

Preparing New Principals in Developing countries: Selection and Induction

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: *This paper aims to overview of the challenges facing new principals in developing country and to explore the provision for leadership and management development for new and experienced school leaders.*

Design/methodology/approach: *Based on recent research and literature, the paper analyses the experience of principals and proposes an induction model for principalship in developing countries.*

Paper type: *Literature review*

Findings: *School principals in developing country face a daunting challenge. They often work in poorly equipped buildings with inadequately trained staff. There is rarely any formal leadership training and principals are appointed on the basis of their teaching record rather than their leadership potential. Induction and support are usually limited.*

Originality/value: *The paper provides an overview of the limited literature and research on new principals in developing country and develops a grounded conceptualisation of their role.*

Keywords: *Principals, Selection, Induction*

INTRODUCTION

The significance of effective leadership and management for the successful operation of schools and colleges is widely acknowledged in the twenty-first century. There is growing recognition that the quality of leaders, and leadership, is critical if schools are to produce the best possible outcomes for their learners, and their stakeholders. The longstanding appreciation of the vital role of teachers is belatedly being matched by an understanding that skilled leadership is also required if schools and colleges are to thrive. The traditional

view in many countries is that school principals and senior staff need only to be qualified and experienced teachers. However, there is now an emerging recognition that leadership is a parallel, if not separate, profession and requires specific preparation.

The case for providing specific preparation for school principals is well established. While almost all principals begin their professional careers as teachers, teaching qualifications and experience are insufficient to prepare professionals for the demanding and very different role of principal. Evidence from both developed

(e.g. Daresh and Male 2000) and developing (Bush and Glover, in press; Bush and Oduro 2006) contexts shows that untrained new principals experience great difficulty in adapting to the very different demands of the leadership role. Given the mounting evidence of the link between leadership and learning outcomes (e.g. Leithwood et al. 2006), providing comprehensive training programmes for new principals may be regarded as vital.

The great majority of school principals and head teachers begin their careers in the classroom. Their teaching experience is vital in underpinning the professional decisions they need to make as leaders. However, in the journey from the classroom to the principal's office, practitioners gradually reduce their teaching, for which they have been trained, and increase their leadership and management role, for which most have not been prepared. This leads to what Daresh and Male (2000) describe as 'culture shock'.

OBJECTIVES

- i) Overview of the challenges facing principals in developing countries,
- ii) Explore the provision for leadership and management development for new and experienced school leaders.

METHODOLOGY

It is theoretical study. I reviewed literatures. The literatures consists of review on leadership, theories of leadership, approaches of leadership and educational leadership, practices of leadership in education in different developing countries including Nepal. I reviewed journal articles, books, electronic materials, research study reports and various publications by various organizations.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this section, I analyze and discuss the data collected from the different literature corresponding to the leader's and principals' perspectives on preparing and supporting leaders. For this, I have linked related concepts with the objectives of the study. In doing so, I examine the principal's everyday life experience and attitudes in relation to leadership development and management for new and experienced school leaders.

The Challenges facing Principals in Developing Countries

It is our belief that school leadership is an essential lever for affecting student achievement and for ensuring that all children have access to the highest-quality education. The evidence is clear that quality teaching is critical. However, to achieve teacher effectiveness at scale, schools need effective principals who create a school culture of high expectations, focused on learning, for both students and adults. Schools must become the kinds of places where teachers can learn in practice how to meet the needs of their students and work together to serve all students. The key to strengthening teaching is outstanding leadership in every school.

School leaders face increasing demands and that these cannot be met effectively without initial, ongoing and specific preparation and development. In developed countries, schools are usually well-equipped, teachers are suitably trained, and budgets are invariably adequate or good (Bush, 2008). A wholly different set of circumstances exists in developing countries. Leaders often work in poorly equipped schools with inadequately trained staff. There is rarely any formal leadership training and principals are appointed on the basis of their teaching record rather than their leadership

potential. Induction and support are usually limited and principals have to adopt a pragmatic approach.

The Commonwealth Secretariat (1996) has taken a keen interest in education in developing countries, and points to the difficulties of managing in such difficult contexts:

The head ... plays the most crucial role in ensuring school effectiveness ... without the necessary skills; many heads are overwhelmed by the task.

Kitavi and van der Westhuizen (1997) refer the most serious problems facing beginning principals in developing countries include: students who cannot pay school fees and buy books; shortage of school equipment; shortage of physical facilities; lack of staff accommodation; lack of playgrounds; students travelling long distances; and use of English as a medium of instruction. Furthermore Bush et al. (n. d.) add that the main problems for developing countries are: Geographical isolation, Economic vulnerability, Limited, or no, higher education provision, Limited natural and human resources. Harber and Davies (1997) provide an overview of the educational context in developing countries, focusing on six dimensions: demographic; economic; resource; violence; health; and culture.

This overview gives a flavour of the context within which school principals exercise their leadership roles. The situation is immensely difficult and challenging for many leaders in developing countries. They also rarely receive appropriate preparation for this demanding role.

Provision of Leadership Development for New and Experienced School Leaders.

The purpose of leadership development is to produce more effective leaders. Hartley and

Hinksman (2003) say that leadership development requires a focus on structure and systems as well as people and social relations. Huber (2004a: 97) argues that the aims of leadership development are themselves derived from wider educational goals. Clearer specification of such goals should help in designing appropriate leadership development activities.

Leadership development contributes to modified leadership and management practice, and to enhanced school and student outcomes. There is a widespread belief in the efficacy of development programmes, leading to the introduction and growth of such interventions in many countries (Hallinger 2003c; Huber 2004a; Watson 2003b). Governments are investing substantial sums in leadership development because they believe that it will produce better leaders and more effective schools' systems. Individuals are also contributing their time, and often their own resources; to their own professional development because they think that it will enhance their career prospects and make them better leaders.

The experience of new principals

When new principals take up their posts, they have not been adequately prepared for their responsibilities and cannot expect any meaningful induction. Tekleselassie (2002, p. 60) refers to the "overload" affecting principals. Requiring principals to embark on such a demanding career without specific preparation "is a recipe for personal stress and system failure, and also has serious ethical implications" (Bush and Heystek, 2006). Kitavi and van der Westhuizen (1997, p. 253) describe the world of novice principals "as one filled with considerable anxiety, frustration and professional isolation [...] an increasingly clear picture shows new principals who cannot serve as instructional leaders, who tend to seek moral

and ethical identities and suffer from feelings of stress associated with their new roles”.

Ongoing developments in societies and their provision of education are reflected in the roles, recruitment and development of school leaders. The role of school leaders is changing. It then examines if school leaders can strengthen the recruitment, development and retention of teachers, as well as lift student outcomes. Evidence is provided to demonstrate that particular leadership practices can achieve these outcomes. It is concluded that school leaders remain of crucial importance for continued improvement of education. Given this importance, the paper then focuses on school leader preparation, selection and induction.

Preparation

In most developing countries, including small island states, there is no formal requirement for principals to be trained managers. They are often appointed on the basis of a successful record as teachers with an implicit assumption that this provides a sufficient starting point for school leadership (Bush and Oduro 2006: 362). Given the demanding contexts mentioned earlier, however, the lack of training is likely to have particularly serious consequences. Simkins et al. (1998: 131), referring to Pakistan, say that ‘management training and development might help to improve the effectiveness of head teachers’.

It is evident that preparation for school principals is inadequate in almost all developing countries. Most heads are appointed without any specific management training and few are able to access suitable in-service opportunities following appointment. While pre-service provision is highly desirable, this is inevitably more

expensive because it is not always possible to identify those who are likely to be appointed as principals. Targeting the limited resources at newly appointed heads is much more cost-effective. This can also be seen as an important part of their induction (Bush & Oduro 2006). The other advantage of in-service provision is that it can relate directly to the specific context facing the beginning principal. Crow (2001) distinguishes between professional and organisational socialisation. The former relates to preparation to enact the role of principal while the latter concerns adaptation to the particular school context. In-service preparation enables these two phases to be linked. Linking the training to a qualification is likely to motivate participants (Tekleselassie 2002) and to raise the status of principals in their communities.

Selection and Induction

In the absence of formal requirements for leadership qualifications or training, administrators and/or communities require alternative criteria for recruiting and selecting principals. In developing countries, as we noted earlier, these are often related to the length of teaching experience, sometimes coupled with candidates’ perceived competence as teachers. The criteria used in Africa are varied and unreliable. ‘Kenya was no exception where many headteachers had been identified on the basis of dubious qualifications often of a personal nature rather than relevant experience and proven skills in the field of management’ (Herriot et al. 2002: 510).

Gronn and Ribbins’s (2003: 91) point that ‘culturally grounded recruitment and selection regimes generate particular occupational profiles’. While this often

leads to a male-dominated principalship, as in the examples above, the dominance of women in most professional settings in the Seychelles is reflected in the appointment of principals, with 27 of the 33 schools being led by females (Bush et al.).

There is only limited literature on the induction of principals in developing countries. This is almost certainly because there is little formal induction for leaders in such settings. As Kitavi and van der Westhuizen (1997: 260) put it, 'too often, and without consideration, principals in developing countries like Kenya are tossed into the job without pre-service training, without guarantee of in-service training, and without support from their employers'. They report that most experienced principals overcame their problems through trial and error. However, 'beginning principals in developing countries like Kenya need well-structured induction strategies that will make them effective and efficient educational managers. Without special attention to the entry year problems of beginning principals ... other attempts at improving the quality of education in developing countries may yield few results' (p. 260).

Kitavi and van der Westhuizen (1997: 261–2) advocate eight induction strategies for new principals:

1. Assign a veteran principal to assist the new appointee.
2. Provide manuals for new principals.
3. Ensure a smooth transition by involving the outgoing principal.
4. Orient the new principal to the school and its community.
5. Encourage networking with other principals.
6. Encourage principals to allow their deputies to 'shadow' them to gain experience.
7. Visits to other schools.
8. Provide courses in educational management.

Several of these ideas do not require significant expenditure but are likely to be helpful in supporting and developing new principals. The result is that head teachers tend to depend principally on trial and error approaches in carrying out their leadership tasks. Inadequate, or no, induction compounds the problems arising from a lack of pre-service preparation. Principals are appointed on the basis of their teaching qualifications and experience, and are then left to learn 'on the job'. When mistakes are being made, children's learning is likely to be affected.

CONCLUSION

School leaders in developing countries manage their schools in very difficult circumstances. These nations face severe economic, social, health and educational problems. Principals are usually appointed without specific preparation, receive little or no induction, have limited access to suitable in-service training and enjoy little support from the local or regional bureaucracy.

There are many reasons for this unsatisfactory situation. Most countries have very limited educational budgets and leadership preparation is seen as a low priority. Donor countries and international agencies have introduced training initiatives but these are rarely sustained beyond the initial funding period. While the need for principalship training is widely recognized, translating perceived need into effective provision has proved to be elusive (Bush and Oduro 2006). Another problem is the lack of capacity among those responsible for

appointing, training and supporting headteachers. Many of these officials are no better qualified than the principals. The long distances, and inadequate infrastructure, mean that principals in rural areas are rarely visited, increasing their sense of isolation. Shortages of teachers and material resources exacerbate this problem (Bush and Oduro 2006).

Appropriate training, recruitment and selection do not ensure that principals are equipped with the requisite skills, attitudes, knowledge and motivation to lead their school effectively. Further support from their super-ordinates, and their local communities, are essential if their schools, and the students they serve, are to succeed and help their countries to compete in an increasingly challenging global economy.

MY OBSERVATION

The key relationships in the ways school leaders strengthen teacher recruitment, development and retention were shown to include factors such as teacher satisfaction, school effectiveness, improvement, capacity, teacher leadership, distributive leadership, organisational learning, and development. School leaders can be a major influence on these school-level factors as well as help buffer against the excesses of the mounting and sometimes contradictory external pressures. A skilled and well-supported leadership team in schools can help foster a sense of ownership and purpose in the way that teachers approach their job. Conferring professional autonomy to teachers will enhance the attractiveness of the profession as a career choice and will improve the quality of the classroom teaching practice. Teachers who work together in a meaningful and purposeful ways have been found to be more likely to

remain in the profession because they feel valued and supported in their work.

One of the most consistent findings from studies of effective school leadership is that authority to lead need not be located in the person of the leader but can be dispersed within the school between and among people. There is a growing understanding that leadership is embedded in various organisational contexts within school communities, not centrally vested in a person or an office. The real challenge facing most schools is no longer how to improve but, more importantly, how to sustain improvement. Sustainability will depend upon the school's internal capacity to maintain and support developmental work and sustaining improvement requires the leadership capability of the many rather than the few.

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