the curriculum personnel believe that all aspects related to teaching and learning should revolve around the curriculum. So, his (the curriculum personnel's) idea is that there should be a professional relationship between schools and not only the curriculum department but also with teacher education, the central office and other schools as well. Teacher education personnel also believe that there should be a professional relationship with schools. And, in fact, it has been helping schools although the teacher education personnel notes, "by mandate we ... do not have the in-service teacher education with us, with FE [Faculty of Education]". At the moment, however, it appears that these relationships are minimal and yet staff from either institution could play a critical friend's role.

### *Other Organisations*

Until recently, schools were very much influenced by external agendas (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Stoll & Fink, 1996), especially, that of sports organizations, to hold interschool sports competitions. On the positive side, such activities brought fame to some schools and, to those few students who were selected and won places, a boost to their morale. On the negative side, however, a lot of valuable time and effort was diverted from academic work (see, for example, Manik et al., 2000), the key function of any school. One senior member of staff mentioned another negative aspect: schools get blamed for various incidents [especially] when things go wrong and, thereby, affecting

negatively the school's image. Now these activities have been limited but still the school can (and does) seek assistance from sports organisations when needed.

As mentioned earlier, the school takes a holistic view in educating its students. To this end, it maintains relationship with many organizations that provide such support. Among them are: Boys' Scout and Girl Guides' Associations that provide many social skills for young children (see, for example, Mortimore, 1998); some health-related organizations that assist schools in conducting various check-ups like eye and dental care for children (see, for example, Mitchell, et al, 2002); and, some others (for an example, the Environmental Council, Maldives) which hold non-sports competitions. These are not time- and effort-intense activities and, therefore, have a positive rather than a negative effect.

#### *Parental involvement*

Schools make a lot of effort to involve parents (Gray et al., 1999; Hopkins et al., 1994; MacBeath & Stoll, 2001; Stoll & Fink, 1996) because, as Brighthouse and Woods (1999) assert, keeping a close relationship with parents is important for "they are co-educators of children in parallel with teachers" (p. 99). Furthermore, such relationships would "avoid any mismatches between school and home" (Mitchell et al., 2002, p. 25). And, as Mortimore et al (1988) found out, "parental commitment is a cornerstone of the school's success" (p. 260).

Formal and informal channels for involving parents exist in the case study school. The Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings are the most regular and formal means of building this relationship. The PTA meeting that I was fortunate to attend suggested that there are parents now who are actually debating issues. A few years back, such debates were almost non-existent, especially in relation to student issues, at least in the primary schools. Parent teacher associations were revitalized to boost home-school partnership in the schools studied by Gray et al (1999).

In addition to PTA meetings, which are held among a selected group of parents, there are also the parent-teacher meetings where individual parents meet subject teachers with their children. This is a very important meeting for both the teacher and the parent because both are able to know first hand information about the child's work. According to Brighouse and Woods (1999), one of the features of parent-school partnership that would strengthen the capacity of the school to provide effective learning is, among other things, having a termly meeting to explain to parents the coming term's work and provide good information about pupils' work and progress.

The communication channels for parents have been widened in this school, an initiative of the current head. That is, they have obtained written views, as opposed to verbal views obtained at meetings in the past, through administering a questionnaire to parents. Referring to several studies, McCall et al (2001, p. 96) observed that "parents' views of their child's educational experience supply further perspectives on a school's educational quality". In addition to these formal channels, there are many avenues where parents can informally talk to teachers; the 'open door' policy, so to speak, as was noted by Mitchell et al (2002), opens many such channels.

In summary, three types of working relationships exist in cultures conducive to effective development: one, among the professionals; another, among the professionals and the pupils; and, the other, among professionals and the various stake holders in the larger society (A. Hargreaves, 1997). The strongest relationship found in the case study school seems to be the one among professionals. With peers, the relationship is good and it is maintained so, at the moment, mostly through informal means. This, again, is an area that needs strengthening (See, for example, Fullan, 1997a).

Next, a close relationship also exists between staff and pupils. Students are treated with respect and care (Blasé & Kirby, 1992; Montgomery & Hadfield, 1989). Beresford (2003) has argued that a condition conducive to better learning by students is that they get along well with teachers. In other words, teacher-pupil relationships should be a positive one

for effective learning to take place. From this standpoint, this relationship is quite significant to this (and any other) school.

The third type of relationship is the one among professionals and various stake holders. Included in this group are: the central office (the Ministry of Education - MOE), professional institutions, other organisations and parents.

In general, the attitude toward the MOE is good, especially the school's relationship with ESQIS, the section of the MOE dealing with educational quality, but there is only a weak link between the case study school and professional institutions (teacher education and curriculum development). Thus, this study has revealed the need to strengthen these relationships. At the moment, it appears that these relationships are, what Fullan (1991) calls, a "form of episodic events than processes"; what is needed are "processual relationships with each other" (p. 79).

Many scholars contend that involvement of parents benefits school and pupils (see, for example, Brighthouse & Woods, 1999; Gray et al., 1999; Hopkins et al., 1994; Mitchell et al., 2002; Mortimore et al., 1988, among others), although the means of doing so may invoke instances of negative relationship. For example, a vociferous parent or a group of them might impede a decision being made in favour of the school at a PTA meeting, whereas the general parent body might support such a decision and, perhaps individually, do what ever is possible to implement it, if made. With parents, the relationship is more positive than negative, as the school tries to nurture this relationship through many of its activities. Both formal and informal channels exist in the school that nurture this relationship. With regard to this relationship, this study has also brought to light another potential facet. That is, to bring parents in to academic life of the school (to give a lecture, for example) for they are not only stakeholders or partners, but also a potential resource for the school.

The school's relationship with other organisations is mixed; with some being very helpful while others not so. But the school works to maintain a positive relationship with these organisations and seeks their assistance when needed.

The third key concept, identified in this study as undergirding school improvement efforts, 'change', is discussed next in the final section of this chapter.

## **5.4 Change**

### **5.4.1 Introduction**

All improvements entail change (Stoll & Fink, 1996). In other words, where there is an improvement, some form of change would have occurred. The data from this study clearly suggest that there have been changes, positive ones, taking place in the school over the last three years. One of the key messages in change literature, as mentioned before, is that change is better achieved when it is planned and managed (Edwards, 1990; Harris, 2002). Hence, what facilitated change in this study could be attributed to what school management or the school leader did in terms of planning and managing change, with special emphasis on the three phases of change: initiation, implementation and institutionalisation (Fullan<sup>34</sup>, 1991, 2001a).

Fullan (1985) suggests two types of change strategies that could be adopted at school level: innovation-based strategies and school-wide strategies. He defines the former as: "the innovation-focused strategy is one whereby the main approach to school improvement is through identification, adoption, or development of specific proven or promising new programme" (p. 405). And, the latter he defines as: "the school wide strategy takes a more comprehensive approach. Instead of implementing a given innovation in a few classrooms, the school wide strategy engages the whole school or

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<sup>34</sup> As mentioned earlier in Chapter two, I have drawn heavily from Fullan 1991 in this section of this chapter as well.

major subsections of it and attempt directly to alter ... organizational and process factors ... [to bring about] instructional improvement” (pp. 412-3).

It is not the intent of this section to discuss all the changes occurring in the school but to describe two of the change processes that have had most significance to the school in terms of improvement or change. I have chosen the ‘vocabulary building programme’, an innovation-focused strategy and ‘improving students’ academic performance’ a school-wide strategy. Using the three phases of change, initiation, implementation and institutionalisation, I shall now describe how the above-mentioned two programmes were managed by the school. A summary of these phases and their examples from the school are given in table 13.

#### **5.4.2 Initiation**

“Initiation is the process leading up to and including the decision to proceed with implementation” (Fullan, 1991, p. 50).

Innovations get started for many reasons and from many sources (Fullan, 1991; Harris, 2002). Fullan (1991) gives several of these factors and states that any one or several may be the reason to start change: existence and quality of innovations; access to information; advocacy from central administration; teacher advocacy; external change agents; community pressure and/or support; new policy and funds; and, problem solving and bureaucratic orientations. The principal is the main advocate in the case study school as Fullan (1991) notes: “some principals are actively engaged as initiators or facilitators of continuous improvement in their schools” (p. 144). Further, Fullan has stated that, ideally, the best beginnings combine 3 R’s: relevance, readiness and resources. In this study, these 3R’s have been used to understand how the initiation process unfolded.

**Table 13: Summary of change phases and examples from the case study school**

<b>Change phase</b>	<b>Key aspects</b>	<b>Examples<sup>35</sup> from the school</b>
<p><i>Initiation:</i> Initiation the process leading up to and including the decision to proceed with implementation” (Fullan, 1991, p. 50)</p>	<p>Best beginnings combine 3 R’s:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Relevance Need Clarity Utility</li> <li>2. Readiness <i>For individual</i> Need Skill Time <i>For organization</i> Cultural congruence Linked to other priorities</li> <li>3. Resources Financial &amp; material Support</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Specific needs are identified</li> <li>- Goals are clearly defined and the means to achieve them are clearly specified</li> <li>- Time is spent on preparation &amp; development</li> <li>- Resources are made available</li> </ul>
<p><i>Implementation:</i> Implementation the process of putting into practice an idea, programme, or set of activities and structures new to the people attempting or expected to change” (Fullan, 1991, p. 65).</p>	<p>Three broad categories of factors affect implementation:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Characteristic of change Need Clarity Complexity Practicality Quality</li> <li>2. Local factors District Office Principal Teachers Community / parents</li> <li>3. External factors Professional Institutions Other organisations</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Specific needs are identified</li> <li>- Goals are clearly defined and the means to achieve them are clearly specified</li> <li>- Training is given and continuous help provided thereafter</li> <li>- Leader models appropriate behaviour and pays attention to key activities, thus making the change compatible with the desired culture</li> <li>- Maintains relationship with partners</li> </ul>
<p><i>Institutionalization:</i> Institutionalization is about making the innovation or change a regular part of the school’s activities (Sergiovanni, 1991; Fullan, 1991).</p>	<p>Factors affecting Institutionalization are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Eliminating competing priorities</li> <li>- Link to other ongoing priorities</li> <li>- Extend to whole school</li> <li>- Incorporate change to existing structures, polices, etc</li> <li>- Train a cadre of implementers</li> <li>- Provide continuous support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Training is given and continuous help provided thereafter</li> <li>- Keep focus on key priorities and attend to others the school would attempt anyway</li> <li>- Maintains relationship with partners</li> <li>- Linking changes to other priorities</li> <li>- Maintain communication &amp; continuously monitor change</li> </ul>

<sup>35</sup> These examples overlap, indicating the overlapping nature of the three phases of change (Fullan, 1991).

### **5.4.2.1 Relevance**

According to Fullan (1991), relevance, the first of the 3R's, includes need, clarity and utility:

- A need should be identified and it should be relatively focused or specific
- Goals should be well defined and means to achieve should be clearly specified
- The change would be practical if it addresses a salient and focused need, relates to teachers' situation and there are specified concrete ways to go about it.

*(a) The school-wide strategy: 'Improving students' academic performance'*

This was not a new programme per se, but it was about achieving a set target by all teachers. That is, to achieve a class average of 80 percent for every subject, in every test, including the unit tests. Those who do not achieve this target had to re-work with students. Bringing students to extra classes mentioned earlier is one way of doing this. Further, the subject quizzes that the school conducts are also linked to this programme. That is, teachers pay special attention to see that students answer all the quiz questions correctly and that they learn and prepare for the class quiz competition. (See also the section on "Enhancing student learning" in chapter four).

*Need:* A (mis)perception some people living in Male' still hold is that the first established primary school in Male' is superior to all other schools. A recent study of one Male' school lends support to this thought (see Maniku et al, 2000). This perception has been combated by the case study school and, thus, creating a "felt need" (Fullan, 1991, p. 69); that is, to show to parents in particular and, in general, to the public that this school can achieve what others are achieving.

When unit tests are done, the Head analyses the marks to see the progress of the students and this is shown to teachers during staff meetings indicating to them that attempted change is significant and that teachers are making progress (Fullan, 1991). Further, teachers who have managed to secure progress are publicly acknowledged and praised

while those who do not are given suggestions and encouraged to keep trying; thus, indicating early rewards and identifiable benefits (Fullan , 1991; Harris, 2002).

*Clarity:* The goal of this programme is very clear and specific. (Fullan, 1991; Harris, 2002): A class average of 80% passes to be achieved for every subject in every test, including the unit tests. However, some teachers were anxious, not because the goal is unclear but, for some, the 80% target seemed a bit higher, especially when weak students are not distributed evenly across all classes, as one teacher aired: “If we are to get 80% from all the classes, then equal number of weak students should be there in every class. But it is not like that.”

*Complexity:* “Complexity refers to the difficulty and extent of change required, and extent of alterations in beliefs, teaching strategies, and use of materials” (Fullan, 1991, p. 71). But aiming high has benefits, as McLaughlin (1972), in Fullan (1991), found: in ambitious projects teachers attempted more although the success rate in absolute terms of percentage of objectives achieved was less. There is no doubt that teachers are attempting a lot, as was indicated in the findings chapter.

When change is complex or the extent to which beliefs change or strategies alter is high, sustained assistance would be needed (Fullan, 1991). The school provides such assistance in different ways (see the sub-section on ‘fostering a learning culture in the school’).

*Quality and practicality:* To the extent that a change addresses a salient need, relating to a teacher’s situation and they can see “the presence of next steps”, it can be considered as practical (Fullan, 1991, p. 73). Salience and the fit of this programme, ‘improving students performance results’, cannot be over emphasised for it is one of the main, if not the main, reason(s) that educators exist. Various activities conducted in the school that can be considered as ‘the next steps’ or, as Mortimore (1988), in Fullan (1991), states, ‘how-to-do-possibilities’, are: conducting quizzes, provision to help weak students,

coordination meetings to discuss and formulate classroom activities, all of which, among others, indicate the practicality of the programme.

*(b) The innovation-focused strategy: Vocabulary building*

A need was identified by the teachers: vocabulary is not up to the mark and sentence construction needs strengthening. This is very focused in the sense it targets the vocabulary levels of students. The goal is fairly straight forward: introducing a certain amount of new words each week. This includes the meaning and their use in sentences. Students copy these in their exercise books and they learn the meaning and practice their usage. This knowledge is then tested at the end of the term. These procedures clearly indicate specific concrete ways to go about implementing the programme and it is a salient, focused need relating to the teachers' situation (Fullan, 1991).

#### **5.4.2.2 Readiness**

Second 'R', readiness, could be looked at in terms of individual and organization factors: For the individuals: "Does it address a perceived need? Is it a reasonable change? Do they have necessary prerequisite skills? Do they have time?" For the organization: Is the culture compatible? Are there all necessary facilities, equipment and material available? Are any other changes in progress? (pp. 63-4). The greater the number of no's to the above questions, the more there is reason to look at the 'readiness' factor once again (Crandall et al., 1986, in Fullan, 1991). In these two programmes, it is more 'yes' than 'no' to these questions.

*(a) The school-wide strategy: Improving students' academic performance*

Approaching from the individual's (teacher's) point of view, everyone agrees that there is a need to show parents and the general public that this school can achieve what other schools are achieving. However, there were mixed feelings about how reasonable the 80% target was. Nonetheless, all were willing to work toward it. In terms of necessary prerequisite skills, teachers' initial training and various in-service opportunities, and the school's focus on staff development would suffice. However, time might become an

issue, especially in the provision of extra classes to weak students, a finding similar to Gray et al's (1999) study. That is, it was doubtful whether the teachers in that study could continue the momentum with regard to conducting extra classes for borderline cases.

From the organization's point of view, the friendly culture, alluded to earlier, and the availability of collaborative work structures, render the school's culture compatible to this change effort. And, as many teachers agree, the school provides whatever resources they requested in relation to teaching and learning. Finally, with the recent change in policy (that is, a marked reduction in interschool sports competitions), the school can now concentrate solely on school priorities. In this regard, it has made this programme their number one priority: no other change could contradict this one.

*(b) The innovation-focused strategy: Vocabulary building*

Approaching from the individual teacher's point of view, there is a need that proposed change introduces new words each week, which is reasonable change given the school's circumstances. Given the teachers' level of initial training, there is no issue with prerequisite skills and the programme is fitted into the class time table, denoting that teachers have time. From the organisation's point of view, the culture is compatible in the sense that teachers are working on a felt need of theirs and resources are available for the programme. Because improving English is a high priority area of the school and this programme lends support to it, no other changes within the organisation would be regarded as an impeding force.

### **5.4.2.3 Resources**

Finally, the last 'R', resources, is about the accumulation and provision of support for the change process (Fullan, 1991).

*(a) The school-wide strategy: Improving students' academic performance*

In terms of financial and material support, a substantial part is covered by the school budget. In addition, parents contribute in various forms and some amount of fund raising is also done by the school. Academic support, although not regular, is available from the central office and sector organisations like the curriculum and teacher education institutions.

*(b) The innovation-focused strategy: Vocabulary building*

In this case, the school budget seems to cover all the expenses needed for this programme as it is not a very costly one.

### **5.4.3 Implementation**

“Implementation consists of the process of putting into practice an idea, programme, or set of activities and structures new to the people attempting or expected to change” (Fullan, 1991, p. 65). Change being complex, researchers have tried to find ways to best understand the process of implementation. In this regard, Fullan (1991) suggests two methods: one involves identifying a list of key factors associated with implementation success and the other way is to identify main themes. Both are important and they interact together to determine success or failure. The more these factors and themes support implementation, the more change in practice will be accomplished (Fullan, 1991).

Fullan (1991) has identified nine critical factors affecting implementation that are organized into three broad categories: Characteristics of change include; need, clarity, complexity, quality and practicality of programme; local roles include, schoolboard and community, the principal, the role of teachers; and, external factors.

In terms of implementation, although there are many factors and themes supporting implementation which have been discussed previously, those that are related to the two programmes are addressed here. For example, external factors are not very much related to a school initiated programme such as the one being discussed (vocabulary programme):

as Fullan (1991) notes: change within the school can be brought about by the school people.

#### ***5.4.3.1 Factors Related to the Characteristic of the Change***

In the above discussion on the initiation decision, most of these factors related to the characteristic of the change (need, clarity, complexity, and practicality) have been discussed. Therefore, only the 'quality' aspect of both programmes is discussed here. Fullan says politically motivated change often gets rushed, not enough time is spent on preparation or development and, therefore, implementation suffers.

##### *(a) The school-wide strategy: Improving students' academic performance*

As this change was a school initiated one, no political motive was associated with it (Fullan, 1991) and, therefore, enough time is being spent to see how this can be achieved. As the Head says, "meticulous planning" goes on in the school regarding this programme. Various planning activities that take place in this regard have been mentioned earlier (see the sub-section on 'structures').

##### *(b) The innovation-focused strategy: Vocabulary building*

Regarding quality, time is spent in developing material needed for the programme as, Fullan (1991) notes: if enough time is not spent on preparation or development, implementation would suffer.

#### ***5.4.3.2 Local Factors***

##### *The School District*

Although change within a school can be brought by the school, central office help is essential. Even if it is not in material terms, aligning their decisions with school priorities is vital (Harris, 2002; Hopkins et al., 1994; Stoll & Fink, 1996). Said differently, they should not make decisions that hamper the school's efforts to progress. Another point that the central office should realise is that, just like teachers, principals, too, need help

(Fullan, 1985; 1991). That is, principals would have had little, if any, preparation in fulfilling the “new role as a facilitator of change” (quoted in Fullan, 1991, p. 77) and, as such, they too need training and ongoing support in this area (Fullan, 1985; 1991).

*(a) The school-wide strategy: Improving students’ academic performance*

Data suggest that a few decisions that hamper school’s efforts to pursue this programme have been made in the recent past. Nonetheless, the central office does provide help to schools (see the role of ESQIS in section 4.7.4.3).

*(b) The innovation-focused strategy: Vocabulary building*

As indicated earlier, this is a school initiated change and staff can manage it but the central office backing is needed. In this regard, it is sufficient to say that the central office provides the budget for the school from which the school has resourced this change.

*Community (parents in this case)*

When there is a mutual relationship between the school and the community, implementation of improvement efforts are more likely to succeed (Fullan, 1991).

The existence of a mutual relationship with parents (defined as ‘community’ in this section) has been mentioned earlier. This, according to Fullan (1991), fuels implementation efforts towards success, which is also indicative of the ‘restructuring’ theme. Restructuring here refers to how schools are organized as workplaces (Fullan, 1991). In this regard, restructuring involves such areas as organizational structures and roles, finance, governance and policies that explicitly push for improvement. Both programmes benefit from this relationship but more so in the case of the school-wide strategy.

*The role of teachers*

Teachers, individually and collectively, can affect implementation and, therefore, to the extent the school offers teachers provision to work collaboratively, they will have a positive affect on implementation (Fullan , 1991). Further, Fullan (1991) contends that a teacher’s psychological state (personality, previous experience, stage of career)

determines their degree of change-oriented action. This is not a permanent condition but it will be shaped by the school's culture. Collaborative working structures can orient teachers more toward change and, thereby, affect implementation positively. Finally, to the extent that change involves learning something new, acquiring this new learning is enhanced when there is exchange of ideas, support and positive feelings about their work (Fullan, 1991). To these ends, therefore, positive working relationships become critical for implementation success (see also the section of 'staff relationships'). Both programmes seem to benefit from these relationships.

### *The principal*

The principal, being the main agent of change, can influence the likelihood of change by directly influencing conditions necessary for change (Fullan, 1991).

#### *(a) The school-wide strategy: Improving students' academic performance*

The researcher experienced two instances while on data collection which indicated a key message being sent to teachers, indicating to them that this change is taken seriously (Fullan, 1991). One occurred where the principal instructed a supervisor to tell a teacher to prepare and show her lesson plans for a month and the other was the 'eye catching' slogan put up in the staffroom and supervisors' room. The principal also attends workshops and other training sessions which is the best indicator of her involvement as an example (Fullan, 1991) that influences teachers to persevere.

#### *(b) The innovation-focused strategy: Vocabulary programme*

The principal has voiced the need to improve English Language ability of students. Her answer to the question about major challenges in the past attest to this fact: "to increase the number of students passing in English language in grades four and above", and this has now become a shared goal by all staff. Other factors include the arranging of coordination meetings, which are collaborative work structures; and, the principal herself, as mentioned earlier, who monitors students results, all of which are ways that directly influence the conditions necessary for change (Fullan, 1991).

### **5.4.3.3 External factors**

It has been stated earlier that schools exist among potential partners in their environments and that they can exert both positive and negative influences on the school which would enhance or impede, respectively, the school's efforts to improve. It also has been stated that, in the Maldivian context, sector organisations like the curriculum and teacher education institutions should have a working relationship with the school. But the fact is, although schools and these institutions do not exist in "two entirely different worlds", the needed "processual relationships with each other" is missing and, more often than not, this relation seems to take the "form of episodic events than processes" (Fullan, 1991, p. 79).

#### *(a) The school-wide strategy: Improving students' academic performance*

In the case of other agencies, especially sports, it is true that the school's and these sports organisations' views exist in entirely different worlds and, hence, indirectly affect negatively the school's efforts to pursue its main goal: to improve students' academic performance. This happens because a lot of time is diverted to sports activities which otherwise would have been spent on academic work (see also, Manik et al., 2000). However, some sports organisations try to integrate their assistance with school priorities (Fullan, 1991). That is, they offer assistance only when requested by the school; they do not prescribe or insist on the school doing anything. Likewise, some other social organisations, too, frame their work.

#### *(b) The innovation-focused strategy: Vocabulary programme*

As indicated earlier, this is a school initiated change and staff can manage it but the central office backing is needed. In this regard, suffice to say that the central office provides the budget for the school from which the school has resourced this change.

It has been stated above that change is complex and researchers have identified two methods to understand the process of implementation: one involves identifying a list of key factors associated with implementation success which has been just discussed; and the other way is to identify main themes. Both are important and they interact to

determine success or failure. Themes have been taken from the school improvement literature and, because this current study is about school improvement, these themes have been discussed previously in more detail but suffice to say that the themes are: Vision-building, Evolutionary planning, Empowerment and power-sharing, Staff development and resource assistance, Monitoring and problem-coping, and Restructuring.

#### **5.4.4 Institutionalization**

This is about making the innovation or change a regular part of the school's activities (Fullan, 1991; Harris, 2002; Sergiovanni, 1991). According to Miles (1986), in Hopkins et al. (1994), key activities in the institutionalization phase include the following: eliminating all practices competing with or contradicting to the change initiative being pursued; linking the new initiative with all other ongoing change efforts in a strong and purposeful way; and, making the initiative a school-wide affair.

The continuation or institutionalisation of innovations, according to Huberman and Miles (1984), in Fullan (1991), depends on the extent to which the change gets built into the school's normal way of life through policies, structure and resources; has trained a cadre of teachers, including administrators, who have developed the necessary skills and commitment to the change effort; and, established ways for receiving continuous assistance, especially in terms of supporting new teachers and administrators.

##### *(a) The school-wide strategy: Improving students' academic performance*

Previously, as mentioned earlier, there was a lot of influence from some sports organizations to hold interschool competitions which 'ate away' valuable academic time from schools. Fortunately, for the schools, including this one, a recent policy change has almost scrapped these competitions; thus, eliminating the only practice that was contradictory to the change initiative being pursued (Fullan, 1991). Finally, this initiative is a school-wide affair (Fullan, 1991). That is, the 80% percent target is for all. This initiative is linked to the ultimate goal of the school which is, in broad terms, preparing students for their next level of education; namely, secondary education.

Improving students' performance being the utmost priority of the school, policies and structures are made to reflect this priority (Fullan, 1991; Harris, 2002). In this regard and, to the extent possible, provision is made in the school budget for providing the necessary resources to support this initiative as aired by many staff and particularly by one teacher who said the school provides any material related to teaching and learning even if they were expensive. Further, it is not only through the school budget that the school finds resources, but also through parents by maintaining a close link with them (see the section on parental relationships). A recent study done in Indonesia provides backing for this claim (see, Van der Werf, Creemers & Guldemon, 2001). The only feature over which the school has least control, and perhaps this is where the central office could (and should) assist, is the uncertainty of teacher transfers. This means that there is always the possibility of losing a trained teacher for a new teacher. However, various forms of continuous assistance for teachers (see the section on staff development) are provided by the school including special sessions for new teachers at the beginning of the year.

*(b) The innovation-focused strategy: Vocabulary building*

As English improvement is high on the agenda, there are no competing priorities contradicting this change (Fullan, 1991) and, because having a strong vocabulary base is needed for one to progress her/his language ability, this initiative is linked to a bigger priority, improving language ability and, as such, this programme can be said to have been linked to other ongoing efforts in a strong, purposeful way (Fullan, 1991). However, data does not indicate that school has made this vocabulary building a school-wide affair (Fullan, 1991).

There are also signs of continuation of this programme. Teachers who have implemented this programme have had some training sessions and this, together with their experience, would enable them to carry forward this programme. Further, the school's policy to improve English focuses teachers in this direction as policies also indicate the school's way of life (Fullan, 1991); that is, they are "conceptual/verbal manifestations" of the school's culture (Beare et al., 1989, p. 176).

In talking of sustainability, the 'improving students' academic performance' initiative posed some issues. This is because, although the case study school has made efforts to make this initiative a regular feature of the school's activities by putting in place policies and structures to reflect this initiative (Fullan, 1991; Harris, 2002), some staff were finding it too demanding of their time. In other words, to the extent that sustainable change refers to the development of an initiative within an organization without compromising other ongoing developments and not necessarily to whether a change initiative lasts in that organization (A. Hargreaves & Fink, 2003, 2006b), the 'improving student academic performance' initiative seems to compromise other developments: that is, not being able to bring out the full potential in staff due to the "overuse" of staff energy, which is not healthy for sustainability (Fullan, 2006, p. 121).

To summarise, where there is an improvement there is always a change (Stoll & Fink, 1996) and change becomes successful when it is planned and managed (Edwards, 1990; A. Hargreaves et al., 2001; Harris, 2002). This study has revealed that Fullan's (1991) model of initiating and implementing change is a suitable<sup>36</sup> model to follow through when attempting change at the school level. Fullan (1991, 2001a) and Harris (2002) conceptualize the process of change as having three distinct but overlapping phases, initiation, implementation and institutionalisation, which, when followed, increases the possibility of change becoming successful. Two change initiatives of the school that had the most significance in terms of improvement have been described in relation to the three phases of change.

Fullan defines 'initiation', the first phase, as "the process leading up to and including the decision to proceed with implementation" (1991, p. 50) and contends that, ideally, the best beginnings combine 3 R's: relevance, readiness and resources. Among the three 'R's of the first phase, initiation, the 'relevance' and 'readiness' factors, in terms of a felt need, clarity, practicality and quality, seemed to have contributed most to the successful

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<sup>36</sup> See Polyzoi and Cerna (2001), who, in a recent study of educational change, not at the school level, but at the national level, have indicated the suitability of Fullan's model, especially, the first two phases: 'initiation', and 'implementation'.

implementation of both the programmes discussed in this section. This is not to say that the third 'R', resources, is unimportant. But in the case study school, resources is more of a "school level, 'given' variable"<sup>37</sup> than "school level policy variable"<sup>38</sup> (Mortimore et al., 1988, p. 219). Thus, it was evident from the data that the initiation phases of both programmes were managed in relation to these three R's.

The second phase, implementation, is defined as "the process of putting into practice an idea, programme, or set of activities and structures new to the people attempting or expected to change" (Fullan, 1991, p. 65). Fullan contends that there are nine critical factors and six major themes that together determine success or failure. The factors affecting implementation fall into three broad categories: One, characteristic of change, that include, need, clarity, complexity, quality and practicality of programme; two, local roles, that include, school board and community, the principal, the role of teachers; and three, external factors. The themes are, vision-building, evolutionary planning, empowerment and power-sharing, staff development and resource assistance, monitoring and problem-coping, and restructuring. The more these factors and themes support implementation, the more change in practice will be accomplished (Fullan, 1991).

It was found that, except for the external factor and one of the local factors, all other factors were operating in favour of the school's situation. In the case of the vocabulary programme, both the local and the external factors were not so related because the programme was small scale and school initiated. In the case of the other programme, 'improving students' academic performance', however, there were some external factors and one local factor that obstructed the school's efforts to improve. Thus, this study has clearly shown that the above-mentioned categories of factors did have an effect on the implementation process; thus, adding support to Fullan's model.

For example, the initiation phase was well managed in both the programmes; that is, needs were identified, goal were clarified, time was spent on preparation and

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<sup>37</sup> Those aspects of a school over which school personnel have little influence.

<sup>38</sup> Those aspects of the school that are under the control of the school personnel

development and, to the extent possible, resources were made available. Because the initiation phase was well managed and the fact that most factors affecting initiation are also similar to many of the factors that affect implementation (see table 13), at the time of data collection, implementation seemed to go fairly well. However, the Head mentioned some potential issues in carrying through these programmes which were related to local and external factors. The external factor now is settled but one of the issues related to local factors does not seem to have eased. The point here is that local and external factors do have an effect on implementation, as indicated in the model, in the direction of these factors; that is, either negative or positive. In this study, these factors seemed to have a constraining effect on these programmes and, thereby, became a hindrance to the smooth implementation. As for the themes that determine implementation, they have been discussed more fully elsewhere<sup>39</sup>.

The third phase, institutionalization, is about making the innovation or change a regular part of the school's activities (Fullan, 1991; Sergiovanni, 1991). Key activities in this phase are the elimination of all contradictory practices, linking the initiative with other ongoing changes and making it a school-wide affair (Miles, 1986, in Hopkins et al., 1994), while success depends on whether the change gets built into the existing policies and structures, whether trained personnel exist to carry forward the change and whether ways of providing continuous support are established (Huberman & Miles, 1984, in Fullan, 1991).

Improving students' performance being the utmost priority of the school and because having a strong vocabulary base is linked to a bigger priority, improving language ability, policies and structures are made to reflect both these priorities. As such, provision is made in the school budget for providing the necessary resources and, in addition, parental support is sought, too, to supplement these initiatives. Finally, various forms of continuous assistance for teachers (see the section on staff development) are provided by the school, including special sessions for new teachers at the beginning of the year.

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<sup>39</sup> These themes are discussed in the section on leadership because they have been derived from school improvement literature and because the current study deals with improvement, these themes better aligned with that section.

The two contradictory forces that hindered the school's effort to make its focus, on improving students' performance results, a regular part of the school activities were the involuntary aspect of taking part in sport competitions and one of the decision made by the central office in relation to enrolment (see the section on "Stakeholder relationships" in chapter four). With a recent change in policy, all primary schools have now been relieved of the compulsion to take part in sports. However, as mentioned earlier, the latter issue still exists.

Data suggests that, except for 'eliminating of competing priorities', the school has considered, to a greater extent, all the factors affecting institutionalization. As for the elimination of competing priorities, the school alone cannot address it. However, despite this difficulty, data show that the school has made the two improvement initiatives, discussed in this section, a regular part of the school, at least in the short run. This supports Fullan's (1991) assertion that school level changes can be managed even without district help although their help can strengthen and aid in sustaining a school's efforts to improve.

In talking of sustainability, the 'improving students' academic performance' initiative posed some issues because it was having an adverse effect on other developments; thus, not fulfilling completely, the features of sustainability as advocated by A. Hargreaves and Fink (2003, 2006b).

## **5.5 Summary**

In this chapter, I have discussed the findings of this study in relation to the three interrelated key concepts (change, leadership and culture) undergirding school improvement efforts. These three concepts and their associated main components were identified from a review of related literature on school improvement, the broad topic of this study. Stoll and Fink (1996) assert that, although all change is not improvement, all improvements entail change. Such changes or improvement have occurred in this school

over the last three years. These improvements have been attributed to key leader actions and the way change was managed, specifically the leader's attention to the intricacies inherent in the process of change that involves three broad phases: initiation, implementation and institutionalisation (Fullan, 1991; 2001). The discussion also highlighted the presence of three interrelated generic dimensions of culture, structures, norms and relationships which facilitated the recent improvements. In the next chapter, the researcher draws conclusions of this study by answering the research questions with which the researcher started the study.

## CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSIONS

### 6.1 Introduction

This study sought to answer the main research question:

How does a primary school in an urban setting of the Maldives deal with school improvement efforts?

A review of literature on school improvement, school effectiveness, educational change, organizational culture and leadership enabled the researcher to frame the following specific questions to pursue in order to answer the main research question.

1. How does the principal effect and manage change in a Maldivian urban primary school?
2. What are the internal conditions [or major components or themes] at work with regard to improvement efforts in a Maldivian urban primary school?
3. How does the principal create and/or manipulate the necessary internal conditions within the school that would bring about lasting improvements?
4. How do teachers perceive improvement efforts?
5. What is the role of the central office (the MOE in this case) and what other parties, besides the MOE, influence the school's efforts to change and how do they influence?
6. How does the school determine the worth of its improvement programmes?

In this chapter, the researcher:

- Provides answers to the above sub-questions;
- Reflects on the methodology used in this study; namely, the case study approach;

- Delineates the contribution and implications of this study and identifies areas for further research and,
- Concludes with a final remark.

## 6.2 Answers to the Research Questions

*Q1: How does the principal effect and manage change in a Maldivian urban primary school?*

*Q3: How does the principal create and/or manipulate the necessary internal conditions within the school that would bring about lasting improvements?*

The study found that there were three major dimensions or three key concepts that together undergirded the improvement efforts in the school. They are change, leadership and culture. In action-oriented terms, these dimensions or concepts translate into managing change, attending to specific leader actions and influencing the school's culture, respectively, and reflected six themes of school improvement. They are: a focus on change, a focus on students, a teaching learning focus, investing in staff, strong leadership by the head, and school culture.

It was evident from the data that the attempted changes were planned and managed. In the previous chapter, two programmes that were planned and managed were discussed which clearly indicated that attention was paid to the three phases of change, initiation, implementation and institutionalization. Key aspects, corresponding to these three phases of change were identified in the data as having contributed to the change efforts:

- Specific needs are identified,
- Goals are clearly defined and means to achieve them are laid out,
- Time is spent on preparation and development,
- Resources are made available,
- Training is given and continuous help is provided, thereafter, along the way,

- The leader models appropriate behaviour and pays attention to key activities; thus making, the culture compatible with the desired change,
- The focus is maintained on few priorities while attending to others the school would attempt anyway,
- Relationships are maintained with potential partners,
- Each priority is linked to other ongoing priorities,
- There is communication and continuous monitoring of the change efforts.

This finding resonates with the existing literature on change: that is, change becomes successful to the extent that attention is given to the intricacies inherent in each of the three phases of change<sup>40</sup>.

The data also suggested that there were specific leader actions, in the case of this principal, that kept the change momentum in the school. These leader actions included:

- Building a shared vision,
- Emphasising proper planning,
- Maintaining an academic focus,
- Keeping teaching and learning at centre stage,
- Personal involvement in monitoring and evaluation,
- Fostering a learning culture in school,
- Being people-oriented,
- Empowering others and
- Building allies or creating partnerships.

This finding supports the existing literature on leadership in two ways. One way is that strong leadership by the head is a paramount factor of effective or improving schools<sup>41</sup> and, two, that these leader actions resonate with the most cited dimensions of effective

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<sup>40</sup> See Fullan, 1991; Harris, 2002; Lewin, 1951, in Neville, 1992.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Mitchell et al., 2002; Mortimore et al., 1988; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Scheerens, 1992; Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993; Sammons 1999, among others.

leadership<sup>42</sup> in schools; namely, building a shared vision and planning; being achievement-oriented in terms of student learning; being committed to colleagues as well as one's own professional growth; empowering colleagues to take leadership roles; risk taking or having courage and attending to influence the school's culture.

With regard to culture, it was evident from the data that there were three aspects of culture that facilitated the recent improvements in the school. They are the presence of appropriate structures<sup>43</sup> or frameworks that enabled staff to perform better; seven cultural norms<sup>44</sup> that supported teaching and learning; and three specific working relationships<sup>45</sup>: one among professionals, another, among professionals and pupils and, the other, among professionals and the stake holders. Stake holders are the central office, professional institutions, other governmental and non-governmental organizations and parents. The above findings about the culture of the school align with the existing literature on school culture<sup>46</sup>.

*Q2: What are the internal conditions [or major components or themes] at work with regard to improvement efforts in a Maldivian urban primary school?*

The findings of this study revealed that there were six major themes (Harris, 2002) or internal conditions (Hopkins, et al., 1994) or climate setting conditions (Stoll & Fink, 1996) conducive to school improvement efforts that pervaded the school. They are: strong leadership by the head; investing in staff; influencing the school's culture; keeping a focus on students; maintaining a teaching learning focus; and, change management.

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<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Blase & Kirby, 1992; Collins, 2000, cited in Fullan, 2003; Edwards, 2003; McEwan, 2003; Kouzes & Posner, 1987; Senge, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1991, Smith & Piele, 2006; Spillane et al., 2004, among others.

<sup>43</sup> Bolman & Deal, 1991; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Hopkins et al., 1994; Stoll & Fink, 1996.

<sup>44</sup> Edwards, 2003; Saphire & king, 1989; Stoll, 1999; Stoll & Fink, 1996.

<sup>45</sup> A. Hargreaves, 1997; D. Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1991; Mac Gilchrist et al., 1995, in Stoll, 1999; Purkey & Smith, 1983.

<sup>46</sup> See footnotes 41-44, above.

*Q5: What is the role of the central office (the MOE in this case) and what other parties, besides the MOE, influence the school's efforts to change and how do they influence?*

The school exists among potential partners or stakeholders and they exert both positive and negative influences on the school which either enhance or impede, respectively, the school's efforts to improve. Included in this group are: the central office (the Ministry of Education - MOE), professional institutions, other organisations and parents. In the case of the central office, MOE, although a recent isolated case has stifled, to some extent, this relationship, generally it is good; especially the school's relationship with ESQIS, the section of the MOE dealing with educational quality. With the new supervision programme in effect, the relationship between the school and the MOE/ESQIS has the potential of becoming a critical friend relationship.

With regard to professional institutions such as the Educational Development Centre and the Faculty of Education, a similar potential also exists between them and the school. However, currently the needed "processual relationships with each other" is missing and, more often than not, this relationship seems to take the "form of episodic events than processes" (Fullan, 1991, p. 79).

The school's relationship with other organisations is mixed; with some being very helpful while others are not so. But the school works to maintain a positive relationship with these organisations.

Finally, parents provide support to the school in a variety of ways. Their help in both academic and social activities of the school is very much appreciated by the staff. This is in addition to helping students at home with their school work. The school maintains various communication channels with parents in order to nurture this relationship.

*Q4: How do teachers perceive improvement efforts?*

To the extent that what affect students most is related to what teachers do with them in the classroom, how teachers perceive 'improvement' is worth considering.

Although there is no consensus among the staff on what constitutes improvement, most are of the view that improvement is about raising students' performance results, especially up to the level specified by the school: the 80% target. This is a view similar to Ofsted's "tangible improvements" (1994, p. 18). Staff in this school firmly believe that, regardless of who students are or, where they are from, they could achieve; thus triggering the 'competitive spirit' in them and giving them the enthusiasm to work hard, a strong norm of the school, as suggested by the data.

*Q6: How does the school determine the worth of its improvement programmes?*

In line with the concept of improvement as mentioned above, determining worth of programmes takes many forms. At an informal level, teachers assess students' work by asking questions during the lessons and some teachers give tests. At a more formal level, there are the unit tests and term tests in which students are assessed about their learning of curricular content. Finally, the school uses the self-referenced criterion<sup>47</sup> to monitor progress over time as there are no national standards against which to base the performance level. The school level yard sticks are: 'commended' and 'honour-listed reports'<sup>48</sup>.

In the current study, many participants indicated that recently the school has started laying emphasis on systematic monitoring of students' progress, especially their performance in these unit and term tests. In this regard, the head reviews weekly the results of the assessments given to students in the presence of the teachers and supervisors involved. Because the top management places such a high emphasis on

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<sup>47</sup> See, Baumgart, 2001; Stoll & Fink, 1996.

<sup>48</sup> See the 'School Handbook' 2005.

systematic monitoring of students' progress, teachers value the importance of the diagnostic function that these unit tests serve. Data suggests that the current head takes a personal interest in monitoring and evaluating students' performance and has a strong determination in "taking active steps to firmly embed a valuing of evaluation as a significant part of the prevailing culture of the school" (Edwards, 2005, p. 5).

### **6.3 Reflection on the Research Methodology and Its Limitations**

The purpose of this study was to find out how an urban primary school in the Republic of Maldives dealt with school improvement efforts. The case study method provides a researcher with the possibility of studying a single case or a few cases in detail. Thus, for the researcher, the case study method fulfilled the above purpose. Further, studying a phenomenon such as 'school improvement', which is more people-driven than a natural cause, getting as close as possible to where the actions occurred, was needed. Furthermore, studying human behaviour requires one to study it in its context (Gillham, 2000b). Therefore, the qualitative case study method was most suitable for this study for it enabled the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon by being close to where the actions unfolded.

The case study method also provided the researcher with the possibility of collecting data related to the study's research question from different sources. This enabled the researcher to enhance the credibility of the findings by triangulating the data from different sources.

A serious limitation of case study method, however, is that it deals with small samples and, by implication, wide generalization is not possible. Hence, one of the limitations of this study is that the findings would be limited to the school that has been studied. A further limitation of this study is that samples used were small<sup>49</sup> and the limited time the researcher had to do the fieldwork. Hence, other schools need to be studied in a similar

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<sup>49</sup> The requirement of the MUHEC to obtain participants' signatures on the consent forms put many teachers off. This was the main reason why many teachers were hesitant to give interviews.

way, using larger samples and more time, before one could attempt to draw any parallels. However, the fact that case studies enable a researcher to describe the research context in detail provides an avenue for applying the findings to similar situations. Therefore, despite the above limitations and, given the scarcity of in-depth studies of primary schools in Maldives, the researcher believes that this methodology could be adapted to study other urban primary schools in the country because most urban schools are state run schools and, of the eight, six are in Male', suggesting that the contexts<sup>50</sup> of these six schools would be more similar than dissimilar.

Further, in qualitative studies, the researcher collects and analyses the data. Therefore, researcher bias is a potential threat to validity of the study's findings. To minimise this bias, transcripts were member-checked and data from different sources were triangulated. Further, all the procedures used in the data analysis process have been documented.

#### **6.4 The study's contributions, implications for research and recommendations for further research**

##### *Main contributions of this study*

However modest they might be, this study has made contributions<sup>51</sup> to our understanding of school improvement efforts. First, leadership by the head is a strong theme in school improvement literature. This study too, lends further support to this finding. But in particular, the Head's emphasis on systematic monitoring of student progress and continuous sharing of this data with staff seem to be the driving force behind the case study school's recent progress. Although other studies (e.g. Mitchell et al., 2002) cite many actions of the school leader as having contributed to success, a particular aspect as having prominence is not cited. Therefore, this study has brought to light a new research question: What specific action of a leader has the most impact on students' achievements?

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<sup>50</sup> See Denscombe (1998, p. 37) for factors for comparing cases: 'physical', 'historical', 'social', and 'institutional' locations.

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, Hart (1998, p. 24).

Second, this study has highlighted the need to focus on change that is sustainable. Sustainable change refers to the development of an initiative within an organization without compromising other ongoing developments and not necessarily to whether a change initiative lasts in that organization (A. Hargreaves & Fink, 2003, 2006b). In the case study school, as the findings of this study have revealed, notable changes have occurred. However, given the above definition of sustainable change, there exist in the case study school some issues that cast doubt about the sustainability of those changes. For example, some staff are finding it quite demanding to strike a balance between professional and personal lives, and work load seems to be one of the factors. To the extent that people are an organization's key resources who process inputs into outputs, a constraint in any significant way on personnel does not qualify any change as being sustainable because such changes are compromising other developments; that is, in this case, bringing out the full potential in staff.

Another important aspect of sustainable change is that it necessitates the generation of future leaders (the concept of leadership succession) as proposed by Fullan (2006). Although training related to leadership is provided to staff at different levels in the case study school, no consideration is given to prepare the next leader of the school which is the crux of the issue. Given the above findings in relation to sustainable change and because focusing on sustainable change is a recent trend even in international literature, this study is posing another research question, in particular to the Maldivian context and, in general, to any other country's context: Have there been any changes that can be counted as sustainable? If so, what factors account for sustainability? Or, to what extent do those factors align with or, deviate from, Fullan's (2006) 'elements of sustainability'? (see section 2.7.3.3).

Third, like leadership, school culture is an important variable in the school improvement equation. In this study, school culture is depicted as structures, norms and relationships. In this regard, the importance of one particular norm, 'competitive spirit', has been identified as a strong norm in this school. Although other scholars, for example, Stoll and Fink (1996) and Saphier and King (1989), have identified a set of norms, none of

their norms seem to capture the essence of ‘competitive spirit’ as identified in this study. In fact, this norm could develop into a new cultural norm for it was so widespread in the case study school and was having a positive effect on the school as shown by the study’s findings. However, to substantiate this finding, further research is needed, especially in Maldivian schools, that would look into the culture<sup>52</sup> of the school as norms form a major part of a school’s culture.

Last, but not the least, scarcity of educational research literature, in particular, literature on school processes in the Maldives and, in general, in the developing countries, too, makes this study a useful contribution for both these contexts.

#### *Research implications for schools and school leaders*

In today’s fast-paced world and where the environment is constantly changing, schools need to face the challenges of inevitable change. To this end, becoming a learning organization has been advocated in this study. Thus, the implications for schools and school leaders are that they should build a shared vision for their schools and emphasise proper planning based on this vision; keep teaching and learning at centre stage and thereby maintain an academic focus at a high level; Monitor and evaluate students’ work regularly and empower others (teachers) to act on the results obtained from such reviews; build allies or create partnerships especially with other educational organizations and, in particular, the curriculum department and teacher education institute; and, foster a learning culture by adhering to all of the above.

#### *Research implications for the MOE*

Given that the heads of schools had to perform a variety of key functions in order to face the challenges of inevitable change (see above), the MOE should make plans to conduct professional development courses for the school heads for currently there exist no such programmes. Further, many heads of Male’ schools would not have done specialized training in headship; it is just that they have been either good teachers or supervisors and

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<sup>52</sup> The researcher knows of only one empirical study that looked into school culture in a Maldivian school and, that is, Qasim, 2007.

hence promoted to the headship. In the case of the Atoll Schools' heads, their training being just two years in duration and pedagogy and school management take up a big proportion of this training, areas such as school change, culture and leadership, as depicted in this study, would have been covered only minimally. Second, alongside the current whole school supervision programme conducted by the ESQIS, MOE, there is a need to identify a critical friend for each of the primary schools in Male' even on a trial basis because, as the name suggests, a critical friend could play a key role in maintaining a school's quality and, third, MOE should increase dialogue with schools and assess their situation before making any decisions that might have adverse affects on them, just like the 'isolated case' mentioned in this study (see page 217).

#### *Recommendations for further research*

Three areas surfaced as a result of this study that need further research in the Maldivian context:

(i) Because this study is first of its kind, an in-depth study of school improvement in an urban primary school of the Maldives, studies of other urban primary schools are needed in order to provide a better understanding of this phenomenon and a firmer base for policy makers to make decisions.

(ii) Unlike urban schools, the rural counterparts have functioned and, still are functioning, in a very different situation although they, too, are state run schools. An investigation into this area would render comparisons of how schools in rural contexts deal with school improvement efforts and, thereby, inform practice and policy making.

(iii) Similarly, researching a school that is not performing well, as suggested by one of the senior officials with whom the researcher talked in identifying a school to do this study, would also provide instructive lessons for no study exists so far in this area.

## 6.5 A final remark

School improvement has been attempted by many schools throughout the world with the ultimate aim of enhancing student learning. A review of literature into this field suggests that there is no single route to improvement.

In this study, the researcher looked at one Maldivian, urban primary school's journey towards improvement. Although the methodology used in understanding this journey had its weaknesses, just like any other methodology, the accounts presented in this study are rich in detail and informative to any school personnel; that is, the study has portrayed the micro-level realities of the working of a school that is consciously and continuously striving for improving educational practice.

For the researcher, the insights gained from this investigation with regard to school improvement policies, strategies and outcomes, would no doubt contribute to better face the challenges that lay ahead in understanding of and, intervening in, improvement of the educational provision in the Maldives for he would have to deal with some aspect of education in general or, schooling in particular; be it evaluation, supervision, management, planning, all implying better performances or enhancing student learning.

But more importantly, if enhancing student learning is the ultimate aim of school improvement, then this study has revealed how staff in similar situations can work together towards the ideal of making school improvement work. One participant's response to one of researcher's questions eloquently captured the spirit of making school improvement work:

*R: Where do you see yourself in another three years time?*

P: [In] three years time and, always, I would like to work in a school. That is where the challenge lies.

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<sup>53</sup> In Malta they call 'dissertation', and sometimes 'long essay'.

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Consent letter from the MUHEC



# Massey University

20 January 2005

Mr Ahmed Ali Didi  
3/20 Ranfurly Street  
**PALMERSTON NORTH**

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT  
TO THE VICE-CHANCELLOR  
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humanethics@massey.ac.nz  
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Dear Ahmed

**Re: HEC: PN Application – 04/155**  
**School improvement: The route taken by a Maldivian urban primary school**

Thank you for your letter dated 24 December 2004.

I am pleased to advise you that the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North has approved the ethics of your application. Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, reapproval must be requested.

In response to your email of 24 December 2004, I wish to reiterate that no child should be made to take part in the research, even if parental consent is provided. The assent of the child is important and, if it is more culturally appropriate, this can be obtained orally. Please ensure that children are aware that they do not have to take part.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

**A reminder to include the following statement on all public documents:** *“This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, Palmerston North Application 04/155. If you have any concerns about the ethics of this research, please contact Professor Sylvia Rumball, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: PN, telephone 06 350 5249, email humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz”.*

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sylvia Rumball".

Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair  
**Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North**

cc Professor Wayne Edwards  
Department of Social and Policy Studies in Education

Consent letter from the Ministry of Education, Maldives



**Department of Higher Education and Training**  
Ministry of Education,  
Male' Republic of Maldives

5<sup>th</sup> August 2004

Mr Ahmed Ali Didi  
3/20 Ranfurly Street  
Palmerston North  
New Zealand

Dear Mr Ahmed Ali Didi,

This is with reference to your letter dated 5<sup>th</sup> August 2004 to Honorable Minister of Education requesting permission to conduct part of your fieldwork in Maldives.

We have studied your proposal and grant you permission to conduct your data collection activities as stipulated in the above-mentioned letter. Furthermore, we would be pleased to offer you our assistance to facilitate your work here in Maldives.

Let us also request you to share with us your findings for our information and possible use as per conditions appropriate to you and your University. However, this sharing of your findings is not conditional to our consent for your fieldwork in Maldives.

You are required to conform to all local regulations in all your activities in Maldives. You are also required to share with us a time-line of activities prior to the commencement of your fieldwork so that we will be able to alert the Ministry of Education and hence the schools.

If you need any further clarifications please get in touch with us. You may share this letter with any concerned party who may contact us for further verification purposes.

Sincerely,



Abdul Muhsin Mohamed  
Assistant Executive Director,  
amuhsin@moe.gov.mv

Information sheet



**Massey University**

**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**  
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**Project Title: School Improvement: The route taken by a Maldivian urban primary school**

**INFORMATION SHEET**

**Purpose:** To explore in detail how a primary school in an urban setting of Maldives deals with the issue of school improvement.

**Student's Name:** Ahmed Ali Didi

**Student's Supervisor:** Professor Wayne L. Edwards

**Name of Degree and Field:** PhD in Education

**Employment Status of Student:** Director, Ministry of Education (MOE), Maldives;  
Full-time student, Massey University

---

This study involves the collection of student assessment data at the school level from three to four primary schools in Male'and, if available, a similar set of data from secondary schools, which they take upon arrival of a cohort from the primary schools. This would be followed by an in-depth study of one school, selected on the basis of a suitable sampling procedure.

The research procedure entails an initial interview with an MOE official to enable me to establish the parameters for data collection, followed by the activities stated below:

- (i) Interviewing the principal, members of the senior management team and a random sample of 28 teachers (four from each grade); fourteen parents (two from each grade); two school board members from the selected school; and, three personnel from the education sector. It is estimated that each interview would take no more than an hour.
- (ii) Administering a questionnaire to all teachers and to a random sample of 40 seventh grade students. This would take no more than 45 minutes.
- (iii) Reviewing of documents such as school handbook, minutes of academic meetings, student's academic records, records kept by supervisors regarding

teaching and learning, and school's communications with MOE which have reference to academic matters.

(iv) Observation of various school activities, both formal and informal. These would include, among others, staff and other academic meetings and classroom observations.

All interviews would be audio taped if consent is received from participants. Even if consent is obtained, participants have the right to ask for the audio recording to be turned off at any time during the interview. In the case of the questionnaire, please note that the completion and return of the questionnaire implies consent. However, participants have the right to decline to answer any particular question.

All data gathered during the data collection stage of the study would be kept confidential and stored securely in a place accessible to the researcher only, and it will not be used for any purpose other than the purpose for which it was collected. A participant's identity will not be disclosed unless permission is given to the researcher by the participant. Upon completion of my study, a copy each, of the completed thesis, would be kept at Massey University Library, Palmerston North, New Zealand, and at the documents' section of the Ministry of Education, Maldives; the raw data, including the audio tapes, would be disposed off under the supervision of the Head of the Department of Social and Policy Studies in Education, Massey University.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Application 04/155. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North, telephone 06 350 5249, email [humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz). Permission to conduct this study in the Maldives has also been granted on 5<sup>th</sup> August 2004 by the Department of Higher Education and Training, Ministry of Education, Maldives, and supported further by the Ministry itself through its letter number 22-E/Mis/2004/2563 dated 9 August 2004.

The purpose of this information sheet is to invite you to participate in this study. But please note that your participation is voluntary and, even if you decided to participate, you still have the right to decline from answering any particular question or ask any question related to the study or withdraw your participation at anytime without any penalty. If you have any questions regarding any aspect of this study you could contact me or my supervisor:

Ahmed Ali Didi,  
Ma. Rose Burn,  
Male',  
Republic of Maldives.  
Phone: 32 4077; 324745  
Email: [didi5152@hotmail.com](mailto:didi5152@hotmail.com)

Professor. Wayne Edwards,  
Department of Social &  
Policy Studies in Education,  
Massey University, New Zealand.  
Phone: 64 6 351 3386; Fax: 64 6 351 3385  
Email: [W.L.Edwards@massey.ac.nz](mailto:W.L.Edwards@massey.ac.nz)





Participant Consent forms



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[www.massey.ac.nz](http://www.massey.ac.nz)

Project Title: School Improvement: The route taken by a Maldivian urban primary school

**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being audio taped. *(Please underline or circle your choice)*

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature:

Date:

Full Name (please print)





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Doc 14

**Appendix 5**  
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www.massey.ac.nz

**Project Title: School Improvement: The route taken by a Maldivian urban primary school**

**AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF TAPE TRANSCRIPTS**

This form will be held for a period of five (5) years

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript of the interview/s conducted with me.

I agree that the edited transcript and extracts from this may be used by the researcher, Ahmed Ali Didi, in reports and publications arising from the research.

**Signature:**

**Date:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Full Name: ( please print)**

\_\_\_\_\_



Sample field notes

19/5/05

Arrived at 6.53 to attend morning assembly.  
 As I came the student who was to recite Quran was off  
 with the accompanying respectation <sup>of the</sup> (that was  
 properly the message. After Quran recitation, the National  
 Anthem was played on tape. Then head gave message. A  
 couple of points were raised: Congratulated and commended a  
 last night drama presentation by Gr. 7; Reminded to go over  
 the contract; Reminded of Friday's study skills camp for grade 7s  
 and that student who had not come on Wednesday should remember to  
 take the info sheet to parents. This reminded to keep to for  
Friday prayers. Interviewed 1st teacher for today. It not same to  
 find her. She was having tea. Upon completion I had her to  
 let her colleague know of her (interview), then usual going for tea,  
 2nd T sent me <sup>some</sup> a rechargeable which I had for Monday.  
 Then came to office to write it down and I was thinking of using  
 email service. Just then SPP had her that she'd give a train  
 for interview. [OC: Shows that they are willing and accepted my  
 presence that's without reminding]. Arranged another  
 Dubon will earlier sup. That's on Sunday at 1.30 pm.  
 Many are working on OUI today. I had 20% every month. [OC: See that T'  
 get what they deserved]. And on many occasions I've heard  
 Supp saying to T's to fill in the appropriate form. Today  
 there was no meeting for the Art teacher because tomorrow  
 they are going to have the study skills workshop so teacher had to  
 get ready for that. So the interview scheduled for 2.00 was  
 brought forward to 1.30.

May study:  
acceptance

camp

additional  
work of T's

left 2.00 past.

## Sample field notes

NO

DATE

4/5/01

- Arrived at 9:20 and left 1:15.
- The SMT was meeting Supos. [I will have to get a briefing on the meeting].
- Observed one science lesson. Ratted tea.
- Asked one Supo to get the English extra read by a student. She actually was sent by the Supo to me to tell that she bring it tomorrow even she didn't have to bring.
- English period set for Thursday: spoke to Sup.
- Observed a second science lesson.

Bl.

The student  
speaks very  
well and  
with  
confidence.  
I was very  
impressed  
by this.

- Talked to head about participating in the SMT meeting. Generally it was OK she said. However there was one idea on the agenda that she had might be of concern to Supos if an outside was attending. Here, I opted not to attend so as to keep the good relations already developing. Instead I requested a copy of the agenda. I also took a quick look at it. It was mostly procedural items and almost unrelated in strict sense to academic work. Head agreed to give a copy. Further, this SMT meeting of Thursday brought forward because staff wanted to concentrate on Children's Day (May 6<sup>th</sup>, next week). But performance descension will continue. Also talked to Dave Sup. about tomorrow's observation.

⊕

SMT  
proceedings  
(not the  
weekly  
meeting)

- ⊕ The only SMT meeting of this kind held while I was here.

Invitation letters --



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Male',  
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Phone: 32 4077; 32 4745  
Email: [didi5152@hotmail.com](mailto:didi5152@hotmail.com)  
(date)

Dear -----, (Principal) letter A

Attached is an information sheet that tells you about a field study that I have planned to conduct in part-fulfilment of the requirements of a doctoral degree that I am currently pursuing at Massey University, New Zealand. Attached is also a form entitled "PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM".

If you volunteer to participate in this study, by way of taking part in two interviews (one at the beginning of my data collection period and the other towards the end), kindly fill in the attached form and return to me at the above address. If you need further information on any aspect of this study you could contact me or my supervisor at [W.L.Edwards@massey.ac.nz](mailto:W.L.Edwards@massey.ac.nz) . Furthermore, I would like to bring to your notice that, because this study is about one primary school in Male', even though I did not mention the name of the school in the final thesis, its identity could not be kept completely anonymous. However, as stated in the "Information Sheet", no names of or any information given by a particular participant would be made identifiable.

Thanking you in advance for considering my request.

Yours Sincerely,

Ahmed Ali Didi

Invitation letters



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Doc 4

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Chaan'dhanee Magu,  
Male',  
Rep of Maldives.  
Phone: 32 4077; 32 4745  
Email: [didi5152@hotmail.com](mailto:didi5152@hotmail.com)  
(date)

Dear -----, (Parents, sector personnel, MāE official) staff  
Board member

Attached is an information sheet that tells you about a field study that I have planned to conduct in part-fulfilment of the requirements of a doctoral degree that I am currently pursuing at Massey University, New Zealand. Attached is also a form entitled "PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM".

If you volunteer to participate in this study, by way of taking part in an interview, kindly fill in the attached form and return to me at the above address. If you need further information on any aspect of this study you could contact me or my supervisor at [W.L.Edwards@massey.ac.nz](mailto:W.L.Edwards@massey.ac.nz).

Thanking you in advance for considering my request.

Yours Sincerely,

Ahmed Ali Didi



Invitation letters

Doc 5



**Massey University**  
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Chaan'dhanee Magu,  
Male',  
Rep of Maldives.  
Phone: 32 4077; 32 4745  
Email: [didi5152@hotmail.com](mailto:didi5152@hotmail.com)  
(date)

Dear -----, (Teacher) 1/1/14

Attached is an information sheet that tells you about a field study that I have planned to conduct in part-fulfilment of the requirements of a doctoral degree that I am currently pursuing at Massey University, New Zealand. Attached is also a form entitled "PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM".

If you volunteer to participate in this study, kindly fill in the attached form and return to me at the above address. Your participation would include the following:

(i) Completing a questionnaire; and, if selected through an appropriate sampling procedure, (ii) to participate in an interview and, (iii) agreeing to your class being observed by me (the researcher) on no more than two occasions. If you need further information on any aspect of this study you could contact me or my supervisor at [W.L.Edwards@massey.ac.nz](mailto:W.L.Edwards@massey.ac.nz).

Thanking you in advance for considering my request.

Yours Sincerely,

Ahmed Ali Didi

Invitation letters (Translation)

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

وَأَرْسَلْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا  
وَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ الْفٰكِرُونَ

.....

وَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ الْفٰكِرُونَ

أَرْسَلْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا  
وَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ الْفٰكِرُونَ  
وَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ الْفٰكِرُونَ  
وَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ الْفٰكِرُونَ  
وَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ الْفٰكِرُونَ  
وَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ الْفٰكِرُونَ  
وَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ الْفٰكِرُونَ  
وَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ الْفٰكِرُونَ  
وَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ الْفٰكِرُونَ  
وَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ الْفٰكِرُونَ

وَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ الْفٰكِرُونَ  
(ر) وَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ الْفٰكِرُونَ

(س) وَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ الْفٰكِرُونَ (وَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ الْفٰكِرُونَ)

وَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ الْفٰكِرُونَ

(س) وَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ الْفٰكِرُونَ

وَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ الْفٰكِرُونَ

وَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ الْفٰكِرُونَ

324745 وَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ الْفٰكِرُونَ

(وَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ الْفٰكِرُونَ) وَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ الْفٰكِرُونَ

وَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ الْفٰكِرُونَ W.L.Edwards@massey.ac.nz

وَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ الْفٰكِرُونَ

وَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ الْفٰكِرُونَ

30

وَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ الْفٰكِرُونَ

وَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ الْفٰكِرُونَ

Invitation letters



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MUHEE (only)  
(Dr 7)  
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Ma. Rose Burn,  
Chaan'dhane Magu,  
Male',  
Rep of Maldives.  
Phone: 32 4077; 32 4745  
Email: didi5152@hotmail.com  
(date)

Dear -----, (child's parent) letter D

Attached is an information sheet that tells you about a field study that I have planned to conduct in part-fulfilment of the requirements of a doctoral degree that I am currently pursuing at Massey University, New Zealand. Attached is also a form entitled "PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (For Parents)".

Your child, ....., is being invited to participate in this study by way of filling a questionnaire. If you consent to your child's participation, kindly fill in the attached form and return to me at the above address. If you need further information on any aspect of this study you could contact me or my supervisor at [W.L.Edwards@massey.ac.nz](mailto:W.L.Edwards@massey.ac.nz).

Thanking you in advance for considering my request.

Yours Sincerely,

Ahmed Ali Didi



**Interview schedules**

**Teacher's interview**

**Introduction**

1. How long have you been here?
2. What responsibilities do you have here other than being a class teacher?

**Change**

3. What do you see as the most significant changes that have happened in this school over the last three years?

- changes in people
- changes in ways of doing things

4. How did these changes come about?

5. What was their impact in the school?

- on your role
- on students
- on the work of the school

6. What major achievements have there been in the past three years?

7. What major challenges have there been in the past three years?

8. What changes external to the school have had an impact on the school over the last three years?

9. What was their impact?

- on your role
- on students
- on the work of the school

**Own values and philosophy**

10. What are your own beliefs about the purposes of education?

11. What do you think are the most important things for students to learn in school?

**School values and philosophy**

12. What is your understanding of what your school really values?

13. How have these values been developed?
14. How are these values reflected in what happens in this school?
15. How would you describe the culture of your school?

**Teaching and learning**

16. How would you describe the expectations for learning for students in this school?
  - Your own expectations
  - School expectations
  - Parent expectations
17. What approaches to learning appear to be successful in this school?
18. Over the past three years can you identify any developments in approaches to learning and teaching in your classrooms?
19. What has contributed to these developments?
20. How do you plan for children's learning?
  - Where do you start?
  - What information do you use?
  - What resources do you use?
  - What involvement do you get from others?
21. What kind of information do you seek on students' learning?
  - How do you decide what to collect?
  - How is the information used?
  - How do you involve students in understanding how they are learning and achieving?
22. How are parents involved in the learning of their children?
23. What information do you share with parents about student achievement?

**Professional development**

24. What processes (opportunities and methods) are there for teachers to get feedback on their teaching?
25. In what ways does the school support and encourage on-going learning?
26. What staff development activity is seen as most important?

27. What opportunities have you had to continue your own learning?
28. Can you describe a professional development initiative which you see as having had a positive impact on your own teaching?
29. Were you able to build on the initial impact?
30. How are teachers supported in this school when they need advice?
31. What opportunities are there for teachers to develop leadership skills?

**Outside agencies**

32. What outside agencies have had an impact upon this school?
33. What outside agency involvement has been helpful?
34. What outside agency has been less helpful?

**Finale**

35. What do you enjoy most about working in this school?
36. What do you enjoy least about working in this school?
37. What major challenges lie ahead for this school?
38. Where do you see this school in another three years time?
39. Where do you see yourself in another three years time?
40. Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you would like to add?

Thank you.

Principal's interview - 1

**Change**

1. What do you see as the most significant changes that have happened in this school over the last three years?

- changes in people
- changes in ways of doing things

2. How did these changes come about?

3. What was their impact in the school?

- Impact on principal
- Impact on teachers
- Impact on organization
- Impact on students
- Impact on the school environment

4. What major achievements have there been in the past three years?

5. What major challenges have there been in the past three years?

6. What changes external to the school have had an impact on the school over the last three years?

7. What was their impact?

- On principal
- On the work of the school
- On families, children etc.

**Leadership and management**

8. What are the key strategic goals of this school?

- Do they follow from the school's vision/mission statement?
- How are these goals identified?
- Who is involved?
- In what ways does the school consult with its community about these goals?

9. Can you briefly describe the organizational structures in this school?

- What are the main roles and responsibilities of these people?
- Describe how timetables are drawn and students and teachers assigned to classes?
- How are these decision made?

10. What is the role of the School Board in this school?

11. Could you select one important goal of your school and describe how it is being translated into practice in school?

- Why was this goal selected?
- Who chose it? Who participated in the decision?
- What information was used to select it and guide future decisions?
- Who has responsibility for seeing that it is addressed?
- Who is involved in the implementation?
- What are the implementation steps?
- How do you know that the goal has been achieved?
- How do others learn about the impact of efforts to achieve the goal?
- What are the next steps?
- What information do you give to the School Board about progress towards achievement of goals?

12. Is the process you have described for this goal the same for use for other school goals?

1. What differences are there, and why?

13. What records does your school keep which might help in tracking the progress it is making?

14. What role does the Ministry of Education play in improvement efforts?

Thank you.

Principal's interview - 2

**School's vision and/or mission**

1. How was your school's vision and/or mission statement developed?
2. Who was involved in it?

**Own values and philosophy**

3. What are your own beliefs about the purposes of education?
4. What do you think are the most important things for students to learn in school?

**School values and philosophy**

5. What is your understanding of what your school really values?
6. How have these values been developed?
7. How are these values reflected in what happens in this school?
8. How would you describe the culture of your school?
9. Can you think of an example which shows how this culture operates in the everyday life of the school?

**Teaching and learning**

10. How would you describe the expectations for learning for students in this school?
  - Your own expectations
  - School's expectations
  - Parents' expectations
11. What approaches to learning appear to be successful in this school?
12. Over the past three years can you identify any developments in approaches to learning and teaching in classrooms in your school?
13. What has contributed to these developments?
14. What kind of information is collected on students' learning?
  - How is it decided what to collect?
  - Why is this information collected?

## Appendix - 8

- What use is made of the information?
- 15. What processes are there for feedback to students about their learning?
- 16. What processes (opportunities and methods) are there for feedback to and from parents about their children's learning?
  - For parents to support and encourage children's learning?
  - To let parents know about how well their children are achieving?
- 17. What processes (opportunities and methods) are there for teachers to get feedback about their teaching?
  - Are there ways that teachers learn from each other?
- 18. What opportunities are there for teachers to talk about teaching and learning?

### **Staff development**

- 19. In what ways does the school support and encourage on-going staff learning?
- 20. How are professional development priorities set in your school?
- 21. Can you describe a professional development initiative which you see as having had a positive impact on your own school?
- 22. Were you able to build on the initial impact? How?
- 23. What system of staff appraisal do you use in your school?
- 24. How do you work with teachers whose performance is of concern?
- 25. What opportunities are there for classroom teachers to develop leadership skills?
- 26. What opportunities do you have to continue your own learning?

### **Outside agencies**

- 27. What outside agencies and people have had an impact upon this school?
- 28. What outside agency or people have been helpful to you?
- 29. What outside agency or people have been less helpful to you?

**Finale**

30. What do you enjoy most about working in this school?
31. What do you enjoy least about working in this school?
32. What major challenges lie ahead for this school?
33. Where do you see this school in another three years time?
34. Where do you see yourself in another three years time?
35. Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you would like to add?

Thank you.

**Parent's interview**

1. What do you see as the most significant changes that have happened in this school over the last three years?
2. How did these changes come about?
3. What was the impact in the school?
4. What changes external to the school have had an impact on the school over the last three years?
5. What was their impact?
6. What are the expectations of children's academic achievement in the school?
7. What are the expectations of children's behaviour in the school?
8. How does the school help children to meet these expectations?
9. What processes (opportunities and methods) are there for feedback to and from parents about their children's learning?
  - For parents to support and encourage children's learning?
  - To let parents know about how well their children are achieving?
  - How well does this work?
10. What is it about this school that you appreciate most as a parent?
11. What major challenges lie ahead for this school?
12. Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you would like to add?

Thank you.

**Interview schedule for sector personnel**  
(Quality improvement)

1. What constitutes school improvement? In other words, how would you define school improvement?
2. Given your definition of school improvement, could you tell me what areas should a school focus on most for it to improve?
3. Do you have a way of knowing whether schools are achieving their goals? If so, how? If not, what needs to be done?
4. What do you see as your role (or as the role of the section) in helping schools achieve their goals?
5. What support services are available to schools in this regard?
6. What support do schools seek in achieving their goals?
7. What approaches to learning appear to be successful in this school?
8. Over the past three years can you identify any developments in approaches to learning and teaching in this school?
9. What has contributed to these developments?
10. Are there any changes in student learning and achievement which you can link to these developments?
11. Is there anything that you would like to add?

Thank you

**Interview schedule for sector personnel**  
(Curriculum & teacher education)

1. What constitutes school improvement? In other words, how would you define school improvement?
2. Given your definition of school improvement, could you tell me what areas should a school focus on most for it to improve?
3. What do you see as your role (or as the role of the centre) in helping schools achieve their goals?
4. What support services are available to schools in this regard?
5. What support do schools seek in achieving their goals?
6. Do you have a way of knowing whether schools are achieving their goals? If so, how? If not, what needs to be done?
7. What kind of a relation do you foresee schools to have with you so that their efforts to improve would be enhanced?
8. Is there anything that you would like to add?

Thank you

Questionnaires (Staff and student)

Project Title: School Improvement: The route taken by a Maldivian urban primary school

Staff Questionnaire

This questionnaire has three parts. Part 1 asks you about your opinions on a variety of issues related to your work and school. Part 2 asks for your opinion of changes at your school. Part 3 asks for some background information. Your responses will be confidential and anonymous. Please complete all three parts and return the questionnaire in the envelope provided.

*This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Application 04/155. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North, telephone 06 350 5249, email [humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz).*

Part One

THE MANAGEMENT CONDITIONS OF THE SCHOOL AND CLASSROOM  
CONDITIONS

Attached is a series of 48 statements about your school and your classroom. I would like to know how far these statements match your own perception of the school and the classroom, in other words, your personal view of the school and your classroom. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' answer; I am seeking your opinion. For each statement please circle one response.

**(Please turn over)**

## Appendix - 9

**1. In this school we talk about the quality of our teaching**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**2. As a school we review the progress of changes we introduce**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**3. Teachers make time to review their classroom practice**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**4. I feel able to express my views freely about school policies and practices**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**5. Our long-term aims are reflected in the school's plans**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**6. Our planning processes encourage good working relationships**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**7. Everyone is fully aware of the school's development priorities**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**8. In the school we review and modify our plans**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**9. We ask students for their views about various aspect of the school's functioning**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**10. This school takes parents' views into consideration when embarking on changes**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

## Appendix - 9

**11. Staff and PTA Members work in collaboration to decide on future directions for the school**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**12. We make effective use of outside support agencies (e.g. resource personnel and consultants) in our development work**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**13. Professional learning is valued in this school**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**14. In devising school policies emphasis is placed on professional development**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**15. In this school the focus of staff development is on improving teaching & learning**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**16. The school's organization provides time for staff development**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**17. Staff taking on coordinating roles are skillful in working with colleagues**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**18. We get tasks done by working in teams**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**19. Staff are kept informed about key decisions**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**20. We share experiences about the improvement of classroom practice**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

## Appendix - 9

**21. Staff in the school have a clear vision of where we are going**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**22. Senior management take a lead over development priorities**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**23. Staff are given opportunities to take on leadership roles**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**24. Staff undertaking leadership roles are given appropriate support**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**25. Teachers in this school believe that all students can learn**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**26. Teachers conduct their relationships in the classroom in ways that demonstrate consistency and fairness and build trust**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**27. Teachers understand and show that communication with pupils involves listening as much as speaking**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**28. Teachers encourage students to be independent learners**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**29. Teachers establish clear boundaries to, and expectations of, pupil behaviour**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**30. Teachers promote a system of rewards and sanctions that emphasise expectations and promotes pupil self-esteem and self-discipline**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

## Appendix - 9

**31. Teachers use active management strategies to create and maintain an appropriate classroom environment**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**32. Teachers show consistency, with flexibility, in responding to pupils and events**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**33. Teachers build variety into lesson plans**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**34. Teachers adjust classroom strategies in response to pupil feedback during lessons**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**35. Teachers employ strategies that enable pupils to find meaning in lesson**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**36. Teachers use homework to reinforce and extend learning**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**37. Teachers demonstrate a range of classroom management skills in their lessons**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**38. Teachers employ various teaching strategies or models with their lessons**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**39. Teachers trial and refine new teaching models as part of their own professional development**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**40. Teachers reflect on their classroom practice**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

## Appendix - 9

**41. Teachers discuss with each other the nature of teaching strategies and their application to classroom practice and schemes of work**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**42. Teachers establish specifications or guidelines for using new teaching strategies**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**43. Teachers agree on standards used to assess student progress as result of employing a range of teaching methods**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**44. Teachers regularly observe each other in the classroom and give each other feedback**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**45. Teachers use systematically collected classroom-based data in their decision-making**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**46. Teachers employ effective strategies for reviewing progress and the impact of classroom innovation on pupil progress**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**47. Teachers are widely involved in the process of data collection**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**48. Teachers establish clear ground rules for the collection, control and use of school-based data**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

*Questions 1 – 24 are adapted from Hopkins et al., 1994, pp. 210-11 & Hopkins, 2002, pp. 120-122; and, questions 24 – 48 are adapted from Beresford, 2003, pp. 157-8; Hopkins, 2002, pp. 124-125 & Mitchell et al., 2002, pp. 329-331.*

**Part Two**

**CHANGE OVER THE LAST 3-5 YEARS**

For questions one through ten, please circle one response.

(Use 1-5 scale, and "Don't know") 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree

1. We expect more of our students

1	2	3	4	5	Don't know
---	---	---	---	---	------------

2. We enjoy our work more

1	2	3	4	5	Don't know
---	---	---	---	---	------------

3. We have made positive changes to the way we teach

1	2	3	4	5	Don't know
---	---	---	---	---	------------

4. Student behaviour has improved

1	2	3	4	5	Don't know
---	---	---	---	---	------------

5. We have made positive changes to the way the school runs

1	2	3	4	5	Don't know
---	---	---	---	---	------------

6. We have more professional development

1	2	3	4	5	Don't know
---	---	---	---	---	------------

7. We have more contact with other schools

1	2	3	4	5	Don't know
---	---	---	---	---	------------

8. We have made positive changes to how we plan ahead

1	2	3	4	5	Don't know
---	---	---	---	---	------------

9. We monitor our progress more

1	2	3	4	5	Don't know
---	---	---	---	---	------------

**Appendix - 9**

10. Parents show more interest in their children's learning

1	2	3	4	5	Don't know
---	---	---	---	---	------------

For questions 11 through 14, use the spaces provided to write your responses. You may also use the reverse side of this page.

11. What do you see as the major achievements of this school over the last 3-5 years?

.....

.....

.....

.....

12. What do you see as the current strengths of this school?

.....

.....

.....

.....

13. What changes would you like to see in this school over the next couple of years, if any?

.....

.....

.....

.....

14. Finally, in your opinion, what constitutes an improvement, in other words, how would you define improvement?

.....

.....

.....

.....

*Questions in part two are adapted from Mitchell et al (2002, p. 332)*

Part Three

BACKGROUND INFORMATION (Please tick appropriate boxes or fill in spaces provided)

1. Gender

Female

Male

2. Years of experience

Less than two years

2 – 4 years

5 – 10 years

10 – 15 years

15 + years

3. Years at this school

Less than two years

2 – 4 years

5 – 10 years

10 – 15 years

15 + years

4. Position

Class teacher

Supervisor/AP/DP

Other (please specify) -----

5. Qualifications

-----  
-----  
-----  
-----

Thank you very much for taking time to complete this questionnaire.

Questionnaires (Staff and student)

Project Title: School Improvement: The route taken by a Maldivian urban primary school

Student Questionnaire

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Attached is a series of 24 statements about your school. I would like to know how far these statements match your own perception of the school, in other words, your personal view of the school. There are no 'right' answers or 'wrong answers', I am seeking your opinion.

For each statement, please circle one response that most reflects your personal view. An example is given below.

**When there is very heavy rain with strong winds, the school remains closed.**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	<b>OFTEN</b>	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	--------------	---------------

**You DON'T have to write your name. But before you proceed, please show your gender by circling one of the following: BOY / GIRL.**

**(Please Turn Over)**

Questionnaires (Staff and student)

1. At some time during the day I think about what I have learnt.

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

2. I know how well I am doing in school.

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

3. I am serious about reporting the work that I do at school to my parents.

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

4. I ask teachers how I can improve my work.

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

5. I can find the classroom books and equipment I need for lessons.

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

6. We do problem-solving in lessons.

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

7. We do group work in lessons.

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

8. I use books at home or in libraries to do research.

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

9. I get on well with teachers in this school.

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

10. Teachers in this school make us want to work.

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**Questionnaires (Staff and student)**

**11. Teachers in this school are helpful.**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**12. We discuss with teachers what work we should do.**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**13. Lessons in this school are varied, and don't follow a pattern.**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**14. I cope with the different teaching styles that teachers use.**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**15. Lessons in this school are interesting.**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**16. We are taught new ways of working, for example how to work well in groups.**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**17. I look forward to lessons.**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**18. I work hard in school.**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**19. I put lots of effort into my homework.**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

**20. Hard work is rewarded in this school.**

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

Questionnaires (Staff and student)

21. Teachers in this school are firm but fair.

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

22. I can see the sense of having school rules.

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

23. My weekly attendance at school is good.

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

24. My behaviour in school is good.

RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	NEARLY ALWAYS
--------	-----------	-------	---------------

THANK YOU

*Adapted from Hopkins (2002, pp. 126-28) & Beresford (2003, pp. 149-150)*

## A coded interview transcript

Interview 16

(Questions one and two contain identifiable information)

3. What do you see as the most significant changes that have happened in this school over the last three years?

- changes in people
- changes in ways of doing things

Changes towards only... what about studies?

[Yes, yes!]

Actually you need some studies... What I feel is, from our side, from teachers' side, from parents' side, from students' side, they have been more focused on their goals, their results. That is something, a significant change, I would say which the former head actually started it and we have been carrying out.

Now parents also know where they are, what they have to do and all that. So students are also more focused, plus teachers.

That is one change. Plus we have been trying to bring about this change: That is, in teaching, to use more student-centered activities. We have been trying to change it, but still I won't say we have totally succeeded. But still we are working towards it. So that is also one change. Earlier, we asked teachers to use teaching aids, but we don't ask them to focus on student-centered activities.

Everyone  
More focused on  
goals/results

Parental awareness

Working toward  
utilizing student-  
centered learning

[So you are saying that focusing on results had come about because of the previous head?]

Yes.

[He initiated this one?]

Yes.

[What about the other one: student-centered learning?]

That I would say we initiated this year.

4. How did these changes come about?

*{The answer to this question can be inferred from the above conversation to Q3 as follows:*

*Focusing on results and using student-centered learning were initiated by the previous head and the current head, respectively.}*

5. What was their impact in the school?

- on your role
- on students
- on the work of the school

[So these two major changes, what kind of impact have these had on your role as a supervisor?]

For one thing, I would have more pressure from all the sides: from my head and from below also. So I also had to be more alert. I also should be more focused when it comes to student-centered activities. I have to be also prepared to see whether those things are there, whether I could provide it, whether I could borrow it, and all of those things I also have to be prepared for all that.

[What about the impact on students due to these?]

Actually students have positive impact when we use student-centered activities. Actually, they also say... I mean, on and off, we also go and talk to the children about the teachers also, when they are not there. We just informally talk to them and <sup>students</sup>

Students agree that activity-based learning is helpful

get their feedback. They also say that when it is like that it is better. Actually they won't use the word which we are using; from their own way which they are saying we know that they mean this.

[Can you give me an example of how they say, for example?]

I have some feedback from grade 6B children. I don't have it now. I can give it to you!

[Yes, alright, that's fine!]

[So, what about the whole work of the school because of these two changes? What can you see about the work that is going on in the school as a whole?]

When there is a focus, everyone's attention is... on one main goal. So we know where we have to work. I mean, they won't be hanging about everywhere thinking of "what are we supposed to do."

[So everybody is clear?]

Yes, clear!

6. What major achievements have there been in the past three years?

From my side or student's side?

[For the school, yes.]

Achievement in the sense... is it regarding studies?

[Anything?]

If I say from student's side, it is 'achievement'. From the senior management side, we are quite bonded together. We help one another a lot. So I could say that it is a big achievement.

[Big bond, right!]

Big bond, yes! And teachers also feel free to come and talk to us. If I take myself as an example, I could say 100% that there is no teacher who will feel reluctant to come and speak to me.

Academic achievement  
They are quite bonded together staff relationships  
Helping one another  
A big achievement  
Institutional achievement  
Bond: indications  
Staff relationships

*Building trust*

They know that they could trust me. I think in an environment like this, it is also an achievement when we have built that trust.

*Comparison* [10]

When it comes to studies, we can't compare ourselves to other schools because (we don't have something to measure us against other schools.) So only we can say that our 'Honour

*Use self-referencing criteria* [10]

List' is this much; our 'Commended' is this much. We don't have a national exam to say that, "yes, we are at this standard".

*No national exam*

[Well, I'm in no way implying that, comparing this school with other schools. I'm saying your achievements; as far as this school is concerned, you may compare it to your past performances. That's what I meant; what were your achievements, not in comparison to other schools?]

*Teacher satisfaction* [10]

As a grade supervisor and subject coordinator, I'm happy about the grade performances as well. I think that is an achievement. There grades are OK compared to past years.

*Academic achievement* [10]

*OC: She is referring to the negative perception. Another participant has also mentioned earlier: "Living in this environment"*

7. What major challenges have there been in the past three years?

*Overcoming of the negative perception Institutional achievement*

Our school has been [redacted] I think we have overcome that. To overcome this, only I cannot work towards it, all have to work. So I think it's with a team effort that we have overcome that label. So I think that was a challenge.

8. What changes external to the school have had an impact on the school over the last three years?

*Parents: threat as well as opportunity*

[Positive or even negative! Something that has happened outside the school that has had an impact on the school?]

*Parental influence opportunities*

Some parents we can take them as a threat and as an opportunity, both. So, compared to earlier batch of parents which we have, now our parents are quite well-educated, not all parents, but still we have a group of them. So it is actually a positive impact on our school, if we can have people who can

*Parental characteristics*

Parental influence:  
threat

back up when we need them/ So they are there. When it comes to negative, ... what should I say?/

[No, you don't have to!]

I mean, I can't think of something like that! But I know that there will be!/

9. What was their impact?

- on your role
- on students
- on the work of the school

[So because of parents, there's been an impact on your role as supervisor?]

Yes.

[Pressure on you?]

Relationship with parents ✓

Pressure plus their help also. I mean, this batch of parents which I'm having in grade they have been working well with me from grade I was actually grade supervisor first, then with the same batch I came to grade and again with the same batch I'm here with grade So they know me well. I can ask them anything easily. They are also at ease with me./

OC:

"Parental influence: Pressure from them" this can be one category

[Is there any other supervisor who has gone the same way?]

I don't know. I don't think.

[So because of parents, there must be some impact on the students as well?]

Parental help support ✓

Yes. I can only talk about this batch of parents. They helped me last year with remedial students. From educated parents I get help like that. So it is a positive impact/right!

OC: Reciprocal relationship between parents and staff

[Yes]

Parents seeking help ✓

The same way, if something goes wrong, still those parents would come and they feel at ease to talk to me about those things as well. So in both ways it helps.]

Relationship with parents ✓

10. What are your own beliefs about the purposes of education?

If we educate somebody, it should not only be, like the head said, something physical. It should be holistic; an overall student. That's what I believe; a child should be a holistic child. But still I feel that from our school's side, there are things that we need to improve in order to make the child a holistic child.

Holistic child  
Emphasis ✓

Areas needing  
emphasis { } ✓

11. That's my next question. Given these purposes, what do you think are the most important things for students to learn in school?

Attitudes and values, still we are lacking on that, from our school's side.

[This is apart from academic work?]

Yes.

Areas needing  
emphasis ✓

12. What is your understanding of what your school really values?

[What values does this school have?]

Earlier we did not focus on values that much. I can say that. When I was working as a teacher also I didn't focus that much on values. But now there is a trend here: we have started greeting. So I think it is making an impact on students and we are bringing up some change because of that. Still I think that we are not giving that much focus on those things that we should give. In studies also, we can impart all that in the academic work as well. But still we are not giving that much focus on it.

A focus on values  
and attitudes  
important values ✓

13 [As important values, you have said attitudes, values and greeting. How did these values develop? How did the school start focusing on these areas, or why?]

Actually I also don't know how this school started this greeting thing. I was not here when they started.

[So it has been here long time ago?]

Not long time ago. As I told you I was not here for one year and when I came back it had already started. So I can't say how it started.

OC The school must have do a lot on emphasizing values & all the etc.

14 How are these values reflected in what happens in this school?

[So, a person like me, an outsider coming in, would I be able to see something that is happening in the school that would show me that you are trying to impart these values?]

Inculcating Values

May be if... may be not! As I have said, we have not given that much attention <sup>on value</sup> but still only the greeting part we could say... <sup>beginning in them</sup> But still we have to, on and off remind the children about that. So it is till not a habit!

Expecting

15. How would you describe the culture of your school?

I could say its open, friendly, but I won't say 'on task', all the time. I mean, I'm not on task 100% of the time. I can say when it comes to communication we have an effective communication because most of the times it is given in written form I could even say it is a safe environment, an environment where we give focus on academic work a lot

School Culture is open and friendly

Good Communication

School culture safe environment

Academic focus emphasis

16 How would you describe the expectations for learning for students in this school?

- Your own expectations
- School's expectations
- Parent's expectations

Supervisor expectation

To be frank I expect everyone to learn what they are supposed to. But I know that's not the reality!

[What does the school expect of them?]

That 80%

[That's all the subjects?]

All the subjects.

[What are the parents' expectations of students?] --

Schools expectation

Shared  
parental goals

Parental expectation

Parental awareness

{ }  
(see elided copy)

Parental expectation  
varies

We are focusing as a group isn't it? Parents would have their own individual thing) So I think they also want their students to pass with, let's say, good marks/ And I think now there are parents who want to, I mean, this education has made it I mean, change in the parents as well/ They want not only studies, they want their students to participate in extra activities and get good places in that. Plus now the parents who are more educated, they are focusing more on achievements: they want their students to be selected as best-all-rounder as well/ Actually it varies from parent to parent/

17. What approaches to learning appear to be successful in this school?

Teaching techniques  
method

Group and  
Activity based  
learning are successful

Actually, I can't say that we are always using the same approach, right! It varies. I can't say that, "yes, we are always using group method, and it is successful/" So it depends. Not chalk and talk method, but any other method where students can get a chance to interact, where they can actively participate. It is successful, depending on the lesson/

18 Can you think of a specific curriculum area, programme or project which was implemented in the last three years or so to improve student learning?

- How does it fit with the school's goals?
- What actions were taken to implement the programme or project?
- Have these actions led to any changes in teaching practice in the school?

Curriculum area means it should be related to the curriculum of which...

[Yes, something about learning: can be the subject you are in charge of or any topic area.]

Quiz  
+  
Academic  
Achievement

We are having this quiz and things. But it has not been only for three years, before that also it has been on. It is bringing a positive impact.

[So this quiz is related to school goals? Related to curriculum?]

Yes, yes.

[So how does the quiz work?]

How quiz is conducted

We have a lot of methods of working with this quiz. Now in the second term we are having a different method. Once the unit that we are teaching is over, we give a lot of questions on that. On their own they have to write the answers and show it to the Science teachers. She will mark them or as a group, discuss how they will mark them. So we have a set week for the quiz. So, on the quiz week, two classes at a time... This is how we have planned for this term. We will go to the hall, now we have planned for the parents also to be there. So each child will be asked 2-3 questions. He or she has to go up on the stage and answer those three questions and we'll give marks. So we select the students. We add up all the marks which they get from each subject and see whether he or she gets a 80%, 90% or 100%. We have three certificate areas where they get ordinary, credit and merit. Other than that, we select the best class in subject plus overall best class as well. Students want to achieve something (They can work as individuals or they can work in groups or in subject-wise or class-wise.) And parents also push a lot for this. I mean, nobody would want their child to go up on the stage and stay back without answering. So when parents are there, they also push a lot. So it has brought a positive impact.

Edit if needed.  
See edited version for Quiz (in NVivo)

Students wanting to achieve

Parental pushing on their children influence

[So they study towards this quiz not only in school, or would they have a specific time in school?]

Learning quiz

It actually varies. Sometimes the teachers, on their own initiative, bring their own classes. Now also, one of the grade

Edit

classes has already started. So the class teacher is bringing students on a specific time. Last year, some teachers who were expatriates, they actually got parents to help them in the Dhivehi. So like that we can get parents help as well. And they study at home as well. Sometimes the weaker students can be attached to somebody who is good in studies and both of them together can study as well. So it is like that.

Support  
Parental help  
Pairing student  
for mutual learning  
Teaching method

edit for  
"Quiz"  
see edited version

[So this you conduct within the school, not in contact with other schools?]

Yes.

19. Are there any changes in student learning and achievement which you can link to these changes?

{The answer to this question has been highlighted in the above conversation to Q18. Therefore, there is no specific answer here}.

20. What challenges lie ahead of you now?

Imparting these values and attitudes has been a challenge for us because we have to do those things. And, we need to think of how we have to do it plus having this student-centered activities, making that also a habit. That is also a challenge because in this changing environment we have to be also changing, we can't always depend on chalk and talk method.

Imparting  
Imparting values and  
attitudes  
Staff challenge  
Area needing  
emphasis  
Keeping pace with  
changes in  
environment

oc: Many are aware that  
chalk & talk method does not  
work very well

21. In what ways does the school support and encourage on-going staff learning?

This school has been quite supportive of staff development. I mean, if we want to have a staff development activity, most of the time the teachers are asked, "what do they want", "which areas do they want on staff development"? That is one way we carryout staff development. The other way is, there are areas which the teachers might not recognize, but when we supervise we might see "yes, this is an area". So, like that, we also find

Being supportive of SD  
Identify staff  
need  
Staff development

areas. [So depending on those things we carry out staff development.]

[So those are the two ways of selecting priorities?]

Yes.

22. How are professional development priorities set in your school?

*{Please note that the above conversation with regard to Q21 has answered this question. Therefore, there is no separate answer here}.*

23. Can you describe a professional development initiative which you see as having had a positive impact on your work?

*Relevant ✓  
Usefulness of  
Yes, training is  
helpful development*

The recent one where we had, I mean, being effective on our own, that workshop. It has actually helped me a lot. It gave me a chance to meet myself; like that way... to think about... [SA] that's what I mean. So when I knew those things I could help those whom I have to help.?

Q24 [So you were able to build on that?]

Yes, on that!

25 What outside agencies have had an impact upon this school?

[Think of an outside agency or office or groups. Now we have talked about parents having an impact on the school who are outside the school, any other such party, agency or office that you think have had an impact on the school?]

The associations: the Scout Association; Girl Guide association, plus the sports associations. They have an impact on us.

26 What outside agency involvement has been helpful?

Earlier we had sports inter-school activities. So, when we had inter-school activities, these associations were quite helpful. That also not all associations. I could say that the Cricket Association was very helpful. They even provided a coach and the place and everything. We didn't have to pay the coach. Some of the other associations we had to find a coach, we had to pay the coach and like that.

The Cub Association and Guide associations, they are helpful as well!

27. What outside agency has been less helpful?

You want me to give names specially?

[Well, you don't have to if you don't want to. We can stop there as well. There are some, right?]

Yes there are some.

[Can you number: one or two; three or four, can you say?]

Actually I was involved in sports for sometimes but I was...

[So these are sports associations, right?]

Yes, sports associations.

[That's fine. That's OK!]

[Now these are final questions, OK!]

28. What do you enjoy most about working in this school?

The school's culture.

School culture

29. What do you enjoy least about working in this school?

[If you don't want to we can skip it, alright!]

Not actually I enjoy least, but when there's a lot of work to do at the same time, stress level goes up. Not that I don't enjoy.

Staff concerns  
Stress

30. What major challenges lie ahead for this school?

{The answer to this question can be inferred from the answers to Q3,10,11,16 & 33 as follows}:

Academic Excellence ✓  
 Communicating ✓  
 being whole child ✓  
 emphasis ✓  
 Institutional ✓  
 concern

- (i) To use more student-centered learning and keeping the achievement level at 80% or higher.
- (ii) Focus more on imparting good attitudes and values in order to make the child a holistic child; and
- (iii) Develop a good staff appraisal system.

31. Where do you see this school in another three years time?

What do you mean "where to be?"

[Well, think of the school's level or in terms of development. So within another three years, where would the school be?]

Academic achievement, I am sure that it will go up. Only we can compare with 'Commended' and 'Honour List', OK. Those things would go up. Plus, this school would have more facilities. For example, now we don't have a proper Art Club, no computer lab; Science lab is not there even though the room is there. Audio visual room, we have it but we don't have all the resources there. So within the next three years I hope this school to be a school with all these resources and facilities.

Aspirations ✓  
 Resources ✓  
 Facilities ✓  
 Resources

Exhibit

32. Where do you see yourself in another three years time?

I think I'll still be a supervisor  
 [In the education field?]  
 Yes, in the education field

OC: Many do not aspire to change / to go up the ladder. They prefer to stay where they are

Job satisfaction ✓

33. Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you would like to add?

Actually you are only talking about the academic things of the school. I mean there's nothing outside, isn't it? You have a most covered everything, I think, I'm not sure.

[Ah, yes! May be more focus on academic. But is there anything I missed about sports or other extra activities?]

I don't think so. I mean, sports and extra activities in school we are not having a lot of those, I mean, inter-school and a

those things. We are now having Youth development programmes. The other things are more focused and we have clubs and inter-class activities. So I think we have covered all those things. And, staff appraisal!

[What about staff appraisal?]

We do appraise staff, OK. I mean, we do acknowledge. But I think we should have a better, written down appraisal for teachers where we can refer back. If we are going to promote, give a promotion or something like that, a good appraisal form should be there. I think school needs to develop a proper appraisal. As a supervisor, I also write down that teachers are doing this and this. But there's no

OC: My post-grad Dip  
then highlight the  
time.

[In an informal sense but there is no evaluation?]

Yes.

[There's only the helping in a situation?]

Yes, yes.

I think that's something which the school needs to develop.

[Anything else?]

That's all.

[That's about all?]

I guess so.

[OK, then! Thank you very much]

School need a  
formal staff  
appraisal system

Institutional  
Concern

**Examples of ‘codes’ and related ‘significant statements’**

<b>Significant statements</b>	<b>Codes</b>
In one lesson, one of the teachers used real material to teach a lesson. I think that’s something we all really have to use in our classes. I also have started using real things in the class.	Learning from each other
If I get absent the school will call me and clarify the matter before I could call and they would say, “If you want an extra class we can schedule it for you.” ... Before it was not like that. If we get absent we had to take extra classes and that is a must... But now we have to take extra classes only if we are behind in scheme and slow in progress. I’m someone who catches up with work. I know when I need extra classes. I know my work, won’t I? ... I have been in this field for ten years so I know my job well.	Valuing teachers’ work
They do support a lot; ... allowing us to go to the classes. Now they release us [from time-tabled time] when it is time for me to attend classes. For example, instead of asking me to attend an extra-curricular activity, they let me pursue my own studies.	Supporting ongoing learning
When we have free periods we always discuss about lessons and teaching	Professional talk
If a teacher needs to initiate any activity, you need to mention it to the head and then she will decide. For the most part, permission will be granted.	Taking initiative

## Appendix – 11 a

### NVivo assembled statements belonging to one category

#### Purposes of education

- ✓ **Document 'Interview 12 significant statements', 2 passages, 514 characters.**  
Education is one of the most important things in our life because without it we won't even get a job now and then for the most part we can't handle life's situations without it. Then there will be so many challenges coming in life and to face them we need education.
- Education is one of the most important things in our life ... There will be so many challenges coming in life and to face them we need education... For the most part we can't handle life's situations without it. Without it we won't even get a job
- A basic need
- ✓ **Document 'Interview 15 significant statements', 1 passages, 139 characters.**  
For their career ahead; for them to be a person as a whole; for them to be able to lead a normal life;... like... not go along the wrong road!
- A basic need  
lead social life
- ✓ **Document 'Interview 21 significant statements', 1 passages, 501 characters.**  
Purposes of education! That is something that a human must have from birth. It is the knowledge...  
[Required for a person!]  
Yes. Actually now we must talk about this generation, right. This is a "push button age". So there are 'buttons' throughout life. It is a "remote control life" we have. A toy car now has a remote control. Even a TV has a remote control. So a child who can walk also must learn how to use a remote. So there is nothing we can have without education. Everything must be learnt.
- A basic need  
imply lead social life
- ✓ **Document 'Interview 23 significant statements', 1 passages, 91 characters.**  
For a prosperous life. Those who are educated can better think of ways to lead a good life.
- lead a social life
- ✓ **Document 'Interview 5 significant statements', 1 passages, 665 characters.**  
There are some values that have to be inculcated in students. Therefore, imparting the necessary knowledge and skills to students so that they become capable adults to lead the society should be a purpose of educations. Being Muslims and when I think of grade 7 students, I think their awareness in religious issues is not enough. Recently when I checked, there were certain students who couldn't even recite Quran or write the Arabic alphabet. What students know in these two areas is limited. Islam has many important values and, therefore, it is important that children be made more aware of these values, and I think education should be linked to these values.
- lead in society
- ✓ **Document 'Interview 7 significant statements', 2 passages, 412 characters.**  
Teaching children how to live in this world. To make a child a productive and well-disciplined citizen who respects his/her parents. I think this is the most important aim of education. And also, he or she must be able to live in the society with others.
- to be able to live in society (social life)
- [ To make a child a productive and well-disciplined citizen who respects his/her parents... And also, he or she must be able to live in the society with others.

Various assembled statements belonging to one category

Purposes of education

✓ Document 'Interview 9 significant statements', 2 passages, 233 characters.  
 [ Good citizens. Down-to-earth people. And, that is also to maintain our culture, tradition, and our moral beliefs and norms.

Good citizens. Down-to-earth people... [who] maintain our culture, tradition, and our moral beliefs and norms.

[good citizens]

✓ Interview 4  
 [ Q10. Education should enable a student to prosper and accomplish in life.

lead social life.

✓ Interview 8  
 [ Q10. Make life in this world better and in the hereafter.

lead a social life.

✓ Interview 14  
 [ Q10. To prepare citizens with democratic, social values who would respect religious values and preserve our culture and contribute to the nation. Education should reflect these values and should not be considered as the sole means for getting an income which is what students say when asked what's the purpose of education. Even parents tend to tell them that without an education you will not get a job. But this [a job] is not everything.

lead a social life.

✓ Document 'Interview 10 significant statements', 1 passages,  
 First and foremost education should provide the means for one to live normally among other people. Education should help one to utilize knowledge in the most productive way. A certificate would not be of much help if one cannot make use of what has been learnt.

lead a social life.

✓ Document 'Interview 11 significant statements', 1 passages, 466 characters.  
 To bring a holistic person.

[Can you elaborate on what you mean by "holistic"?]  
 It's not only what they learn. It's a child who develops good attitudes and other such characteristics ... It is not only academic learning, right?

not limited to academic learning.

I think it's the less emphasis on attitudes and such characteristics that is inhibiting students to make good use of what they learn. Even in Islam, although they know the content, Islamic values are not portrayed in what they practice.

✓ Document 'Interview 13 significant statements', 1 passages, 240 characters.

I think the main thing is to produce good citizens.  
 [Can you just elaborate a little on what you mean by 'a good citizen'?]  
 Not only to know knowledge, but they should be able to use it when they grow up; be with others; work with others.

lead a social life.

(be able to use knowledge)

✓ Document 'Interview 16 Significant statements', 1 passages, 321 characters.

If we educate somebody, it should not only be, like the head said, something physical. It should be holistic; an overall student. That's what I believe; a child should be a holistic

[Make a holistic child]

NVivo assembled statements belonging to one category

Purposes of education

child. But still I feel that from our school's side, there are things that we need to improve in order to make the child a holistic child.

✓ Document 'Interview 17 significant statements', 1 passages, 346 characters.

Helping the child to develop as a good citizen is also important. Also educated people's thinking will also be different, right.

[Can you elaborate just a little more on that?]

A good education is needed to enable a student to become a well-disciplined person. A good foundation for the future could only be laid if a good education is provided.

[good citizen]  
thinking beyond  
academic ability

Document 'Interview 20 significant statements', 1 passages, 123 characters.

Education means getting rid of ignorance ... I think that it is a basic need for any human being to get a basic education.

A basic need

Document 'Interview 22 significant statements', 1 passages, 118 characters.

Education should bring a change and change should be acceptable. I mostly believe that it should be a positive change.

[should bring change]

✓ Document 'Interview 6 Un aprvd version - significant', 1 passages, 225 characters.

Everybody should be educated because when we come up in life we have to deal with different people. So we have to know something so we could face people. Also, when we face difficulties, we need education to deal with these.

lead a social life

✓ Document 'Interview 18 significant statements', 1 passages, 205 characters.

To bring out overall, holistic children for the nation.

[What do you include within the term "holistic"?)

To bring out physically, mentally and socially prepared citizens who love our country and religion.

lead a social life

Document 'Interview 19 Significant statements', 1 passages, 481 characters.

To be able to apply what they learn in their real life. I believe that if you get 100 out of 100, that's not all. It has to be practical. Its not only learning from books, [students] must be able to apply what [they] learn. ... So we have to encourage and help students [know] that that's the purpose of learning. And also we are trying to teach like that; more interactive and child-centered learning in the classes. Instead of asking them to by-heart things, learn from the book.

Apply what's being learnt

✓ Document 'Interview 2 significant statements', 1 passages, 448 characters.

I believe that the purpose of education is to develop the whole person by providing diverse opportunities in a supportive environment. Emphasis needs to be given to academic and personal excellence, self discipline, motivation, tolerance etc. The education we provide should assist the students in developing skills that would help them to become independent and self sufficient adults who will succeed and contribute responsibly to the community.

lead a social life

NVivo assembled statements belonging to one category

Node: Staff satisfaction

Interview 10

194: I enjoy working with children and for them. I talk to them a lot. When I am on duty also I talk to them a lot. And they don't hesitate at all talking to me anytime when they see me. So, I am very pleased about this relationship. The relationship between teachers and supervisors is also very good; I like it very much. So, overall, I like to work here and I enjoy it.

- good relationship among staff

Interview 11

181: Actually the team which I'm working in is very helpful, very caring; that's one thing I enjoy

- helpful, caring team

Interview 12

153: once I started explaining in Dhivehi with simple things, they started getting it. So last year those who were coming to extra classes, they were the children who were getting about E's and C's, they ended up getting C's and B's, respectively. So I was so happy and even the management recognized that.

- Mgt. recognizing good work

210: What ever we need, they will provide. Even if we ask for something that is expensive, still they will try to provide it. So it is very good like that.

- Resource provider

I am happy with the management now. Before, ... I was not, because there were some things that I did not like ... But now it has improved a lot and there is a ver friendly atmosphere in the school... now I look forward to each day of the school and I enjoy teaching here.

- caring friendly atmosphere

12	Staff satisfaction	5.6	3
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Interview 13

212: I think I still prefer to be a teacher.

213: [Any reason for that?]

214: So I get the chance to be with the students more. I feel happier because I feel, at the end of the year, I have taught these students something.

215: [You mean sense of accomplishment!]

216: Yes.

---

Interview 15

194: I like the environment this school has. Like, we can do whatever we want in school, there's nobody to stop us. In teaching we are encourage to do it and then we are praised if we do good work. So, with that, I enjoy.

---

196: We can do whatever we want in school, there's nobody to stop us

---

Interview 17

155: I enjoy working with the teachers, because they are very cooperative.

---

Interview 19

185: I like dealing with the teachers. I like working with teachers and the management staff is also very cooperative. So I'm very happy to work with them.

---

Interview 20

179: I like the environment a lot. I like the people in this school. And, may be, since this is the first school I have been working, it feels like home for me: home outside home!

- environmental relationships

200: I wish to work in this school ... I don't think I'll be out of this school.

Interview 21

240: What do you enjoy most about working in this school?

(friendly)

- happy environment  
- relationships

241: The relation of students, the happy environment here from the teachers and management.

Interview 22

Q. What do you enjoy most about working in this school?

172: The friendly environment and I very much feel that I'm valued here.



- friendly environment  
- work is valued  
(card for)

Interview 23

163: What do you enjoy most about working in this school?

164: Teaching mostly.

165: [Why is it that you enjoy teaching in school?]

166: It has a very friendly environment. School listens to all of our matters.

- friendly environment  
- (card for)

172: I am happy with everything.

## Interview 7

154: I am very pleased about how they give feedback. Mostly they will talk about positive things first and then mention negative aspects as well, but in a positive way.

- feedback giving  
is good

194: Teaching the students and ... being in my group, the teacher group, that's something I really enjoy

- relationship  
among team

Passage 3 of 3 Section 0, Para 222, 160 chars.

Ante 14

222: I am very happy about the environment we have in this school, especially the happy environment among our teachers. Similarly there are positive parents as well.

- happy environment  
- relationships

Intw 4, 8, 14 - Translations

Passage 1 of 1 Section 0, Para 165, 211 chars.

Int 8

165: I appreciate very much how they give feedback to not-so-good points in the lesson. It is done in a constructive way. They also comment on good points as well. I'm very happy about the way they give feedback.

- feedback given  
is good

Intw 6 Un aprvd version -

211: [What do you enjoy most about working in this school?]

212: Seeing students' work.

Enjoy working with  
students

Appendix – 11a

Nodes S - S

226: I don't intend to leave the government. I would be in a school to the last moment possible.

227:

228: [On the management side?]

229: No, as a supervisor. Its alright.

<p>... Now almost all teachers like to work in this school, because, ... <u>now it will be planned</u>, ... things won't come just like that; <u>we will know everything ahead of time</u></p>	12	Teacher satisfaction	5.6	3	- work is planned
--	----	----------------------	-----	---	-------------------

<p>[As a result of those changes, what was the impact on the work of the school?] It is <u>very easy to work here</u></p>	7	Teacher satisfac ion	5.6	5	
---	---	----------------------	-----	---	--

**Examples for the steps in the data analysis process**

**Appendix – 11b**

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Detailed categories</b>	<b>Broad categories</b>	<b>Theme</b>
Professional talk	Forms of staff development	Staff development	Investing in staff
Sharing knowledge			
Forms of staff training			
New teacher induction			
Peer teaching			
Coaching			
Demonstration lessons			
Replicating experience	Opportunities for staff development		
Staff development / workshops for staff			
Getting help from outside			
Enriching teachers' knowledge base			
Learning from each other	Relevance of staff development		
Partnership			
Identifying training needs			
Relevance of staff development	Being supportive of staff development		
Important staff development activity			
Building on initial training	Self development		
New learning			
Self-enrichment			
Catering for individual needs			
Releasing teachers for own learning			
Self development			
Supporting on-going learning	Recognition		
Supportive of staff training			
Teacher development			
Being supportive of SD	Encouragement		
Personal development			
Caring for teachers	Helping teachers		
Valuing teachers' work			
Encouragement from senior management			
Positive feedback			
Teacher encouragement			
Positive encouragement			
Teacher motivation			
Advising teachers	Taking leadership		
Dealing with under performers			
Giving feedback to teachers	Leadership opportunities		
Helping teachers			
Taking initiatives	Leadership training		
Teacher autonomy			
Risk taking			
Assigned leadership			
Leadership training			
Career opportunities			

Student contract



**Target to Improve our class performance**

Class: .....

Subject	No. of students passed in 1st Term	Our target 2nd term	2nd Term performance
Quran			
Islam			
Dhivehi			
English			
Maths			
E.S			
P.A			
P.E			

**To improve the class performance, we will do the following.**

1. ....
2. ....
3. ....
4. ....
5. ....

We believe that we are responsible to learn, achieve and excell. We will extend our full cooperation to our teachers and friends to improve the performance of my class.

Observation notes of a Science lesson

Observation notes of a science lesson on sexual reproduction

Wednesday, 4 May 2005

9.40 am to 10.15 am

Teacher entered the classroom. I followed her to the class. As she entered, all stood up. She waited a little, greeted; they greeted back and sat down. Teacher showed me her chair to sit.

Although she waited at the beginning, she started the lesson by asking questions on the previous lesson by way of recapping before everyone was completely quiet. But eventually everyone settled. Different modes of questioning were used: questions directed to individuals and sometimes to the whole class in which case students who knew the answer raised their hands. Once or twice teacher said 'good'. But there were more correct responses from students than the times she praised.

*OC/T: Very noisy outside. May be because it was just after the break. Yet the teacher's voice was OK.*

She emphasized the ground rules first (all became very quiet) and started off the explanation of the main topic by placing a diagram on the board.

*OC/T: This is the point where she mentioned the objectives of the lesson.*

*OC/T: I have seen teachers who place such items on the board in such a way that some students can't see. But she's OK.*

*Also, the way desks and chairs were arranged was not very ideal for concentrating because students had to turn round to face the teacher. Some teachers take note of this and ask students to turn their chairs and then sit till the explanation is over. I guess the classroom size is a bit small to have in groups, a class of 30!*

While she was explaining, a student asked, "If eggs are not fertilized?" "That, we are coming to," replied the teacher. The smile on his face and the way he looked at his friends suggested that he was trying to get attention unduly. But the teacher handled it tactfully: responded to him positively and quickly continued with the lesson.

As the teacher was doing most of the talking during the explanation, students were looking at the teacher and listening to her most of the times although occasionally some did turn around their heads or looked out of the window for very short periods: just for a few seconds.

*OC/T: Teacher should have noticed these instances even though they were very few. In fact, she was scanning the classroom every now and then. Perhaps for the teacher, these instances might not have warranted her attention!*

**Observation notes of a Science lesson**

As the teacher finished her explanation, one student asked a question to which she answered. Then she assigned some classwork: To write down a summary or the main points of the lesson. The teacher once again summarized the lesson's main points. This time the students listened very attentively; leaning forward with both hands placed on desk, folded:

*OC/T: Emphasising the main points at the end of lessons is an effective way to make students understand better. In addition to this summary, she should have asked some questions on today's lesson.*

She then asked the students to take their exercise books, copy the questions from the board and answer them. She also explained briefly how she would mark the answers and then wrote three questions on the board.

*OC/T: From my where I was seated, the questions were not clearly visible, but I didn't want to get up just in case I might be intervening in some way.*

*OC/T: Throughout the explanation, the look on her face was kind of neutral; there was no smile at all!*

One boy was kept beside the teacher's table, away from others. As he was the student sitting closest to me, I could see that he was not taking part in the lesson. Sometimes lying face down on the desk, at other times, either looking at the students in the group nearest to him or briskly turning the pages of one of his books. Occasionally he would try to get attention of others, especially those sitting in the group nearest to him by saying something loudly. But the teacher took notice of these potential interruptions and dealt with it without losing continuity. She either stared at him or called him by his name, which was just enough to keep him quiet.

*OC/T: Why was this boy kept from others? I wonder whether he was a discipline case; I need to ask this.*

One student completed the work and showed it to the teacher. She corrected it on the spot and gave her feedback (gave a 'star'). [The bell rings: the period is over]

*OC/T: She should have given feedback to other students who might have done a good part of the exercise.*

She asked the student to read what she wrote. Then she read. Teacher praised her: "Very good! Well done!" Then she gave instructions to complete the work at home.

*OC/T: Although the look on her face was neutral, she never said anything negative during the lesson.*

*OC/T: Being a sensitive topic especially for this age, she was confident about what to say and handled questions very well.*

- Feedback was given on 8 May 2005.

**Lesson observation: comments and rating**

<b>Lesson presentation</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Rating</b>
Attention gaining	Waited a little at the beginning, but started asking recap questions before everyone became attentive although they became so later; Emphasised ground rules just before explanation	Good
Clear explanation	Clear voice; Used diagrams; asked questions; did not give any chance for interruptions	Good
Objectives mentioned	Objectives mentioned just before the main topic	Good
Connect to previous lesson	Questions asked about previous lesson	Good
Content knowledge / approp level	Given the sensitivity of the topic, especially in our community, teacher handled it well	V.Good
Questioning	Questions were directed to individuals and to whole class; students raised hands	Good
Assessing student learning	Questioning about previous lesson; for this lesson teacher would be correcting the exercise after the lesson. Question could have been asked about current lesson	Satisfactory
Structure / pacing	Questions for recap; explanation and summarising; assigning work; some correction and feedback given.	Good
Appropriate teaching material used	One diagram, appropriate to the lesson	Good
<b>Classroom management</b>		
Teacher authority established	Reminding of ground rules was just enough	V.Good
Monitoring pupil activity	Scanned classroom every now and then; after assigning work, went round the class checking students work	V.Good
Awareness of events /early detection	Detected potential disruptions; should have noticed those who were not looking even this was for a short while	Good
Student working to task	Students listened to the teacher most of the times. Occasionally a few did turn around but just for few seconds	Good
<b>Relationship with students</b>		
Rapport, warmth, enthusiasm	Appeared a bit neutral in this regard although nothing negative was said	Could do better
Variety in interaction patterns	Throughout explanation teacher talk was dominant but used a diagram and the board; A few students asked a question or two	Satisfactory
Facilitates individual learning	Corrected one student's work on the spot letting the student know that answers were correct; could have commented similarly to others even if they have not finished	Satisfactory
Reinforcement and Feedback	Said "very good" to this student and gave a 'star'. But during recap, 'good' was heard twice.	Satisfactory

Lesson observation: Comments and rating

School communications carrying the school's motto

School

(Motto)

**World Environment Day 2005**  
**5<sup>th</sup> June 2005 - Programme**

**5<sup>th</sup> June 2005 – Sunday**

- Assembly talk by a teacher on the theme "Green Cities" – both sessions
- Display information on the theme "Green Cities"
- Clean up the school:
  - Grade 4 & 5 - 11am to 11.30am
  - Grade 6 & 7 - 11.30am to 12.00pm
  - Staff - 11.00am to 12.45pm
- Donate Plants/trees to school : 7.30am to 6.00pm (school hall)
- Plant trees in the school: ( 5.00pm to 6.00pm)
- Hold an Art exhibition on the theme "Green Cities" – for environment club members.  
Drawings would be displayed on 5<sup>th</sup> June.

*All students are requested to come in their sports uniform on 5<sup>th</sup> June.*

**6<sup>th</sup> June 2005 - Monday**

- Information session on the theme "Green Cities" by Mr. Zahir – only for **grade 6** students.

School communications carrying the school's motto

Staff notice board

(motto)

School

## Grades 4, 5, 6 & 7 Subject Quiz Competition – 2nd Term 2005

**Aim:** To emphasize the importance of being involved in academic related activities  
To help students to revise their lessons for the exam.

**Objectives:** It is expected that at least 70% of the students get an average of 50% correct responses.

### How the Quiz would be conducted

All questions would be from the work done during the SECOND TERM.

Quiz would be conducted as follows

1. Mathematics	Written paper	} in the hall 2 Questions per student 1 Multiple Choice 1 Short answer
2. Environmental Studies	Oral	
3. Islam	Oral	
4. General Science	Oral	
5. Social Studies	Oral	

**NB:** Since we have literary activities this term we will not be having Quiz in English and Dhivehi.

### Preparations for Quiz

Mathematics	Sample question would be given to students before hand	All grades
Islam	All Questions would be given to students before hand	All grades
Environmental Studies	All Questions would be given to students before hand	Grades 4 & 5
General Science	All Questions would be given to students before hand	Grades 6 & 7
Social Studies	All Questions would be given to students before hand	Grades 6 & 7

- Every student has to take part in the competition.
- The quiz would be conducted in oral and written form.
- Students would be given 30 seconds to answer each oral questions.
- Students would be given 30 minutes to answer written paper.
- Students' responses to oral question must be very clear.
- Students' can respond only once to questions that contains two choices. For example either YES or No.

### Scoring Points

- Each correct answer is 1 point (oral)
- Written paper will have a marking guide.
- Later the scores for all subjects would be added and calculated to 100% for selection of awards.

### Awards

- Students would be awarded at 3 levels
- 1. Certificate of MERIT if a student gets an average of 85% and above correct responses
- 2. Certificate of CREDIT if a student gets 75% and above correct responses
- 3. Certificate of ORDINARY if a student gets 65% and above correct responses
- Classes would be awarded at 3 levels
- This would be given subject wise.
- 1. Certificate of MERIT if 85% of students in class gave the correct responses.
- 2. Certificate of CREDIT if 75% of students in class gave the correct responses.
- 3. Certificate of ORDINARY if 65% of students in class gave the correct responses.

The following awards would be given from each grade.

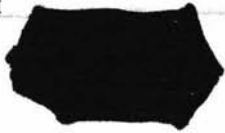
1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> Place subject wise

1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> Place Grade wise

### Calculating the Percentages

- Percentages of all the students would be divided by the number on roll to find the average of the class.
- Long absentees will not be included.
- If a student gets absent on the day of the quiz and brought a valid excuse letter on the first day he/she returns, he/she will not be included in the number on roll.
- For selection of best class all the subject averages would be added and divided by the number of subject.

Roles and responsibilities of staff



[Redacted] School



Male'

**Job Description**

Name: .....

Post: .....

- 1- Teach students according to the schedule prepared by the school.
- 2- Prepare lesson notes regularly and all teaching aids necessary for the lesson.
- 3- Teach the students according to the syllabus content specified for the particular grade. Make sure that students achieved the objectives of the lessons.
- 4- Pay particular attention to students' behaviour during class hours, extra activities and train them to practice appropriate behaviour.
- 5- Maintain class attendance daily.
- 6- Attend and participate in different meetings held by the school such as Coordination, Sharing, Performance Evaluation discussion and Staff meetings.
- 7- Attend and participate in parent teacher meetings.
- 8- Prepare exam questions as instructed by the school. Invigilate examinations whenever required. Mark the papers, and prepare report cards. Assess students regularly and maintain students marks and other records.
- 9- Be a good role model to the students both inside and outside the school.
- 10- Have good rapport with the students, their parents and the community in away that you would win their respect.
- 11- Discipline students to respect religion and country.
- 12- Abide by the school rules and regulations (mentioned on the teachers' handbook) *(This is a gross point because teachers should be a role model for students)*
- 13- Participate in other activities organized by the school when required.
- 14- Be punctual in attending school for teaching sessions as well as extra activities and participate fully.
- 15- Organize and carry out extra activities (sports, arts, clubs etc) according to instructions given by school authorities.
- 16- Corporal punishment is not permitted at anytime.
- 17- Students lesson notes, assignments and tests should be marked correctly, comments should be written neatly, legibly and signed without delay.
- 18- Update information and particulars of students assigned at any given time.
- 19- Display on the class noticeboards all relevant information and keep all notices updated.
- 20- Should be punctual for relief work (supervision) whenever relief work is given.
- 21- Speak politely yet firmly and use good vocabulary with students at all times, Refrain from discussing personal, political or religious matters not considered relevant.

Roles and responsibilities of staff

- 22- Class teachers should go to the assigned class at the beginning, during interval and at the end of the session to ensure the daily smooth running of classes.
- 23- Cleanliness of the classrooms should be maintained throughout the day.
- 24- Greet students pleasantly when you come across them in class and out side class.
- 25- Be responsible for the safety of students and school property under their immediate supervision at all times.
- 26- Must respect one another and work towards enhancing professionalism individually and collectively.
- 27- Attend to any task that requires your assistance even if it does not concern your students.

---

Educational qualification and training required for the post (skills and experience included)

- Primary Teaching Certificate/Muddaris Certificate/G.C.E O'Level S.S Certificate/  
Middle School Teaching Certificate.

---

Unusual tasks included in the post (if there is any)

---

Purpost of the job: To teach students.

---

Employees contact person

Signature: [Redacted]

Name: [Redacted]

Designation: *Supervisor*

Date: 31-03-2004

Head of the school

Signature: [Redacted]

Name: [Redacted]

Designation: [Redacted]

Date: [Redacted]

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Employee :

Signature: [Redacted]

Designation: [Redacted]

Name : [Redacted]

Date: 31.3.2004

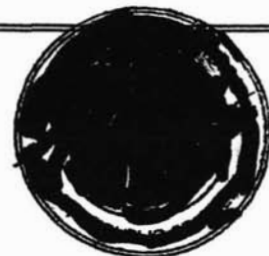
Daily roster

School

School Programme  
02nd June 2005 Thursday

FROM	TO	ACTIVITIES	VENUE	TEACHERS IN CHARGE
<b>MORNING</b>				
6.40am		Before School Duty	Ground	[Redacted]
6.55 am		Session begins for ( Gr.4 Gr.5, Gr 6 & Gr. 7)		
11.40am		Session Ends for (Gr.4 & 5 )		
11.40am	12.15pm	After School Duty	Room 5	[Redacted]
12.10 pm		Session Ends for ( Gr .6 & Gr 7)		
12.15 pm	1.00pm	After School Duty	Room 5	[Redacted]
<b>AFTERNOON</b>				
12.45 pm		Before School Duty	Ground	All the class teachers ([Redacted])
12.50pm	1.00pm	Before School Duty	area near the main gate	[Redacted]
12.55pm		Session begins for ( Gr .1,2 & Gr. 3)		
4.00pm	6.00pm	Literary Competition Practice	6A,6B,6G,6D,6E,6F,room 34	[Redacted]
4.30pm	5.30pm	Poem Practice (4F, 4G)	5G	[Redacted]
5.30pm	6.30pm	Cub Investiture Ceremoney Practice(Gr.2)	Ground	[Redacted]
5.30pm	6.30pm	Singing Practice	Music room	[Redacted]
5.30pm		Session Ends for ( Gr.1,2 & Gr.3)		
5.35pm	5.50pm	After School Duty	Room 5	[Redacted]
5.45pm	7.00pm	Little Maids Enrolement & Golden Ladder Ceremoney Practice (Gr.2,3 &4)	Hall	[Redacted]
6.00pm	7.00pm	Quran Club 4, 5, 6 & 7	Room 11	[Redacted]
7.00 pm	9.30 pm	Ground Supervision	Ground	[Redacted]

Please finish the activities on time.



# Work Assigned to Senior Management Staff 2005

Role/task designation chart

[Redacted]  
 Ensure Effective Implementation of Curriculum & management of the school  
 Staff Development  
 Sports Office  
 Grade 6 & 7 academic Program

[Redacted]  
 Staff Employment Affairs  
 Little Maids/Guides  
 Environment Activities,  
 Media, Asbly Sch

[Redacted]  
 Afternoon Session  
 Students Affairs  
 Senior Management Meeting  
 School Programme, Art Club  
 CubScout, PTA, Asbly Sch

[Redacted]  
 Issues Related to Budget  
 Budget Staff & Workers Affairs  
 Stock & Inventory  
 Maintenance of building,  
 Furniture & Equipment

Supervisor  
 [Redacted]  
 Grade 1,  
 Lit Activities (PM)  
 Prog 3T, Grnd Sup

Supervisor  
 [Redacted]  
 Grade 2, Greetings, Mosque  
 Prog 2T, Grnd Sup

Supervisor  
 [Redacted]  
 Grade 3, Band, Staff room,  
 Staff Meet, Prog 1T, Grnd Sup

Supervisor  
 [Redacted]  
 Grade 4, Quran, Room 5  
 Grnd Sup

Supervisor  
 [Redacted]  
 Gr.5 (acting)  
 Grnd Sup

Supervisor  
 [Redacted]  
 Gr. 6, Gr.6 & 7:GSc/PA  
 Choir/sing, Sc. lab Grd Sup,

Supervisor  
 [Redacted]  
 Gr.6 & 7:Math/Sst  
 Art Club, Stage & Hall  
 Grnd Sup

Supervisor  
 [Redacted]  
 Grade 7, Prefects  
 Gr.6 & 7: Isl / Div  
 AV Room, Grnd Sup

Supervisor  
 [Redacted]  
 Gr.6 & 7: English/PE  
 Lit Activities (AM)  
 Library, Grnd Sup

Appendix - 18

**Notes of a ‘coordination’ and a ‘performance’ discussion meetings**

**Coordination and/or sharing meetings**

In coordination meetings, the teachers meet their respective supervisors to talk about curriculum issues. From grades one through five, the school has class teachers taking most or all subjects. Therefore, teachers of each grade meet together along with their supervisor to talk about curriculum issues, mainly lessons to be taken the following week and what’s happening in the current week with regard to the lessons being taken. In grades six and seven, a similar activity takes place but teachers group themselves by subject. And, at this level, the meeting is commonly referred to as ‘sharing meetings’.

## Notes of a 'coordination' and a 'performance' discussion meetings

### Coordination (Sharing) Meetings

First meeting (1<sup>st</sup> May 2005: 12.25 pm – 12.55pm):

This meeting was held in the library for Science teachers of grade seven. The supervisor for science for this grade took charge of the meeting. Two similar meetings were going in the library at the same time. But because groups were small (4 & 6), there was no problem with the noise level: within groups, people could be heard without difficulty.

Only supervisor and two teachers who take grade seven Science were present and, as such, there was a lot of interactions among them. Points/issues raised/discussed follows:

- Supervisor says: Two days of Science teaching would have to be cancelled because of one public holiday and Children's Day, a day that is being marked in schools every year since the marking began sometimes back.
- The kind of topic and its sensitivity: Human reproduction and puberty. "Answer only to important ones and ignore silly ones" says the supervisor. But still keep the option of asking questions.
- Main discussion was about the work of the current week. This was done with reference to the 'scheme of work' prepared earlier.
  - Activities in the work book were discussed
  - There was evidence that supervisor was well prepared for the discussion for she had done some references over the internet. Yet she mentioned about a possible difficulty that might arise in teaching but to which one teacher knew how to overcome.
  - Talked about intercourse for next lesson. All three talked about various sensitivities. One said that last year it was OK, because supervisor told if boys asked silly questions ignore them. But one teacher said they were curious so she had explained appropriately.
  - All agreed not to go into very detail.

*OC: This was rather a tricky topic for this grade level. But both teachers showed confidence in the subject matter and their conversations depicted the kind of care they would be taking while presenting the lessons.*

- Next topic was about quiz
  - First, some doubts were cleared about certain dates
  - Also, talked about next test. Discussed types of questions in general and agreed that was OK.
  - Again came back to quiz. Both teachers identified quiz questions for grades six and seven.
  - Two sets were done like this.

(Discussion ended here)

**Notes of a 'coordination' and a 'performance' discussion meetings**

**PERFORMANCE DISCUSSION MEETINGS**  
(Thursdays)

These meetings are held in the A/V room on Thursdays. Two meetings are held each day, one for each for the morning and afternoon session teachers. The meetings last for about an hour. The main activities generally include the following:

- The head might show the performance of a particular assessment of a particular grade. This is done in a format (graphically on LCD) appealing to staff. Then she talks about the results and praise those teachers and supervisors who have done good work and also identify areas needing improvement.
- A supervisor might do the above in terms of her grade.
- Share an article or talk about a session or workshop or seminar the Head attended in which an important topic was discussed.
- A visitor or an in-house person to make a presentation on a classroom related topic.
- A teacher would be asked to re-teach a lesson that s/he has taught well. At the end, the head would ask others to give positive comments about the lesson and also what would some one do if s/he were to teach the same lesson again. [this is encouraging risk-taking].
- These types of activities constitute the major part of the meeting. However, some time is also spent on other matters of general nature, for example, house keeping issue, etc.

Notes of a 'coordination' and a 'performance' discussion meetings

**Second meeting (Morning-session teachers)**  
**Thursday, 5<sup>th</sup> May 2005: 12.50 pm – 13.30pm**

The meeting was introduced by head

Agenda item one

Head started off by saying that the results of the first term were shown to the teachers previously and asked what they were doing to bring up the standard. "Just share you thoughts and experiences..., anything revolutionary you've done!" she said.

One teacher said: Complete class work and home work. If class work is finished earlier, students are provided with revision material.

Another teacher: Succeeded in brining one-fifth of the weaker students up to the mark and another two are on the way to reach this level.

Another teacher: Better ones are helping the weaker ones. To this another teacher said that she is doing the same.

*[OC/T: this is something really good: "Better ones are helping the weaker ones"]*

Another teacher: One student being not literate, so she has arranged with the supervisor to have extra classes especially for this student.

Head intervenes by mentioning the two of the seven habits of effective leaders: 'circle of concern' and 'circle of influence'.

Agenda item two: Sharing of an article with teachers

Head shares an article about 'marking' student's work with the teachers. She highlights an example given in the article and then gave time to read and think about it ...

[Quran reciting started, indicating the beginning of the second session. Therefore, everyone stood up and observed silence till the recitation was over. This took just a minute or two]

... The head continued by asking what were teachers' reactions to it [the article].

First, an expatriate teacher mentioned about what has been done in her country. Another teacher says to see whether communication is good, meaning, is the student able to communicate what s/he wants? Head intervenes: brought to teachers' attention how, in the example, the opening and closure is dealt with. That is, "see the flow" she says and "be sensitive [to these things] when you mark". Students are seen as quantifiable targets that which can be measured. There are also other aspects to think.

**Notes of a 'coordination' and a 'performance' discussion meetings**

Agenda item three: Head brought to the attention of these teachers the issue about some classrooms being made untidy by morning session students, mentioned by the afternoon teachers. The teachers concerned said that they would tell their students pick up any stuff that is on the floor before the session ends.

Agenda item four: Head asked teachers if they had anything to share. As there was no one to say anything she continued: She thanked and commended on the concert performance. She showed her appreciation to the staff who worked on it.

One teacher mentioned about food running out in the canteen. To which the head replied, "If we are to run this way, we should expect days like this".

*[OC: the very first day the head explained to me about how the canteen is run. She says it is much better to let school staff (the janitorial staff) run it rather than handing it to a commercial group. She said, "At least the staff would have some income to supplement their not-so-high income and in that way they will be happy to work in school."]*

Another teacher mentioned about a few toilets not being kept clean.

One of the SMT's aired about some furniture not being ready. To this, the head replied: "write to the MOE".

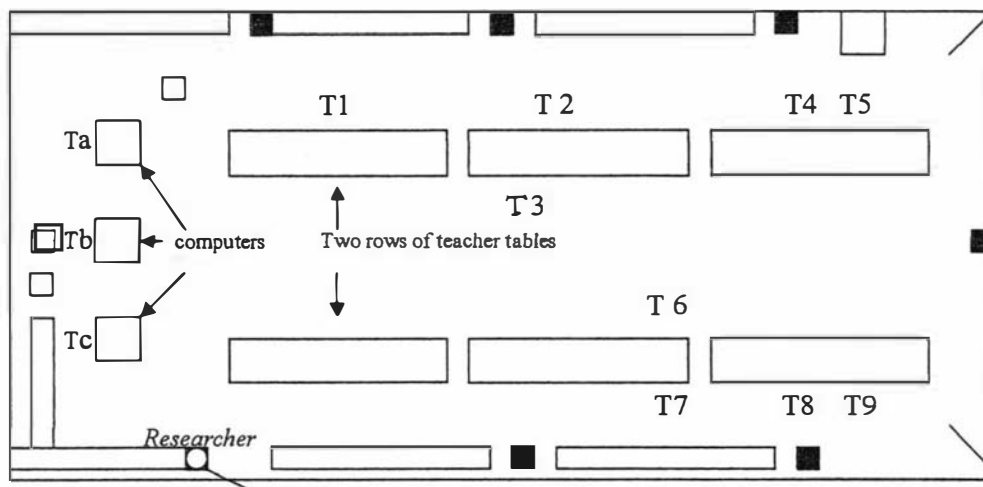
A professional development trip to Sri Lanka and its pros and cons to be discussed later, was briefly mentioned by one of the Assistant Heads.

Regarding the marking of the Children's Day, the head said that every child should get a prize. She also said to request teachers to come at 6.40 am on Monday [the Children's Day].

Finally, regarding the tragic case, she told staff not to get involved and not to make judgements and refrain from blaming anyone about the issue. Also, she noted: "one school has to be supported by the other". With this comment she brought closure to this meeting.

## Notes on staffroom observations

## The staffroom



*Observation one:* Here is what I observed teachers doing for the first 5 minutes (10:35-10:40 am) of the sixth period on Thursday, 19 May 2005.

T1 (short form for teacher one) was marking books; occasionally discussed something with T2 and T3.

T2 and T3 were discussing and at the same time marking.

T4 and T5 were marking.

Tc (here I have used alphabets instead of numbers to differentiate those who are sitting at the computers) was doing some work at the computer. She had some sheets of paper with her to which she was referring to at times and then using the mouse. From where I sat I could see the person sitting at this computer but not the other two.

T6 and T7 were marking.

T8 was writing some notes to be given to students to take to parents. She said this to her neighbour, T9, "I am doing chits." That's actually notices to parents.

T9 was marking.

T4 and T5 stopped marking and started a conversation. The way they were referring to a book in hand suggested that the conversation was work related.

T6 gets up and walks over to T1. Then takes up a science text book and started a conversation about a science lesson on a certain page (I could not get the page number).

Just heard music played by Ta. T6 goes out of staff room about 4 minutes later.

Answers to one of the open-ended questions regarding 'major achievements'

Q11. What do you see as the major achievements of this school over the last 3-5 years?

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Teachers

T1:

- (a) Professional development
  - (b) Performance of students
  - (c) Status attained as a good primary school
- 

T2:

Number of 'Commended' and 'Honour-Listed' reports have increased  
More children-based activities

---

T3: { F; 10-15; 2-4; Subject Teacher; Cert of Middle Sch Teaching }

Children's behaviour improving  
Results of the children improving

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T4:

Haven't seen much

---

T5:

(No answer)

---

T6:

Haven't seen much changes

---

T7:

(No answer)

---

T8:

(No answer)

---

T9:

Don't know

---

T10:

(No answer)

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T11:

I have been here for the last 1½ years (nearly 2 years). School has a good control of the children compared to the previous year. (New methods applied).

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Answers to one of the open-ended questions regarding ‘major achievements’

**T12:**

Number of ‘Honour-Listed’ and ‘Commended’ reports have increased.  
More activities for students to participate.

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**T13:**

Students’ work has improved a lot.

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**T14:**

(No answer)

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**T 15:**

Haven’t seen that much changes

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**T16:**

Haven’t seen much

---

**T17:**

Most of the students’ behaviour have improved

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**T18: { F; 5-10; 2-4; BA & BEd }**

Haven’t seen much

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**T19:**

(No answer)

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**T20:**

More activities are introduced for the children like English and Dhivehi literary Club, English Literary competitions, reading porgrammes etc. To develop the students’ academics. It has been successful to some extent.

**Supervisors**

**S1:** Improvement in the literacy rate year after year

**S2:** Progress of the students’ results

**S3:** Results improved

**S4:** Academic performance have improved and more attention given to improve the standard of students; End of each unit test, results are analysed to see whether students are able to achieve the expected level; Inter-Class Subject-Quiz Competition also enabled students to draw their focus more towards studies.

**S5:** Improvement in the academic standard and discipline of students

**S6:** No idea, difficult to say!

## Weekly review meetings: Notes and format

### Weekly Review Meetings (Sundays)

In these meetings, the Head meets all supervisors together with the two assistant heads. The supervisors report a summary of their work for the previous week which includes their main activities and concerns. This summary is not a descriptive write-up, but a jotted down points based on a set format and, yet, it is an informative meeting for the Head with regard to student learning and the teaching of teachers. The meeting lasts one hour. Almost always the Head asks for clarification for which the concerned supervisor responds. To some extent, others also comment.

### Weekly Review Meeting Two. 15 May 2005

Meeting started on time (7:30 am). The head was chairing the meeting. Head gave a nudge to start. First item was to present the weekly report. This is based on a specific format.

**First report:** The report was presented as per the format. (see the report for points reported). There was nothing unusual in this report, just reporting the facts, the main ones.

*OC: Just like the other day, some were thinking about their own presentation for a few minutes, but much better than the previous day.*

The head, SAP were the only people who commented on this presentation. Also, the supervisor herself made a few comments following these.

**Second report:** Presented in much the same way. During this discussion the first period came to an end, and there was noise from the classes. So head gave an indication to one of the supervisors to see to this matter. So off she went. Soon the noise level subsided as the second period got under way. She also came within a minute or two.

In this discussion, one issue was seriously taken: one teacher was not doing well. The head instructed the supervisor to tell the teacher to prepare a detailed lesson plan and show this to supervisor for a month. Supervisor says that despite telling the teacher about this issue during coordination meetings, no improvement was seen in her work, especially in lesson preparation. She also said that she talked to another teacher to bring some changes to the way she was presenting the lessons. At this point the head intervened and indicated how another teacher improved after having talked to her. For almost every item on the reporting format, the head asked questions from the supervisor.

The head, SAP, the presenter and one other commented after the presentation.

*OC: A little more interactive this time*

### Weekly review meetings: Notes and format

**Third report:** Supervisor presented the main points in the same way. The head asked an important question. For example, she asked, “Is it a repetition of last week?” referring to something that a student has done the previous week.

The head and SAP commented.

At this point, one supervisor was sent out to meet a visitor who was waiting just outside the supervisor’s room.

**Fourth report:** Once the main points were presented, one issue of concern was raised: One of the teachers, working under this supervisor, was attending a full-time graduate course. When exams or end of papers are nearing, this teacher cuts school. The head and the SAP both said that this teacher has been repeatedly advised on this matter but without much difference. The head and SAP commented.

**Fifth report:** Once the main points were presented, a general point was raised: not to collect students’ exercise books for marking for the weekend.

As the supervisors are supposed to observe at least 2-3 lessons per week, the head said, I don’t expect you to do much classroom observations today, because the Children’s Day’s work is just ahead. But on Wednesday and Thursday focus on this issue”.

Various points about the Children’s Day’s activities were discussed. She indicated that all the proposed activities should be done in a timely manner and said, “I don’t want to stay all night to work”

*OC: It is actually two occasions (Children’s Day and the Day Maldives Embraced Islam) to be marked that is falling on the same day.*

One issue was raised about some children getting angry after PE period. She noted a particular case, a boy, who became very angry the other day after the PE period.

*OC: No further discussion on this issue except that one of the supervisors said many students, especially boys, perspire a lot in class the period after the PE lesson. I wonder why this issue was not discussed further. Might be an isolated case!*

The head declared the Children’s Day would be a non-teaching day but emphasized the importance of letting everyone know that there are ground rules to be followed and make everyone aware of these by repeating the rules. She also mentioned about children’s safety and taking attendance on Children’s Day. She requested teachers to wear something special, if possible. There was one parent who refused to give a present to his/her own child. The head gave instructions to SAP to give a present to this child from the school but phone the parent and mention about this and commented, “We shouldn’t be negative to students”.

*OC: This is a very comprehensive review of teachers’ work done by the supervisors. The way these observations are presented would make all supervisors knowledgeable, at least to some extent, about all the teachers in this session.*

The meeting ended at 8.32 am.

### Classroom conditions for school improvement

**Authentic relationships:** the existence of the needed teacher-pupil relationships. This means making classroom a safe and secure place for the students to learn and also extending teacher's respect to students. This mutual relationship however, does not inhibit the teacher to make demands on pupils.

**Rules and boundaries:** ground rules for and expectations of students, related to their performances and behaviour within the classroom, which is set by the teacher and the school. This is about the capacity of the teacher to induce a positive learning orientation in students and not mere application of school or classroom rules in a mechanical sense. This also involves teachers creating a framework of expectations for which students are made to respond.

**Planning, resources and preparation:** the availability of a range of teaching materials and the ability of the teacher to plan and match material to student level. Effective learning takes place when lessons are structured and well planned. This condition is about teachers organizing and presenting lessons, taking into consideration pupil characteristics and their prior learning.

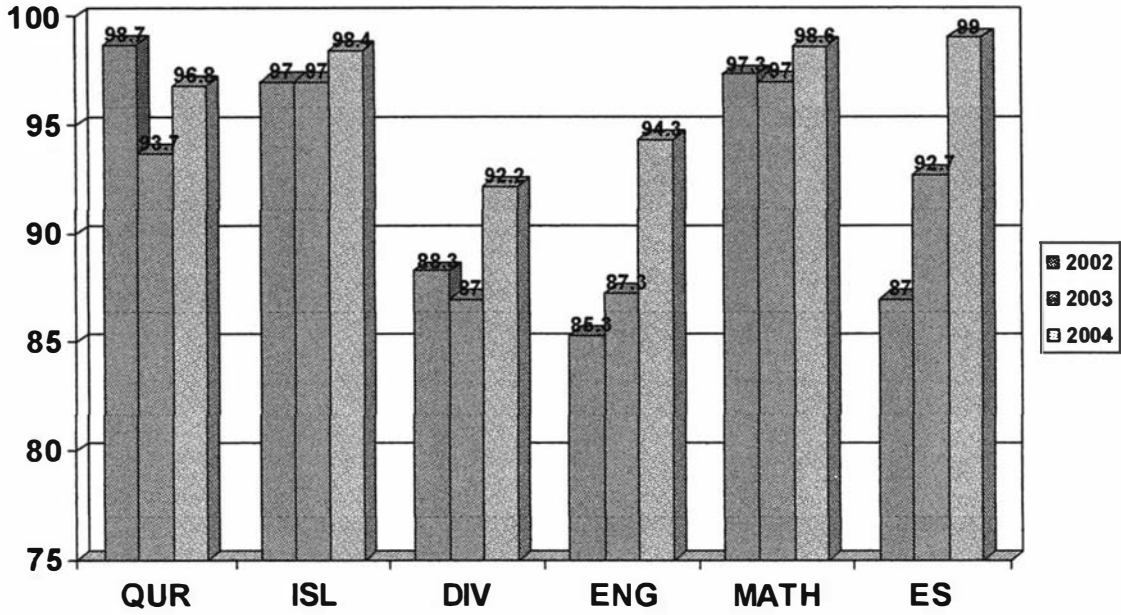
**Teacher's repertoire:** a variety of teaching styles and models used in school that is available to a teacher and that which could be easily matched to the level of student, context, subject matter and outcomes. The quality of learning is affected by the teaching strategies used by the teacher. This condition necessitates teachers to have a range of teaching strategies and the ability to link strategies to learning.

**Pedagogic partnership:** teacher's ability to form professional relationships both within and outside the classroom for the purpose of studying ways to improve classroom practice. Forming a partnership, even if it were with a colleague, this relationship enhances practice and drives out the feeling of professional isolation.

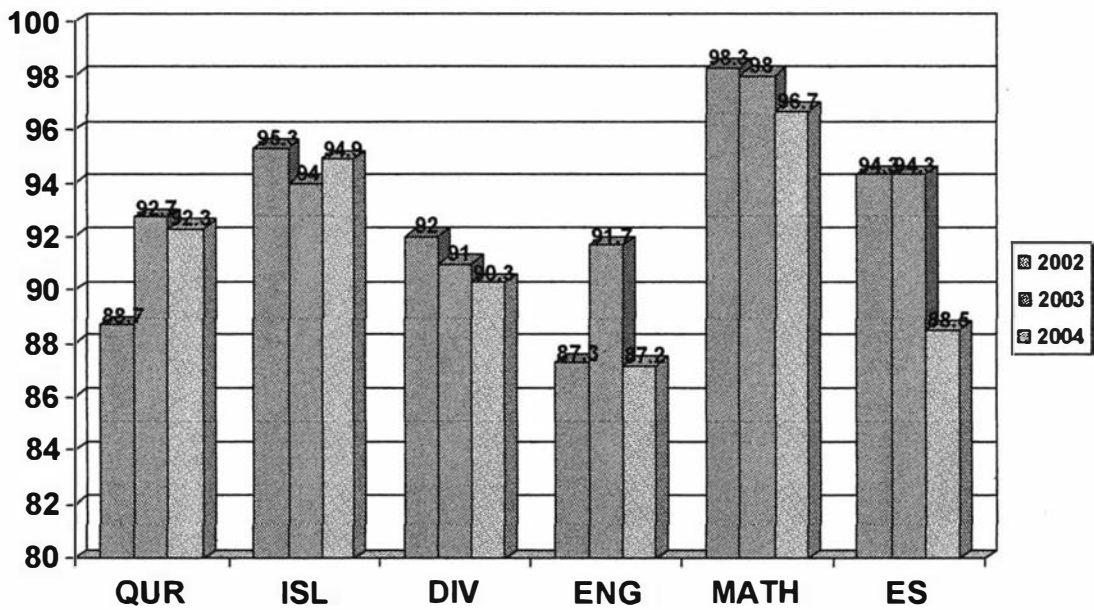
**Reflection on teaching:** This is about teachers' capacities to both reflect on his/her own work and experiment ideas from other sources. Hopkins (2002) found that this ability of a teacher to reflect on his or her practice on a routine basis enhances the impact on the other classroom level conditions mentioned above. Teachers could reflect on observations made by an external consultant or a colleague or even reflect on his or her own work.

Performances by grade and by subject (2002 – 2004)

Grade 1, Average of Three Terms 2002 to 2004

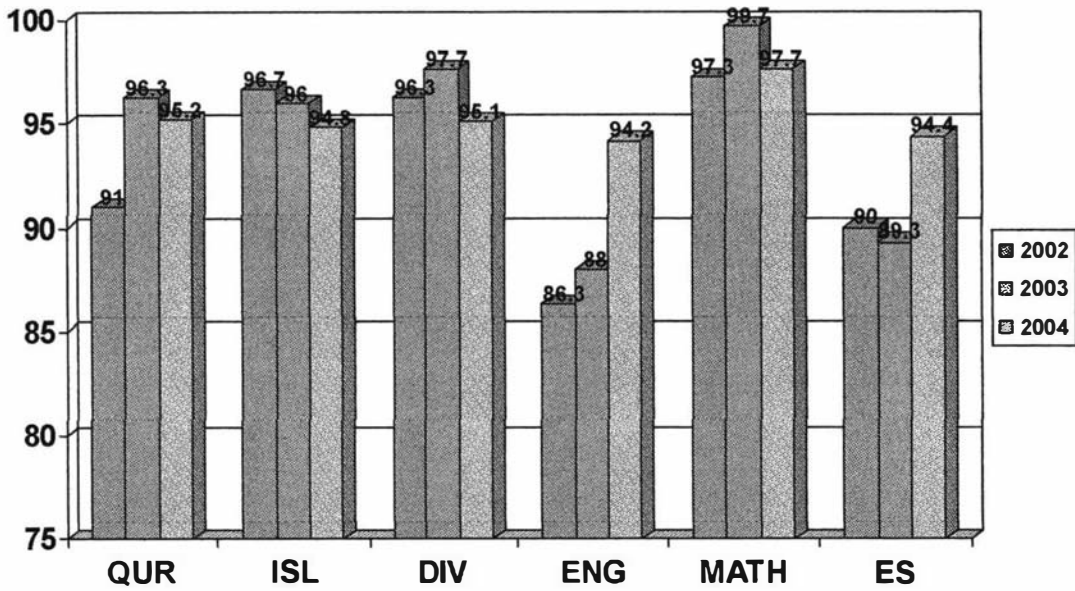


Grade 2, Average of Three Terms 2002 to 2004

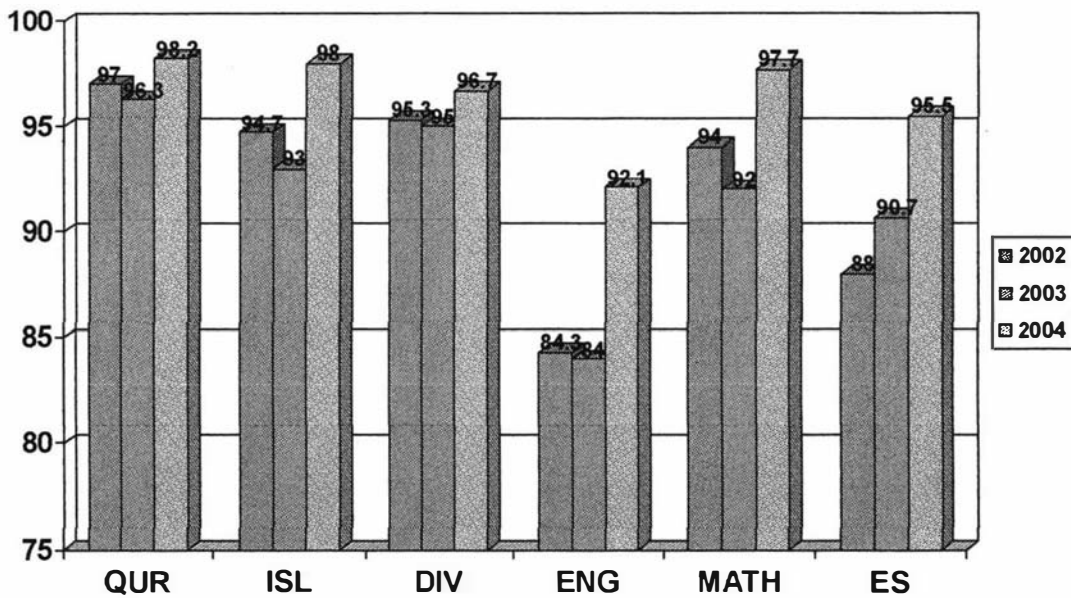


Performances by grade and by subject (2002 – 2004)

Grade 3, Average of Three Terms 2002 to 2004

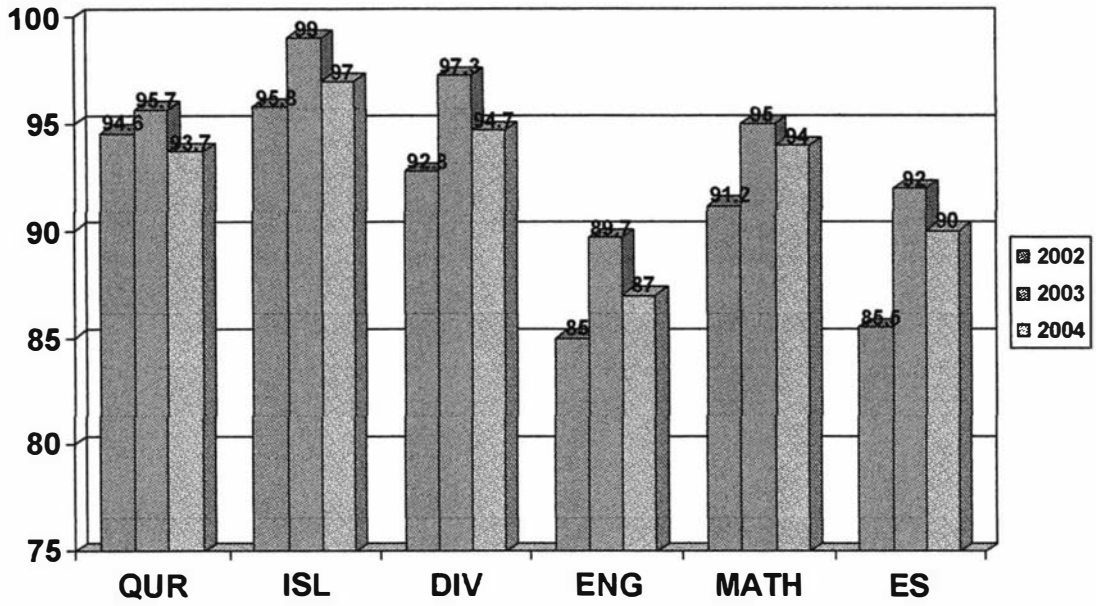


Grade 4, Average of Three Terms 2002 to 2004

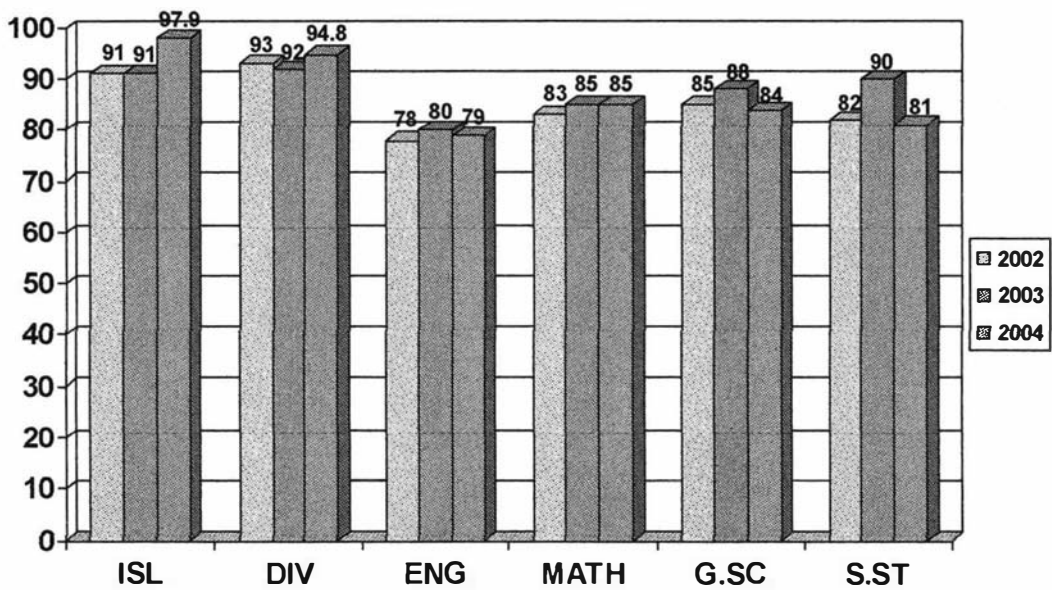


Performances by grade and by subject (2002 – 2004)

Grade 5, Average of Three Terms 2002 to 2004

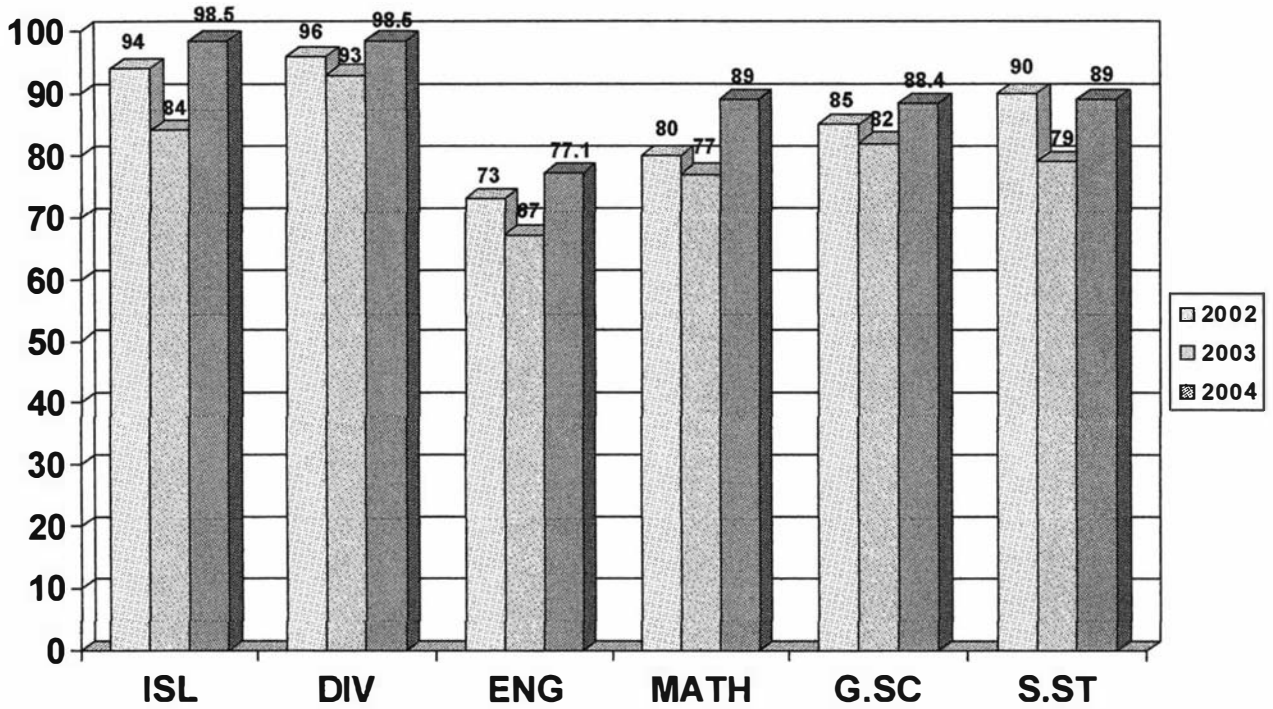


Grade 6, Final Aggregate 2002 to 2004



Performances by grade and by subject (2002 – 2004)

Grade 7, Final Aggregate 2002 to 2004



### Three performance indicators

Gray and Wilcox<sup>1</sup> (1995) advocate three performance indicators which are very useful for a study of this nature, especially when there are limitations on time and resources:

“academic progress”<sup>2</sup>, “pupil satisfaction”<sup>3</sup> and “pupil-teacher relationships”<sup>4</sup> (p. 27).

They also have pointed out that, although these are not sufficient conditions for excellence, from a pragmatic point of view, “it would be hard to imagine a ‘good’ school where these things did not happen in reasonable measure” and, they further went on to say, “where they happened frequently, the odds would be on the institution being a ‘good’ one” (ibid).

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<sup>1</sup> Gray, J., & Wilcox, B. (1995). “The quality of Schooling: Frameworks for Judgement”. In J. Gray & B. Wilcox. ‘Good school, bad school’: Evaluation performance and encouraging improvement. Buckingham:OUP. (Chapter one)

<sup>2</sup> Section 4.2.1 discusses students’ academic progress

<sup>3</sup> Section 4.4.4 and figure 13 indicate the level of pupil satisfaction

<sup>4</sup> Section 4.7.4.2 describes this relationship