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Principals Perspectives on Autonomous Schools in Bhutan

Namgay Wangchuk
Principal, Nganglam Higher Secondary School, Bhutan

Abstract: ***The study intends to find out perspectives of school leaders on autonomous schools in Bhutan. The report explores the satisfaction level of school principals with the autonomy granted to them by the government and the ministry. Out of 19 autonomous schools, 17 schools' principals were assessed with questionnaires and interviews. The study is based on primary and secondary data collected from the respondents and other relevant materials.***
The study found out that 65% of principals were satisfied with the autonomous school system in Bhutan. A majority (89%) of principals said there is decentralization of power and finance, while 78% of school principals said Bhutanese schools should go for autonomy. At the same time, school principals want more autonomy in terms of recruitment of staff, award contracts, maintenance of school infrastructure, paying travel allowances and daily allowances and salary to the staff, termination of non-performing staff, promoting staff, preparing curriculum frameworks, and fixing school fees.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background

This study was undertaken to discover principals' perspectives on Autonomous Schools in Bhutan. It is a newly introduced and implemented concept in Bhutan. The Ministry of Education (MoE) has taken a bold step to bring this major refinement in the education sector by granting autonomy to 19 state schools, coinciding with His Majesty the Fifth Druk Gyalpo's 34th birth anniversary in 2014. Quality of education is under criticism from both stakeholders and the community, on various forms of media and online forums. According to Dillon (2011), autonomous cultures in the business world have improved employee morale, increased innovation, and a customer-focused workforce, greater autonomy can free educators to try new approaches with instruction, staffing, and schedules so they can respond quickly and more effectively to students.

With the increasing enrolment, improving the efficiency of schools, and providing quality education is a growing concern of leaders, parents, and educators. Bhutan's net primary school enrolment ratio has a drastic increase to 96% in 2012 (UNDP 2012). In the past, many reforms have tried to pay attention to teacher, text-book and strategy to improve the quality of services with little autonomy at the school level. And the report argues that it will be unfair to hold schools accountable for their results and performance, without giving them any autonomy (An ANTRIEP Report, 2000). Decentralization of power to the school level is becoming accepted, from the national level to state level and from state to local level, so that each school can make its own operating decisions (Ouchi, 2006).

Education secretary Sangay Zam (cited in Pelden, 2014) said the intention of granting autonomy to a school was to infuse healthy competition. By granting autonomy, schools are given room to do things the way they like but, at the same time, also fulfil Ministry's vision and objectives. The education director Karma Yeshi (cited in Pelden, 2014) said that the main purpose was to empower schools to set their strategic directions, determine priorities, and exercise control over their resources. He also argued that it is to enhance efficiency and delivery of services by reducing bureaucracy. However, autonomous schools are still monitored by the Ministry. The only difference is autonomous schools are given one years' lump sum amount entitled to run the school (Zangpo, 2014).

The model of the autonomous school is a newly implemented policy in Bhutan, hence there is no previous research conducted on the subject. Through this study the research will establish:

- Perspectives of school principals on autonomous schools.
- Whether principals favor autonomous schools or previous school systems
- Whether autonomous schools increase the performance of students?

This report can fill the existing gap of expectations between the Ministry and school managers. The study found all principals (100%) agreed that autonomous schools are an improvement in the state school system. But with only two-thirds of principals satisfied with the change to an autonomy indicates the need to review the policy and grant more autonomy.

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The Bhutanese autonomous schools have very little autonomy compared to other international autonomous schools. There needs to be a clear understanding between the Ministry and school managers regarding the degree of autonomy. The autonomous schools in Bhutan do not have the autonomy to use the capital budget, recruit and terminate staff, pay incentives by performance, prepare their curriculum, fix school fees, award contract, the right to set policies, pay salary and travelling allowances.

This study provides insight and opinions of the professional educators to the policy makers in an attempt to successfully implement the autonomous school system in Bhutan. School-Based Management schools claim that local decision-makers know better about their community and learners' needs (Hanushek, Link & Woessmann, 2011). Studies have shown autonomous schools in western countries have improved the achievement of the students. When the school has the autonomy to hire highly qualified staff and dismiss non-performing staff, it helps to increase the efficiency of the school (Hanushek, et al., 2011).

Researchers and scholars have also pointed out that autonomous schools have failed to improve students' achievement in low economic level countries. Some countries are reverting to centralized systems of managing schools. Autonomous schools have shown mixed results across the countries, and it is very difficult to specifically measure its impact on students' achievement (Hanushek, et al., 2011).

As stated by Cobbold (2012) there is little evidence to suggest that increased school autonomy can lead to more innovation in teaching and increase students' achievement. Over 20 years of school autonomy in New Zealand and charter schools in the United States show no increase in students' achievement and innovation in teaching.

Charter schools in the United States show that some charter schools do better than traditional public schools, some do no better and some do worse. The major studies show that charter schools do no better than traditional schools. The evidence on the impact of free schools in Sweden is mixed. Foundation schools in England have not improved student achievement while the evidence on the impact of academies is mixed.

OECD (2010) research argues that in the majority of countries participating in PISA 2009, there was no significant difference between student achievement in schools with a high degree of autonomy in hiring teachers and over the school budget and in schools with lower autonomy. On the contrary, school autonomy leads to greater social segregation between schools and greater inequality in resourcing and student outcomes. The most positive statement we can make about autonomy is mixed evidence.

B. Problem Statement

Autonomous School is dedicated to improving the quality of education and increasing the efficiency of schools. Access to primary education is a right of every Bhutanese citizen. Education not only opens doors, provides opportunities, and gives liberty to the people but also helps the nations foster peace and bring economic growth by reducing poverty.

However, many state schools are directly operated and managed by the Ministry and local state, there is very little flexibility at the school level.

The current trend of operating state schools has tied the hands of school leaders to find new and innovative ways of managing schools. With the introduction of school autonomy, it is hoped that schools can perform better in terms of students' achievement and managing resources.

Therefore, the degree of autonomy granted to principals plays an important role in increasing the efficiency of schools. This research attempts to find out the degree of autonomy granted to school managers in Bhutanese autonomous schools. At the same time, it also tries to identify the expectations of principals. The mismatch between the expectation of principals and the autonomy granted by the Ministry can lead to resistance in the newly executed policy.

C. Objectives

The major research objectives of this research are:

1) Perspectives of school principals on autonomous schools,
2) Identify the expectation of school administrators.

D. Research Questions

1) What is the school managers' satisfaction level with the autonomous school system in Bhutan?
2) What kinds of autonomy do school principals want in their schools?
3) Are autonomous schools an improvement over the previous school system?

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW ON SCHOOL AUTONOMY

Globally, many countries accept the importance of human capital investment as one of the key drivers of a country's future advancement and prosperity. Therefore, there is a keen interest in what forms of educational organizations can generate better results for their students (Machin & Vernoit, 2011). Maslen (2012) states that the number of students enrolled in higher education globally will double to 262 million by 2025.

For this reason, attention has shifted away from simply ensuring access to schooling to the quality of learning. Decentralization and transferring of decision-making is amongst the most intriguing recent school reforms (Hanushek, Link, and Woessmann, 2011). Likewise, policymakers and educationists have expressed the need to bring new reforms in the education sector. With the trend of New Public Management (NPM), worldwide many countries are trying to shift decision-making power to schools instead of following centralized administration. Though a central decision-making model has maintained homogeny, quality, effectiveness, and equity, it has also promoted inflexibility in school administration. With a centralized approach, the sense of ownership and motivation was lacking amongst the employees. Sihono and Yusof (2012) claim that School-Based Management with sufficient autonomy, ownership, and flexibility in functioning schools can provide the conditions necessary and the dynamic to facilitate the schools to achieve their goals and maximize the effectiveness in the long run. Centralized and top-down management blocks local-level schools' initiative, creativity, and potentials.

A review of literature on school autonomy (cited in Leithwood and Menzies, 1998) reveals that the concept and its operational manifestation have come to be referred to in a variety of ways: such as School Site-Based Management, School-BasedManagement, Charter Schools, Free Schools, Academy and School Self Management (Levacic, 1992). It may also be noted that the concept of 'school autonomy' is not new. It has been there in educational literature for at least the last three decades, especially in countries such as Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and a few school districts in the USA (Caldwell, 1990). It has only recently, however, become the centrepiece of the movement for reform of school management, especially in developing countries. As Benson (1997) claims, the word autonomy is a complex and multifaceted concept (p. 29). According to Wohlstetter et al., (cited in Agasisti, Catalano & Sibiano, 2013, p. 292) autonomy can be understood as freedom "reduced" by the constraints imposed by a higher authority. The concept of school autonomy is related to a schools' ability to self-determine relevant matters, such as objectives and activities to be conducted. It refers to domains such as governance, personnel, curriculum, instructional methods, disciplinary policies, budgeting, facilities, and student admission. For Holec (1981) autonomy is "the ability to take charge of one's learning."

Chubb and Moe (1990) introduced the original concept of autonomy, they believed fewer constraints in schools can allow schools to develop new tools and continue with best practices. According to Sihono and Yusof (2012, p. 142) schools are more effective when they are empowered to maximize their functions. They believe school-based management can bring in creativity, initiative, and independence. In addition, schools must be given autonomy in main functional areas like budget planning, personnel, and curricula.

School autonomy is seen as an attempt to decentralize and de-bureaucratize school control so that schools can be saved from the problems associated with centralized control. With democratization and decentralization, we can see the devolution of power to the school level principals, parents, students, local leaders, and teachers in modern public schools. The school administration system has been a major focus of reform processes recently all over the world. School education systems have grown not only in size but also in complexity. And there are efforts to move towards greater decentralization of planning and management of education (Govinda, 2000, p. 75). Many schools are granted autonomy to have flexibility in governing their school. Modern schools have a huge responsibility in carrying out social as well as economic objectives (Mulford, 2003, p. 6). To cope up with the ever-changing environment and to meet the demands of the market, there was an urgent need for educational reforms and to shift from old management to new public management. It is not a one size fits all world. The evidence supports the view that decentralized districts outperform centralized districts both in overall student performance and in reducing achievement gaps between racial groups (Ouchi, 2006). The education system is moving towards a more flexible and diverse learning atmosphere, so that every child can find their talents, grow and emerge confident of his/her abilities from school**.** It is also to provide students with greater choice to meet their different interests and ways of learning. Being able to choose what and how they learn will encourage them to take greater ownership of their learning. A study found out that school principals should be given authority over their personnel, their budgets, and key parts of their instructional programs if they are to be held accountable for results. Public schools' principals are like middle managers, with so many obligations and demands placed upon them by the district, state, and central government. They cannot act like CEOs, boldly leading their schools in a new direction. On the other hand, in Charter schools in the United States, principals have a greater deal of autonomy in almost all areas essential to raise the achievement, compared with the district school principals (Adamowski et al., 2007).

For example, US work on charter schools (publicly funded schools with autonomy levels more like private schools) finds some evidence of achievement gains. The school management board and principals have more flexibility and autonomy in operating the schools. Similarly, many types of educational institutes are introduced, for example, in England, there are academy schools. These schools are independent, non-selective, state-funded schools that fall outside the control of local authorities. These schools are operated by a private team of independent co-sponsors. Likewise in Sweden, there are 'free schools'. Free schools are privately managed, but they receive full public funding that is calculated based on the number of students that they enrol who live in their local area (Machin & Vernoit, 2011).

School autonomy has mixed results of both success and failure. According to the studies conducted by Hanushek, Link, and Woessmann (2011), the impact of autonomy depends on the level of development of the country. The outcome of school autonomy in decision-making is positive in developed countries but turns negative in developing countries. To have successful autonomous schools the following aspects are important: local capacity, the capability of local decision-makers, governance efficiency, state competence, parental human capital, and monitoring abilities of local communities are very important.

According to Cobbold (2012), greater school autonomy does not always improve students' results. It is not as appealing as it claims to be. There are a range of autonomous schools implemented around the globe, stand-alone government schools in New Zealand, charter schools in the United States, free schools in Sweden, and foundation schools and academies in England. All involve greater control for principals over budgeting and staffing and some include greater control over curriculum and assessment. But evidence collected from cross countries shows that in some cases there is no improvement at all.

1) New Zealand – no overall improvement;
2) Charter schools – mixed evidence; some better, some worse, and some with no change. The major national studies show no overall improvement;
3) Free schools – mixed evidence;
4) Foundation schools – no improvement;
5) Academies – mixed evidence (Cobbold, 2012).

There are very few studies done on this topic, many studies are done on types of autonomous schools. Many writers like Adamowski et al., Sihono et al., & Paletta have talked about autonomy, autonomy gap, and school-based management. However, Bhutanese autonomous schools follow a unique kind of autonomy; it is not autonomy in the real sense. The school principals hardly have any autonomy over hiring staff, salary, terminating non-performing staff, deciding on curriculum, and promoting staff. Bhutanese autonomous schools are still following a centralized school system. The schools receive one year's financial budget, which they can use with prior permission from the Ministry and other relevant agencies. The autonomous schools are the given current budget in hand; the capital budget continues to remain with the Dzongkhag. Unlike other state schools, the autonomous schools will not have to return any unused back to the government at the end of the financial year. If the school can save, they can use their savings for new projects **(**Pokhrel, 2014).

This study will help to lessen the wide gap existing between the Ministry of Education and the managers of schools by identifying the needs and expectations of school leaders.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. *Research Design*

The study was done using a mixed-method qualitative and quantitative to assess the school managers' perspectives on autonomous schools. Quantitative data were collected through the administration of structured questionnaires. Qualitative data were elicited through open-ended responses, interviews, field notes, and document reviews. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously, analysed separately, and compared/combined the findings from both analyses

B. *Sampling*

The sample data was collected from school principals and vice-principal autonomous schools. It is purely based on the perception of the school principals and vice-principals. The study selected 9 schools out of 19 autonomous schools in Bhutan as sampling groups owing to time and resources constraints. The data has been collected through a simple random probability sampling technique from various locations. Five higher secondary schools, two lower secondary schools, and two primary schools were selected for the study. The total estimated school managers are 38 (N = 38) in autonomous schools and the total survey sample is 17 (44.7% of the total).

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C. Study Tool

The study relied both on primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected from principals and vice-principals through unstructured interviews and structured questionnaires, and the secondary sources were newspapers, books, online materials, and other relevant documents. The questionnaire covered many important aspects like attitude, opinions, feelings, and content knowledge of the respondents. To gather adequate information for the study, 15 Likert scales and 2 open-ended questions were prepared.

D. Data Management and Analysis

Data collected through the administration of questionnaires are entered into the data entry application. Basic statistics such as frequency, counts, cross-tabulation, and correlations were generated to summarize quantitative information by performing basic statistical analyses on the data recorded in a database. Based on these basic statistics, statistical models were built, tested, and validated. To analyse the data collected from questionnaires and surveys coded and entered into Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) to be transformed into useable statistics. Pearson's Chi-square test A statistical test was conducted to see the existence of a relationship between two variables. In addition, MS Excel 2007 was also used to insert charts and graphs to illustrate and compare data**.** Since the dependent variables are all categorical in nature, such as: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neutral, 4 = disagree, 5 = strongly disagree for questions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, and 15. And for questions 10, 11 and 16, 1 = very high degree or very much or very satisfied, 2 = high degree or somewhat or satisfied, 3 = moderate degree or neutral, 4 = dissatisfied or not much or small degree, 5 = not at all or very dissatisfied.

E. Limitation of the Study

There is still a new scope for the researcher to find the broader conceptual knowledge on this topic with the help of students, teachers, and parents. The research undertaken has the following limitations:

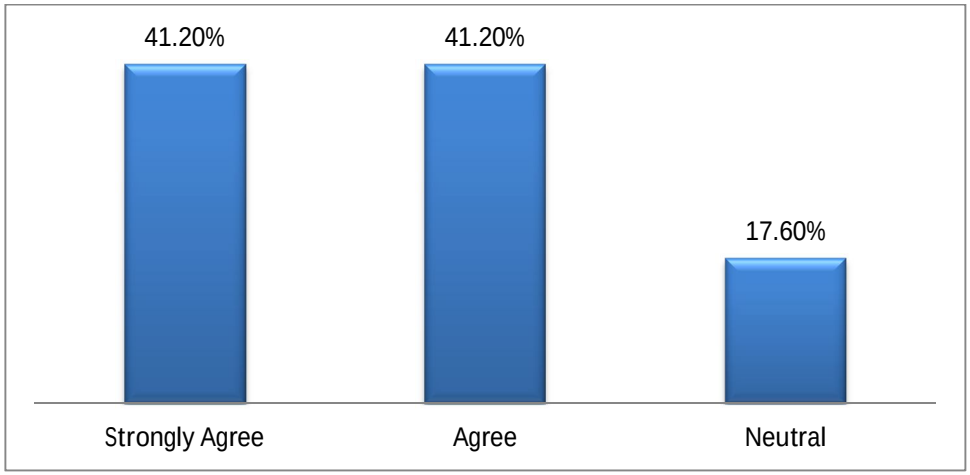
1) Due to limited time and resources, all the autonomous schools in Bhutan could not be covered.
2) The sample collected may result in bias responses and may lack representativeness.
3) Since the topic of research is sensitive, respondents may not have disclosed their true opinions, fearing negative implications from the Ministry and other relevant stakeholders.
4) The information in this study is purely based on the opinions of principals and vice-principals.

F. Ethical Statement

1) The information generated from respondents is both confidential and anonymous and individual respondents cannot be identified.
2) Permission was sought from the concerned principal before distributing the questionnaires.

IV. FINDINGS

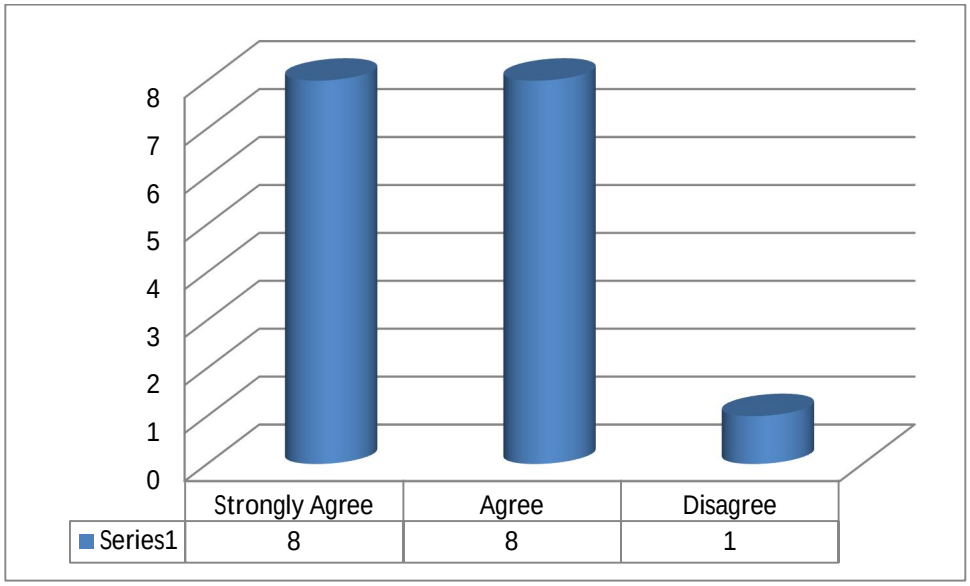
Figure 1. Respondents' level of agreement on Autonomy



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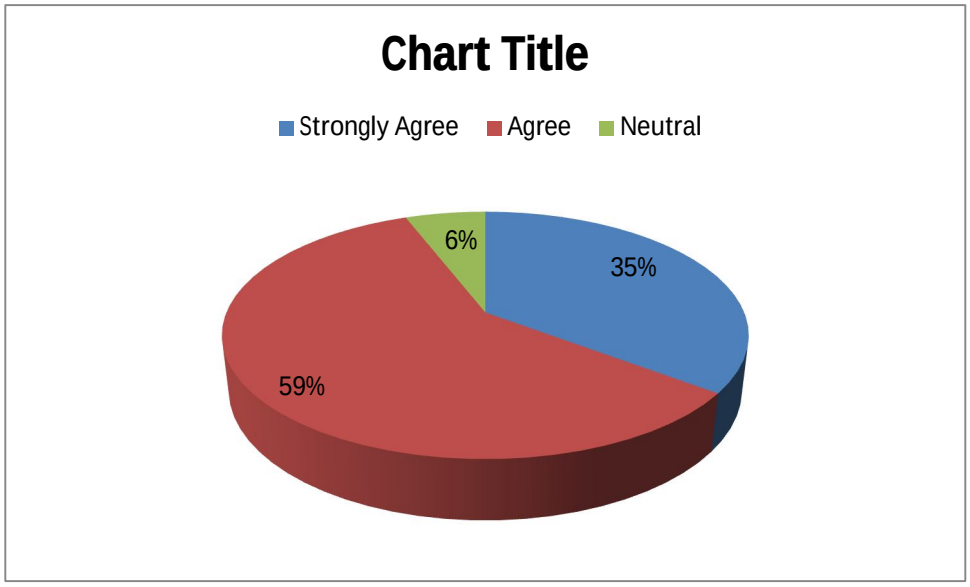
The above figure shows whether Bhutanese schools should go for autonomy. About 82 percent either strongly agreed or agreed that Bhutanese schools should go for autonomy. No respondent disagreed with the policy on school autonomy. This depicts almost all respondents favour autonomous schools. However, there are still just over a sixth of all respondents who are neutral and undecided whether Bhutanese schools should opt for autonomy.

Figure 2. There is the decentralization of power and finance in school



This graph shows the number of respondents with the opinion of whether there is the decentralization of power and finance at the school level. In the above data, the majority of the respondents, 47% strongly agree as well as agree with the implementation of school autonomy. There is the decentralization of power to the school. There are only 5 of respondents sent, who felt there was no decentralization of authority and finance in the autonomous school.

Figure 3. Autonomous schools are more efficient in delivering services compared to state schools**.**



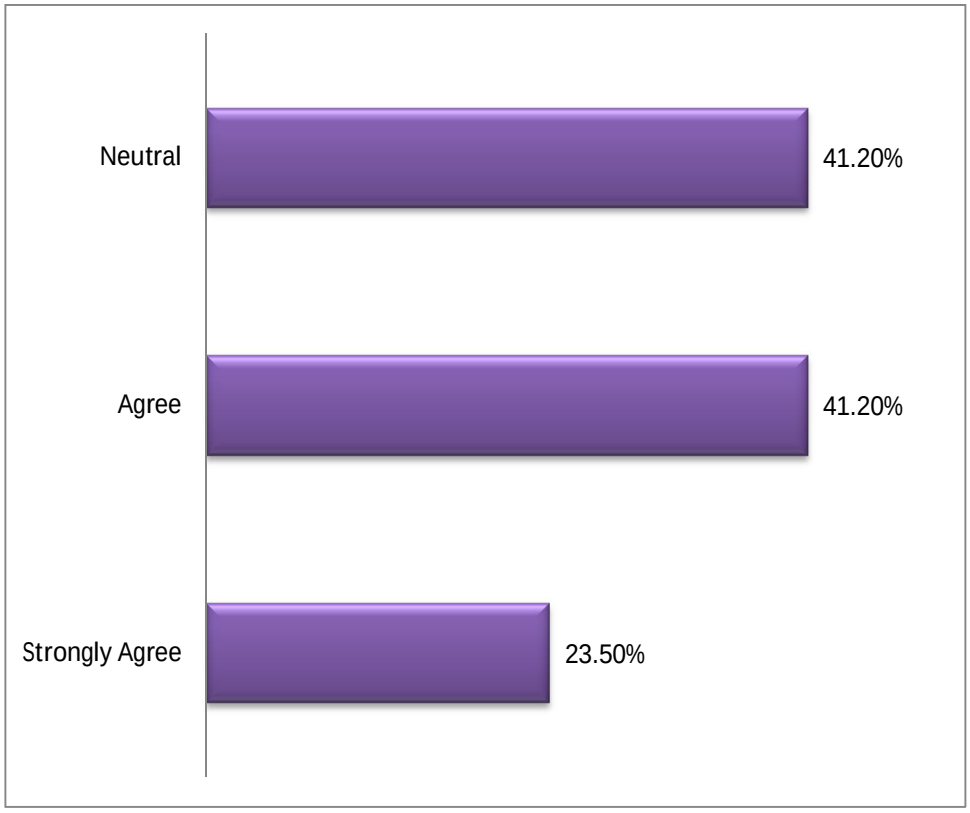
The above pie chart clearly shows autonomous schools are more efficient in delivering services compared to state schools. Since 35% of respondents have strongly agreed and 59% of respondents have agreed that autonomous schools are more efficient compared to state schools. There is only 6% undecided and 0% disagreeing.

Table 2. Correlations between School Autonomy and School efficiency

		Bhutanese schools should go for Autonomy	Autonomous schools are more efficient
Bhutanese schools should go for Autonomy	Pearson Correlation	1	.857
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	17	17
Autonomous schools are more efficient	Pearson Correlation	.857	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	17	17

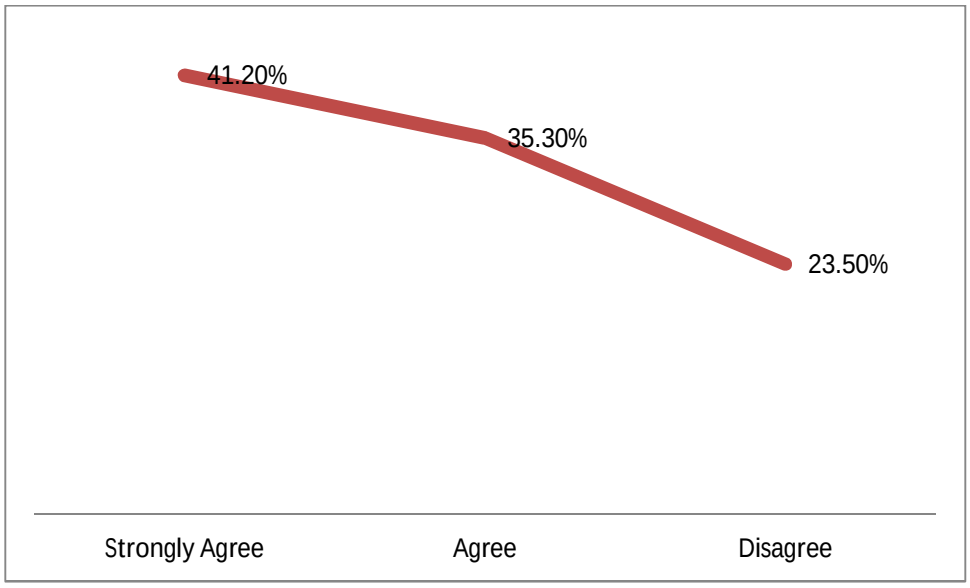
In the above table, the Chi-square test was conducted to test if there is any significant relationship between school autonomy and school efficiency. According to the Pearson chi-square test summary, there is a strong relationship between the two questions. This means that changes in one variable are strongly correlated with changes in the second variable. In the above table, Pearson's r is 0.857. This number is very close to 1. For this reason, we can conclude that there is a strong relationship between our school autonomy and school efficiency. The Sig. (2-Tailed) value in our example is 0.000. This value is less than .05. Because of this, we can conclude that there is a statistically significant correlation between school autonomy and school efficiency.

Figure 4. Autonomous school increases the performance of the students



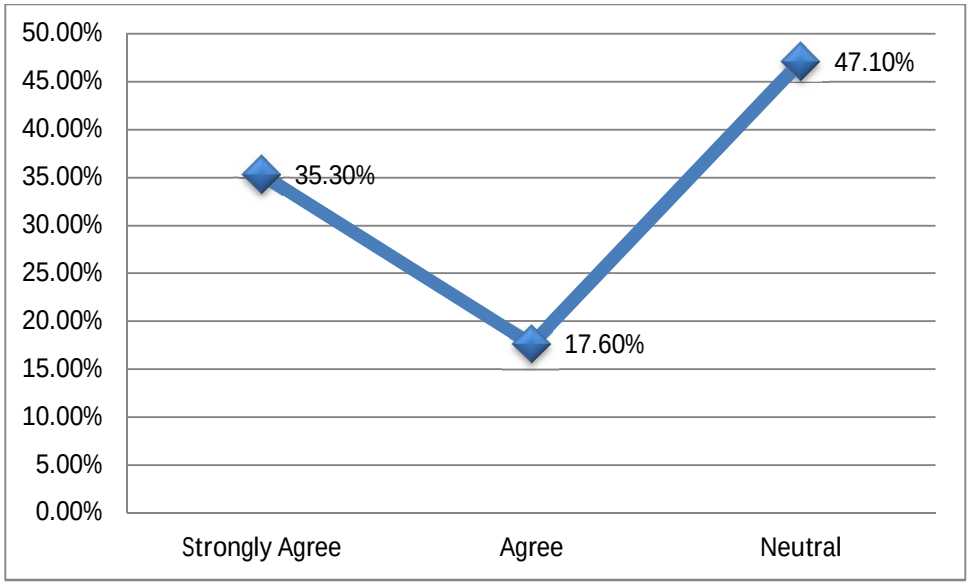
In this case, 23.5% strongly agreed and 41.2% agreed that autonomous school increases the performance of students. On the other hand, 41.2% of the respondents are not sure whether the autonomous school can increase the performance of students. The majority of respondents are neutral, it could be because it is a newly implemented policy, so to measure the increase in students' performance will take a long period of observations and research.

Figure 5. Teachers and the school administration should be given autonomy to determine the content of what they teach in school?



In the above line chart, 41.2% of school leaders strongly agree that schools should be given autonomy to decide the content of the curriculum. Similarly, 35.3% of respondents agree and are confident that schools are capable of framing their curriculum. There are 23.5% of the respondents disagree and they still believe in the uniformity of curriculum content framed by the Division of Curriculum and Research Department under the Ministry of Education. And these respondents agree that collective equity is more important than the pursuit of individual liberty.

Figure 6. Autonomous schools can strengthen recruitment and retention of good staff?



According to the above line chart, 35.3% of the respondents have strongly agreed and 17.6% have agreed that if school managers are given the authority, they can recruit and hold back competent staff in the education system.

At the same time, 47.1% of respondents are undecided. As of now, the Ministry has been recruiting, so principals are doubtful whether autonomy can strengthen recruitment and hold back competent staff. It is found that every year 200 to 300 teachers are leaving the profession.

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Figure 7. School Managers' satisfaction level with the autonomous school

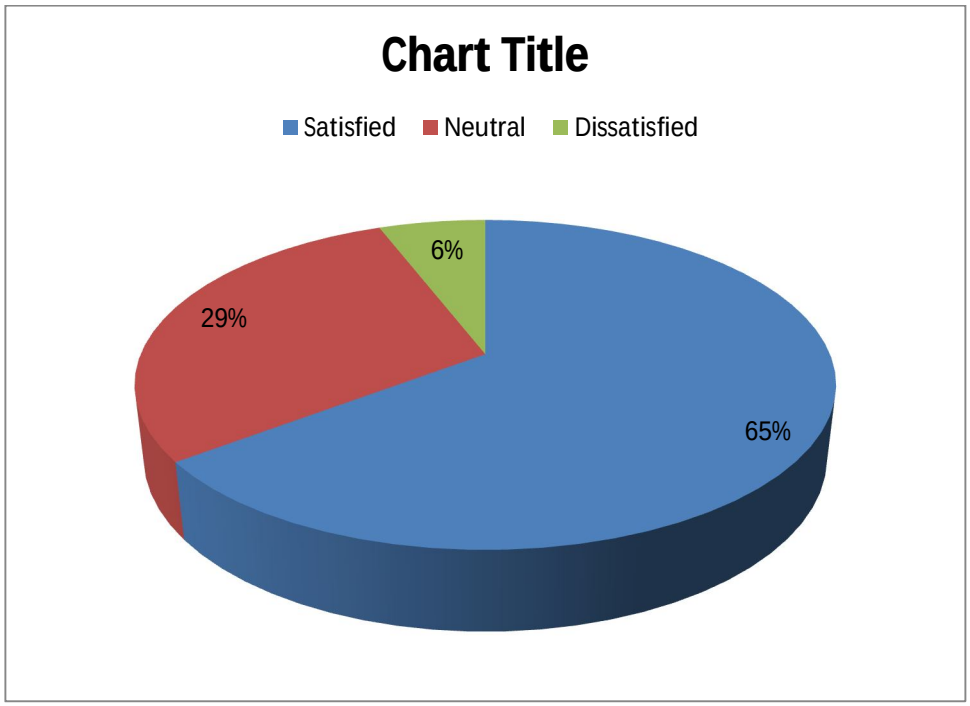
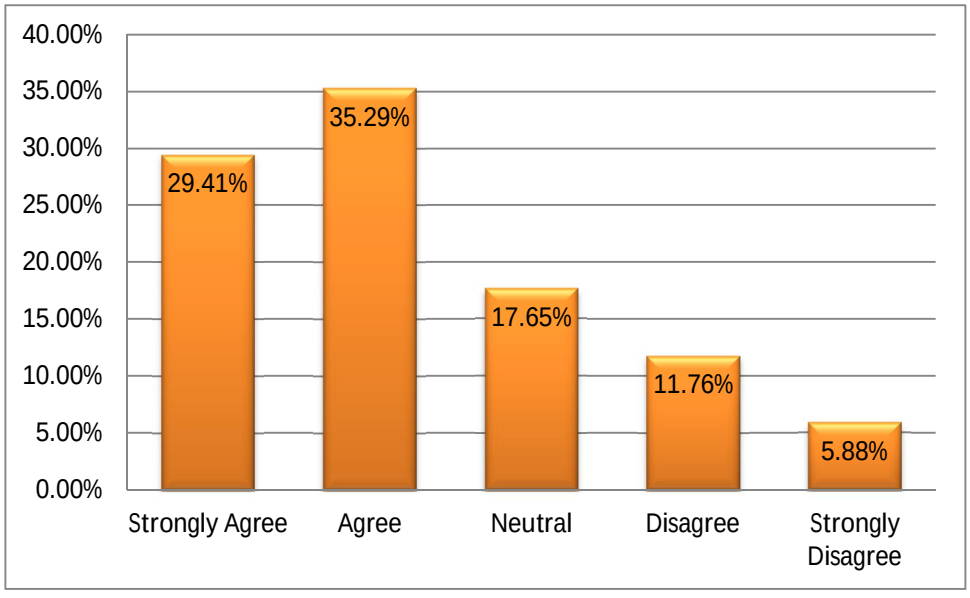


Figure 8 shows the satisfaction level of school managers 5% is satisfied with the newly implemented system of autonomous schools. About 29% are neutral and 6% are dissatisfied with the autonomous school system.

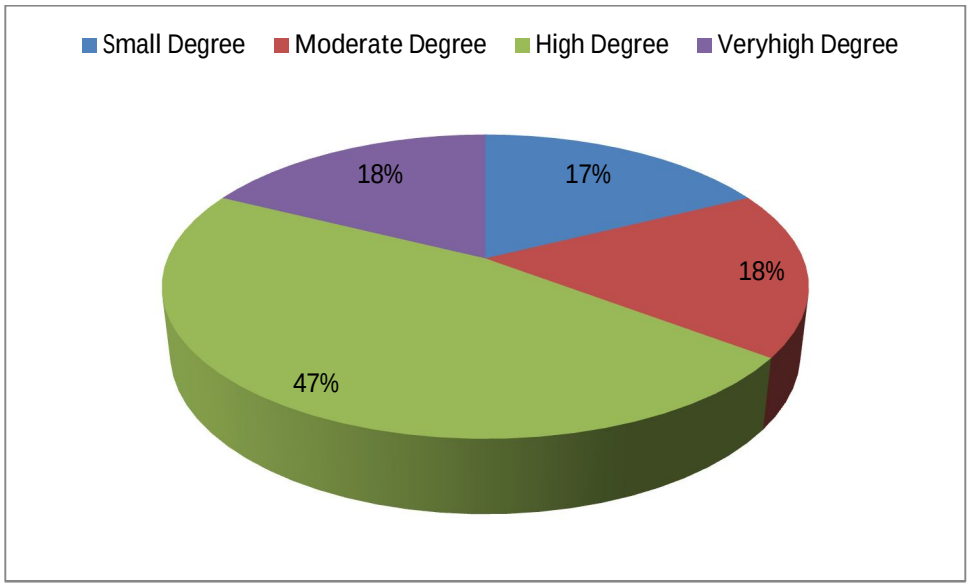
Figure 8. There should be less interference from the Ministry or District in autonomous schools



The above graph shows whether the Ministry or the district should interfere in the daily functioning of autonomous schools. The responses are spread in this case, 29.41% strongly agreeing and 35.29% agreeing on there should be less interference from the Ministry and district. In neutral we have 17.65% of the respondents.

However, 11.76% and 5.88% of respondents respectively disagree and strongly disagree. They feel that Ministry and district education officers must have authority over autonomous schools.

Figure 9. Autonomous schools are an improvement to the previous state school system.



Referring to Figure 10, we can see a majority of respondents agreeing autonomous school is an improvement compared to state schools. 18% of respondents argued that there is a very high degree of improvement and 4claimedaim that there is a high degree of improvement. Similarly, 18% said moderate degree, and 17% said small degree of improvement. So, it is unanimously agreed by all the respondents that autonomous schools are an improvement on state schools.

Table 3. Authority school managers would like to have in their schools

Sl.	Content	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Pay and increase the increment of staff	58.8%	41.2%	0	0	0
2	Recruitment of staff	94.1%	5.9%	0	0	0
3	Textbooks, stationery, library equipment, etc…	88.2%	5.9%	5.9%	0	0
4	Maintenance of school infrastructures	64.7%	35.3%	0	0	0
5	Termination of non-performing staff	41.2%	47.1%	11.7%	0	0
6	Preparing curriculum framework	41.2%	41.2%	17.6%	0	0
7	Awarding of contract	35.3%	52.9%	5.9%	0	5.9%
8	Salary disbursement from school	82.3%	5.9%	5.9%	0	5.9%
9	Disbursement of TA/DA of staff	76.5%	17.6%	0	0	5.9%
10	Promotion of staff	47.1%	41.2%	5.9%	0	5.9%
11	Fixing school fees	35.3%	52.9%	5.9%	0	5.9%

From Table 3, we find that some points are unanimous. All respondents believe school managers should have the autonomy to pay and increase the increment of the staff. According to the Position Classification System of civil service, outstanding civil servants are entitled to double increment, but this is only theoretical. There is no record of any civil servant receiving the double increment, even when they have outstanding records in performance evaluation. The survey shows that school managers should be given full autonomy in hiring and recruiting school staff with 94.1% strongly agreeing and no one disagreeing. It can be seen from Table 3 above that principals want to have autonomy over buying stationeries, with 88.2% of respondents strongly agreeing. And at the same time, 64.7% of principals strongly agree they should be given authority to carry out maintenance of the school infrastructures. Over 88 percent agreed that they should have the right to terminate non-performing staff.

The majority of respondents 82.3% strongly agree, about salary disbursement from schools. While 76.5% of school leaders want autonomy to pay travel allowances and daily allowances to their staff. In addition, we can also see that principals want to have the power to promote their staff again 88 percent agree. Over half, 53 percent of principals agree that they should have the authority to award contracts and fix school fees.

V. CONCLUSION

The study found out that the school managers favour and support school autonomy. As mentioned earlier the research will be looking at school managers' satisfaction level with the autonomous school system in Bhutan? What kinds of autonomy do school principals want in their schools?

It is interesting to find that the newly implemented policy of school autonomy is favoured by 82% of the respondents; they have agreed that Bhutanese schools should go for autonomy. Similarly, a majority of respondents 82% agreed that the MoE should encourage more autonomous schools in Bhutan. The survey discovered that there is a strong relationship between school autonomy and school efficiency. According to the Pearson chi-square test summary, Pearson's r is 0.857. This number is very close to 1, which indicates there is a strong positive correlation between school autonomy and school efficiency. The research also establishes that 11 (65%) out of 17 respondents claim that Autonomous Schools are improvements to the previous school system. In addition, 53% of principals said that autonomous schools can strengthen recruitment and retention of competent staff, but there are still 47% of school managers who are neutral and undecided. Therefore, the Ministry of Education must continue with the autonomous schools' system in Bhutan, with the majority of respondents in favour of school autonomy.

The study establishes that the very first reason for Bhutanese schools going for autonomy is to give importance to learners with more than half of the respondents' agreeing. However, in second place we have 47% of principals stating that it is to decentralize power and to have effective school leaders. On the one hand, one tone-third principal claim that it is to shift from Old Administration to New Public Management. Similarly, we have 41% of respondents asserting that it is to downsize public sectors by retaining best-performers. 29% of respondents said it is to inject competition and accountability into public-sector activity. And the least reason we have 47% saying it is to shift from public funding to private sector provision (the privatization agenda).

The survey found that only 11(65%) out of 17 respondents were satisfied with the level of autonomy in their schools. There was no respondent in the very satisfied category. Some of the reasons could be principals of Bhutanese autonomous schools don't have any autonomy over: recruiting staff, terminating staff, promoting staff, paying incentives to competent staff, awarding the contract, fixing school fees, repairing school infrastructures, salary disbursement, paying travel allowances and daily allowances, and preparing curriculum frameworks. Ministry is still responsible for all the above-mentioned responsibilities, and the principals have only minimal autonomy, to use the current budget given to the school. That is why we find many Bhutanese principals learning to work with systems, instead of trying to change the system (Adamowski et al., 2007, p. 6).

On the contrary, the survey shows different results. The autonomy granted by the Ministry of Education does not match with the school principals' expectations. 100% of respondents agree that they should be given authority to hire staff, increase the increment of staff, and have financial authority to carry out maintenance of schools. Over 88% of principals want to have autonomy over buying stationeries and the right to terminate underutilized staff.

The majority of respondents 82% strongly agree about salary disbursement from schools. While 77% of school leaders want autonomy to pay travel allowances and daily allowances to their staff. In addition, we can also see that principals want to have the power to promote their staff percent of 88 percent agree. Over percent, of principals agree that they should have the authority to award contracts and fix school fees.

It is widely accepted that central governments should shed some of their powers, transferring them to people operating nearer to the schools. It is believed that such a move would give more operational freedom to local authorities and institutions and improve the efficiency of educational management (Govinda, 2000, p. 75).

'School autonomy' might be seen to imply that the school would become a fully self-administering unit, completely freed from external authority and influence. But in reality, this is never so. The state continues to be the prime financier of the school system in most countries and the proposal has never been that the state disappears from the scene altogether.

The second fear is that the handing over of school control and management to local councils and boards may, in the long run, lead to de-professionalization of school administration and even weaken the authority of the school heads. Such extreme localization of authority may make the school the locus of an unwarranted power struggle, undermining the basic concern of improving school efficiency.

VI. RECOMMENDATION

A. Principals' Perspectives

Because many principals favour Autonomous Schools, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education (MOE) should continue with the system of Autonomous Schools. And about 82% of respondents claimed that with the system of autonomy there is improvement in utilization of resources, students' performance, and teacher performance.

B. Staff Training

Given that, most principals were not well-informed about the new system; they just had 5 days of training. It is suggested that MoE should provide timely training to the Autonomous Schools' Principals. It is suggested to appoint experienced and Master's level principals in autonomous schools.

C. Organization

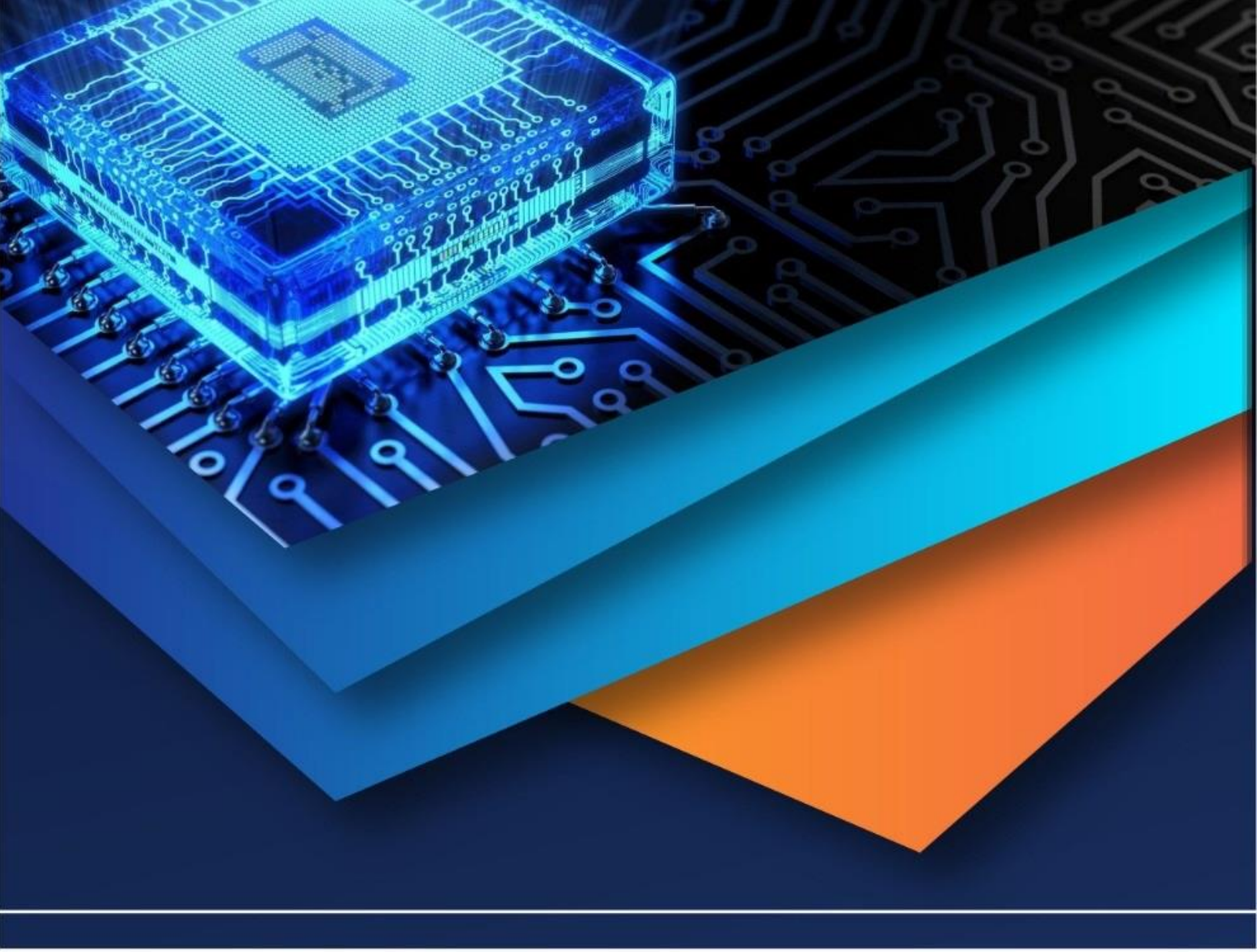
In the light of the 'autonomy gap,' the amount of authority that autonomous school principals think they need to be effective leaders and the amount of autonomy they have concerning personnel decisions (i.e., the ability to recruit staff, terminate staff, promote staff, pay incentives to competent staff, award contracts, fix school fees, repair school infrastructures, salary disbursement, pay travel allowances and daily allowances, and prepare curriculum framework).

Therefore, it is proposed that in the future Principals of Autonomous Schools should be given some authority over the above-mentioned points (Adamowski et al., 2007).

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