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Nadim Farooqi

*Aga Khan University, Institute for Educational Development, Karachi*

Saeed Nasim

*Aga Khan University, Institute for Educational Development, Karachi*

Iffat Nayyar

*Aga Khan University, Institute for Educational Development, Karachi*

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# MOVING TOWARDS EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

*Nadim Farooqi, Saeed Nasim, & Iffat Nayyar*  
*AKU-IED, Karachi, Pakistan*

## **Abstract**

Educational leadership focuses on building a shared vision, improving communication, making decisions collaboratively and remains consistent with the desire to bring about school improvement. Literature reveals that if head teachers / managers' practices are not consistent with the above-mentioned areas of leadership; the expected outcomes of schools become difficult to achieve. In order to build leadership capacity for school / organizational improvement, Aga Khan University-Institute for Educational Development (AKU-IED) has offered various professional development programmes under the USAID Project III to the collaborating Non-Government Organizations / Community Based Organizations (NGOs / CBOs) working in the education sector of Sindh. These Professional Development Programmes are aimed at facilitating the participants in re-conceptualizing their notions of leadership and encouraging them to foster practices of collegial interaction in setting curriculum, instructions and monitoring evaluation and documentation processes at individual, school and organizational levels. Looking at the observations done by the programme instructional team, during Course Participants (CPs) practicum work, their reflections and presentations, field assignments and also the case studies of few programme graduates, provided us with evidence of some change in educational leadership and management practices. These include moving from individualistic approach to team building exercises, playing active role in curriculum setting, improving monitoring, and evaluation and documentation practices. This presentation highlights the strategies, experiences and challenges of the offered programmes with particular concentration on course participants' application of the newly acquired knowledge, skills, attitudes and the process of institutionalizing change in their context.

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## **Introduction**

Laws and Dennison (1991) mention that head teachers spend most of their time on activities that enforce the role of a 'chief executive' whilst professional leadership

actions get less significance. There is a generally held opinion among educators and researchers that school improvement is directly related to the beliefs and practices of leadership, but a majority of Principals and Head teachers in Pakistan do not have an adequate educational management background, which has affected the quality of education and school improvement. In fact, a participatory decision-making strategy and a decentralized model for management is necessary for successful school improvement (Hicks, 1956; Sinah, 1977; Memon et al., 1999). The current National Education Policy of Pakistan (1998-2010) also endorses that the professional qualification of educational managers including head teachers does not cater to the needs of managing and supervising schools effectively, which has severe implications for the improvement of quality of education. Kenneth, Leithwood and Daniel Dike (1999) identified six distinct conceptions of leadership: instructional (influencing the work of teachers in a way that will improve students' achievement), transformational (increasing the commitment and capacities of school staff), moral (influencing others by appealing to notions of right and wrong), participatory (involving other members of the school community), managerial (operating the school efficiently) and contingent (adopting the behavior to fit the situation).

The AKU-IED has been engaged in the implementation of the proposed initiatives from The Aga Khan Foundation, Pakistan (AKF,P) to work with a selected number of NGOs / CBOs to enhance their institutional capacity building. This helps them to provide an equity, access and quality education to all children generally and girls, specifically.

### **Strategies used for capacity building of educational leaders**

In order to achieve the target of education leadership development, two broad-based strategies were employed. These are:

#### ***Certificate in Education: Educational Leadership and Management***

Evolving a reflective model and process used in developing Certificate in Education: Educational Management and Leadership Programme. Four programmes of Certificate in Education: Educational Management and Leadership were offered during the project tenure. This programme was designed as a field-based programme containing six modules of one week each:

- a) Reconceptualizing NGOs / CBOs' role in managing education
- b) Developing effective management and leadership practices
- c) Developing effective educational and community leadership

- d) Understanding the role of curriculum, instruction and assessment in education
- e) Developing understanding about the process of school improvement
- f) Institutionalizing change process in community schools

The overall aim of the programme was to facilitate NGO / CBO leaders and community school head teachers as ‘community builders’ with effective leadership skills and attitudes to work with the community for the promotion of quality education in the rural and semi-urban areas of Sindh. The professional development team also provided professional support for the course participants through planned follow-up field visits for the application of the newly acquired knowledge and skills in their institutions.

### ***Short course in monitoring, evaluation, and documentation***

Monitoring and evaluation is being increasingly recognized as an indispensable management function of any organization. Considering the importance of monitoring and the evaluation of NGOs / CBOs’ educational initiatives, AKU-IED designed a short course in monitoring, evaluation and documentation for senior and middle management of the NGOs / CBOs. This course was designed on the basis of needs assessment. A five-week course in monitoring, evaluation and documentation containing a field-based practicum was also conducted. The participants were exposed to alternative practices of monitoring, evaluation and documentation for enhancing their understanding in these areas.

One programme on monitoring, evaluation and documentation was conducted, and those who participated in this programme were from all management layers. The candidates developed their skills in preparing a framework of monitoring and evaluation including performance indicators and monitoring tools. They also developed skills on how to analyze monitoring and evaluation data and write a report for documentation purposes. Community motivators benefited from these programmes. The purpose of these programmes was to develop serving and aspiring head teachers and community motivators as ‘effective educational leaders’. These participants developed a wide range of skills such as effective communication, participatory decision-making, time management, reflective practice, community participation, monitoring and evaluation, managing change, curriculum enrichment, supervision. The participants were also exposed to processes engaged in organizational development analysis.

### **Achievements**

- While working in their respective institutions, teams observed that the action plan

and practicum assignments provided graduates to institutionalize the change at the organizational level. NGO leadership also recognized the effort initiated by the graduates for school improvement. As an NGO leader commented:

our certificate in education, ‘Educational Leadership and Management’ graduate used to be silent but now they discuss issues and try to justify their suggestions. We were expecting that they would try to bring about a change on a classroom level but they try to work at the school level also.

Some of the graduates who work at the organization level re-visit or develop the vision and mission of the school / organization and try to convert their long-term planning based on their learning about strategic planning with the collaboration of the staff.

- During the last two years of the project term it was continuously observed that in most of the schools, especially where learning resource centres function, the element of team building and professional development of teachers was gaining importance. There were a number of programmes being conducted not only for their own teachers but also for cluster schoolteachers. The impact of such programmes has been overall improvement in various areas, such as student retention, improved academic performance of the students (school results), and transition from a teacher to student-centered environment and from unplanned to planned teaching.

A case study of a school situated in a rural area of Sindh brought forward the aspect of team building. A graduate (Certificate in Education: Educational Leadership and Management) from the school explains that the impact of the programme has brought all the teachers together on one platform. They (teachers) are gelling into one unit because of continuous professional activities. The same graduate at the graduation ceremony of one of the programmes at the LRC reflected:

Before the AKU-IED intervention I was only a school administrator, but now I am able to contribute in LRC activities as a equal team member. Previously I was more self-centered and the only decision-maker in all school-related matters.

- During the follow-up visits, it was observed that the graduates’ attitude changed from compliance towards diagnostic strategies. One of the graduates said, “Field visits help us in modifying the instruments of monitoring and evaluation and making it more diagnostic, thus intended to cater to our needs”.

- One of the graduates of the programme has ten years of teaching experience and manages a boys' primary school in a semi-urban area. After graduating and spending four months in her school, she expressed her sentiments in a formal interview (Project Annual Report 2003) about the programme, saying that:

The programme helped me in many ways, for instance, my personal and professional growth prospered (because after these programmes I got promoted to the position of head teacher), I am now able to justify my actions, being creative and innovative in decision making, solving problems and more. Additionally, not only did the programmes increase my knowledge, rather they also enhanced my skills, attitude and values. They helped me tremendously to re-conceptualize my role as a pedagogical leader. I may not be a perfect pedagogical leader but thanks to the instructional team, I stand today with full confidence and patience. I am able to reflect on my current practice to meet the challenges of improving the quality of education in my school. I remember when I joined my school I could hardly talk in front of others. Now I am confident in sharing my experiences, knowledge and skills with others. I must say that the credit goes to AKU-IED.

She went on to express her views by saying:

The programmes seemed very positive and thought-provoking, and this has enhanced my level of commitment and enthusiasm. During the programme, we were encouraged to critically examine, re-conceptualize and enhance our understanding regarding organizational dynamics, organizational and school culture, roles and responsibilities in relation to community mobilization and promotion of education, especially female education, team building for sustainable change, understanding notion of curriculum, instructions and assessment, effective supervision practices and reflective practice. Now, I have learned how to cope with challenges. All this information has been extremely useful for me, and I implement these in my native context accordingly.

- Another graduate who serves as regional manager at his NGO, shared his reflections (Case Study in progress, 2003) about the AKU-IED programme impact on his professional growth by saying that:

The programme provided an opportunity to us to developing our management and leadership skills to become effective educational and

community leaders. Also during the programme, we were encouraged to systematically monitor and evaluate educational practices in order to make decisions for maximizing the effectiveness of NGO / CBO schools. Reflective practice helped the participants in many ways, for instance, seeing personal and professional growth, being able to justify their actions, being creative and innovative in decision making, for solving these problems. Not only did the programme increase my knowledge, but it also enhanced my skills, attitude and values. It helped me tremendously in re-conceptualizing my role as pedagogical leader of effective schools. Before coming to the AKU-IED, I was interested in talking about people, I used to discuss people rather than issues / problems but now I have learned that it is better to discuss issues / problems rather than people.

The field-based component was also an integral part of the programme. These visits were planned in order to support the CPs in the application of newly acquired knowledge and skills in their respective organizations. To gain maximum benefits from the field visits, the CPs were provided professional support in completing practicum. This practicum included; a) developing a case study for implementing curriculum; b) assessing organizational capacity; and c) conducting action research. During another visit to the same organization he shared the information that in the recent annual performance review at his NGO, five regional teams had presented their annual performance and his regional team won the best performance award. He acknowledged that the actual change process started in the year 2000, when he graduated from AKU-IED. He also praised the role of USAID Project III team by acknowledging that AKU-IED graduates have played the role of a catalyst in his organization.

- Another graduate, in a formal interview (Case Study in progress, 2003) with the team, expressed his sentiments about the programme by saying that he believed that his experiences at AKU-IED enhanced his confidence and empowered him to be a better Vice Principal. In his own words:

I started my career as a science teacher, gradually moved up to senior teacher and simultaneously worked in a local NGO as a social organizer. One year after joining and gaining teaching experience, I was assigned some managerial responsibilities besides my teaching. On account of those responsibilities I was given an opportunity to join the Certificate in Education: Educational Leadership and Management Programme at

Aga Khan University Institute for Educational Development (AKU-IED). After returning from the programme, I was asked to have a meeting with the school's 'Boards of Governors'. For the first time in my teaching career, I actually felt confident while talking to the board!. In that meeting, they discussed what I had learnt from the programme. Two months later, the 'Board of Governors' called to share their decision regarding my future role in the school as the project coordinator.

## Challenges

- Professional Development Team's simultaneous involvement in more than one programme became a challenge in terms of the diverse nature and requirements of different programmes and availability of their time.
- Meeting with the diverse needs of graduates, such as
  - (i) those not fluent in Urdu and English languages, and
  - (ii) those belonging to rural, sub urban areas with limited teaching experience. Special attention was paid to such needs by supporting them in small groups in the classroom and providing them with an Urdu version of the programme handbook, articles and other reading material.
- The programme was very demanding in many ways, especially in terms of time, commitment and resources. It was a field-based modular programme, in between which were three practices. During the three weeks of practicum, the instructional team spent twelve to fifteen days, including Sundays, visiting CPs from Karachi to Mithi. Very little time was available for other professional-related activities or planning for the next module.

## Conclusion

The uniqueness of the project was that throughout the four years of the projects tenure, there was a continuous interaction between the participating NGOs / CBOs' stakeholders and the project implementation team, which resulted in ongoing professional support from the project team. They were eventually able to become change initiators in their respective organizations.

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