January 1998

A follow-up of professional development of educational leaders: Implications for school improvement

Muhammad Memon
Aga Khan University, Institute for Educational Development, Karachi

Fauzia Reza
Aga Khan University, Institute for Educational Development, Karachi

Follow this and additional works at: http://ecommons.aku.edu/pakistan_ied_pdck

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://ecommons.aku.edu/pakistan_ied_pdck/38
A FOLLOW-UP STUDY OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERS: IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

By
Dr. Muhammad Memon & Ms. Fauzia Reza

Abstract
The paper presents an account of the processes, outcomes and challenges associated with a follow-up study after the completion of a professional development programme in educational management for senior education officers from Sindh. Prior to induction to their jobs, the district education officers, principals of elementary colleges of education and higher secondary schools are not formally exposed to any new educational management and leadership practices. As a result, most of them remain unaware of the tasks and demands of their role, therefore, they tend to maintain a status quo position rather than engaging in change strategies for improving the quality of education in their organization. In order to improve their professional knowledge, skills and competence, The Aga Khan University, Institute for Educational Development organized a ten week professional development programme embedded in the paradigm of critical inquiry. The participants were encouraged to critically reflect on their existing beliefs, notions of educational management practices and explore alternatives for improvement. Lewin's model of professional learning (i.e. unfreezing, moving and refreezing) was employed as a vehicle for the professional learning of the participants. Following the completion of the programme in June 1998, a one day follow-up workshop was conducted where the participants were asked to focus on questions such as: Where are they in the change process? What has changed so far? Where are they headed? The initial findings suggest that the formal professional development programme on the whole and participants' process of self-critical reflexion in-action, on-the-job, helped them significantly in bringing about change in their perspectives, attitudes, management and leadership styles (i.e. participatory style). It was evident that most of the participants considered challenges as 'opportunities' to foster the process of school improvement, which reflects their positive thinking.

Context of the Follow-up Study
Managing schools effectively has increasingly become complex phenomenon for school managers/leaders. Literature on managing schools indicates that managers cannot run schools effectively unless they understand schools as social units of society. Since each school has its own culture based on certain values, norms, standards and ethical practices, it has to be managed according to the school's contextual realities. Therefore, the managers need to promote situational leadership in schools that should respond to the needs of each school. Although, some initiatives have been taken in Pakistan to improve the quality of management of schools with special reference to decentralization but it has not yet contributed significantly to the development of effective educational management systems that encompasses efficiency, effectiveness and efficacy. We agree with Dalin (1993) that it is necessary to develop a framework of self-confident schools by developing the vision of managers and leaders who provide educational resources, policies and plans to make schools effective. The district education officers as educational leaders play a pivotal role in managing schools effectively in Pakistan but majority of them are neither formally oriented towards their role nor exposed to any new management and leadership practices. As a result, most of them tend to maintain a status quo rather than engaging in change strategies for improving the quality of education in schools.

Professional Development Programme for Educational Leaders
In recent years, some professional development initiatives based on the 'cascading model' have been taken in the public sector in Pakistan that seem to have failed to bring about change in the managers' perspectives, knowledge, skills and attitudes. In order to enhance the professional competence, skills and knowledge of the district education officers and others as educational leaders, The Aga Khan University (AKU), Institute for Educational Development (IED), Karachi designed a ten week rigorous professional development programme in the area of educational management in line with the 'felt needs' jointly identified by the IED and education department, Government of Sindh, Karachi. This programme aimed to develop the professional knowledge, skills and critical insights of the participants enabling them to contribute positively towards school improvement. A group of twenty two participants consisting of district education officers, principals/vice principals of government elementary colleges of education and the principals of higher secondary schools attended this programme. The programme leading to an award of Certificate in Educational Management encompassed seven domains: These included reconceptualization of current management practices, managing curriculum and instruction, supervision, research and evaluation, educational planning and development process, understanding economics of education, and re-entry to the field. The whole programme contained 300 contact hours. Lewin's model of professional learning (unfreezing, moving and refreezing) was used in the programme as a vehicle for the professional development of educational leaders. The principal aim of the programme was to develop professional knowledge, skills, and perspective of education officers, enabling them to become more effective and reflective managers and leaders to manage their institutions more effectively. The objectives of the programme were as follows:

i) reconceptualize the leaders' role and related challenges through critical analysis of existing management and leadership practices and processes in a contextual framework, in order to enhance managerial/leadership skills and competence;

ii) demonstrate the leaders' understanding of the acquired new educational management and
EDUCATION 2000

Leadership practices and processes required for bringing about improvement in the context of educational management/leadership and supervision; and

iii) develop re-entry plans based on the leaders’ experiential learning in the core area of educational management and supervision in order to contribute towards building personal and institutional capacity.

Participants were encouraged to create a ‘collaborative’ and ‘collegial’ atmosphere among themselves in order to support each other in the classroom. Efforts were made to relate the programme to the realities of school life. The programme began with encouraging the participants to reflect on their existing beliefs, notions of educational management practices and identify various areas for improvement. They were given opportunities to come up with different solutions to their problems. Finally, they were required to synthesize their professional learning outcomes and to develop action plans for their re-entry in the field in order to do the follow-up study.

Implications of Educational Leadership for School Improvement

Leadership is not the position that is occupied by a manager but it is the nature of the manager’s behaviour that makes things happen in the organization. Cowley (1996) maintained that the leaders are those who succeed in getting others to follow them. Thus, Leadership involves assisting everyone working with the organization to generate resources for accomplishing common goals. Parks and Barrett (1994) stress that leaders should have abilities such as recognizing, rewarding, supporting, coaching, providing resources and delegating for the empowerment of the members of an organization. Dennis (1989) differentiates between managers and leaders. To him managers are people who do things right and leaders are people who do the right things. Managers are concerned primarily with maintaining rather than changing established structures, procedures or goals whereas leaders are concerned with initiating changes in established structures, procedures and goals. To Lipham (1964) leadership is the initiation of a new structure procedure for accomplishing organizational goals and objectives. However, all the managers are expected by their stakeholders to provide leadership to the members in their organizations. Therefore, it is said that without effective leadership organizational cannot be called ‘learning organizations’ (Handy, 1984). Conger and Kanungo (1988) have rightly mentioned that leaders must have the ability to articulate organizational vision to direct the organization into its future. If schools are to be improved we need to have new school leadership. Therefore, Snowden and Gorton’s (1998) argument makes sense that we need to have leaders who are able to succeed in exercising effective leadership, who seem to be needed more than ever in education.

Getzels et al. (1968) discuss two types of leadership i.e. normative and idiosyncratic. The former gives emphasis on getting the job done which can be referred to as ‘transmission’ leadership (Memon, 1998). The latter puts emphasis on personal and emotional needs of the members of organization which Getzels et al. (1968) call ‘transnational’ leadership. Leithwood (1992) adds another style of leadership which he refers to as ‘transformational’ leadership. According to him transformational leadership style is a form of facilitative power that is manifested through other people instead of over people. It includes collaborative and shared decision making approach, professionalism and empowerment, understanding change and how to encourage others to change themselves. The transformational leaders have the complete picture of their organization; they concentrate on continuing school improvement and foster a sense of ownership within the organization for creating a team spirit. Effective leaders respond to situations as they arise. Different situations demand different behaviours from the leader. This suggests that no particular style of leadership is appropriate for all situations. This requires adaptability and flexibility in the leaders’ behaviour. The Badaracco and Ellsworth (1989) leaders use their own personal philosophies of management and leadership to solve situational dilemmas or problems. Effective leadership is contingent on a compatible relationship between the leaders’ personal qualities, styles and the demands of the situation. Therefore, there is need to have situational leaders to respond to the demands of any situation in an organization. In order to become situational leaders, one needs to be aware of the power relations in schools, professional maturity levels of staff and the expectations of stakeholders. Since school improvement is an ongoing process of change and is a systematic, sustained effort aimed at changing learning conditions in schools for accomplishing educational goals (Van Velzen et al., 1985) it requires situational leadership to act according to organization’s circumstances and context. Hence, educational leaders should be forward-looking, inspirational and competent.

Follow-up of the Programme and its Process

Follow-up is an integral part of any programme at IED. The follow-up study of educational management programme was planned in the month of June 1998. It had a twofold purpose. Firstly, to provide professional support to participants on the job. Secondly, to track their change initiatives and the nature of challenges they encounter in the process of bringing about change. A verbal consent of the participants was elicited. The participants were kept in touch through written communication or telephone conversation or visiting IED by participants. These communications provided first hand information on their change initiatives and the challenges they faced. A formal follow-up workshop in collaboration with the Bureau of Curriculum and Extension Wing Sindh, Jamshoro was conducted with the participants in September 1998. Out of twenty two participants, twenty one attended the workshop.

The purpose of the workshop was to get the following information:

a) Where are they in the change process?
b) What has changed so far?
c) Where are they headed?

Before the workshop, the participants were sent a guided questionnaire along with their invitation letters. The questionnaire aimed to seek information on the new initiatives they had taken since the completion of the programme, challenges faced and their future plans. Each participant made a presentation on their successes and challenges in order to share with their colleagues. The workshop served as a platform to learn from each others’ experiences and it also helped colleagues to share their challenges. The faculty also made some input followed by providing relevant literature on educational management. The quality of presentations indicated that the participants made an effort to act as change agents. This gave a sense of satisfaction to the faculty that the participants’ efforts had been fruitful. The change in their perspectives, attitudes generally and particularly in interpersonal skills was remarkable.

Initial Findings of Follow-up Study

On the basis of each presentation, the following initial findings were drawn:

i) Shift Towards a Participatory Style of Management

It was noticed that the participants had made an effort to change their role from bureaucratic managers to situational leaders. Some of them thought they considered themselves as ‘superiors’ and tended to keep a distance from their staff. Upon their return from the programme, they tried to be more friendly with their team members. This resulted not only in their becoming more popular but also resulted in a lot of valuable contribution from their team. The most significant achievement was to witness a change in the beliefs of some of the participants with reference to their roles. They seemed to have moved from ‘power culture’ to ‘task culture’. One of the participants said that he had an innovative leader. Now that I look back I feel I was really hard on my teachers. I really regret the way I treated them some times”. Another participant commented “IED has changed our beliefs...” The programme helped them in enhancing their understanding of their management role, tasks and functions. They were able to see the paradigm shift in their role from bureaucratic to democratic leaders. The participants were exposed to alternative paradigms of education, management, supervision, research and planning. As a result, they were able to understand the underpinning assumptions of the alternative paradigms and their implications for their role. They seemed to be appreciative about their new perspective and role as instructional leaders and clinical supervisors. They were also able to conceive their role in school improvement and effectiveness.
ii) Positive Thinking and Attitude

Most of them tended to develop positive thinking skills and attitudes towards their role and their subordinates. It was interesting to note that they had looked at problems not as barriers to their efforts for change but saw them as opportunities. As one participant mentioned, "We were taught not to get scared from the problems... we consider problems as opportunities. We need to create a culture of lead management rather than boss management."

During the follow-up study it was noticed that they had tried to find solutions within their limited means. This indicates positive change in their thinking and attitude. It was also evident that the participants tended to appreciate the importance of parents as an important source for school improvement. Many of them had to work collaboratively with parents on different issues.

One of the participants, while discussing the programme, mentioned a noticeable change in her attitude, which she said ‘I notice myself while working with others.’ She had shown a very encouraging evidence of change: three months after the programme she had solved two major problems in her school. There was no lavatory facility for teachers in the school; they had to go to the neighbours’ houses. And there was no telephone line in the school. She was cognizant of the fact that it was not easy to get these problems solved through her own department, but she mobilized the support of parents and Non Governmental Organizations. With their cooperation she succeeded in getting a telephone connection and a lavatory facility in schools. She attributed this success to her now improved skills of communication and that of problem solving. Also, she now viewed parents as a source not as a threat. She had in fact actually exhibited the art of ‘true’ leadership which is getting others to want to do something that you are convinced should be done.

iii) Using Self-reflection as a Vehicle for Improved Management Practices

It was found that most of the participants employed reflective practice as a vehicle of their professional development in order to become reflective managers and leaders. One of the participants mentioned that "I have become self-critical and self-reflective as a result of using reflective practice in my personal and professional life" (Reflective Journal). This was the ultimate purpose of the programme and everybody seemed to have done a good job to improve themselves as reflective leaders. After the completion of the programme, some participants organized workshops for the professional development of their staff. This shows their commitment towards school improvement.

Challenges of Follow-up Study

After the completion of the programme, the tutors kept a track of the progress of the programme through face-to-face interaction or telephone conversation or written communication with them and with the Bureau of Curriculum and Extension Wing Sindh, Jamshoro. This helped tutors to develop the portfolio of the change initiatives taken by each participant. In order to get more information about the challenges of change initiatives, the field visit of tutors was also planned but due to time constraint, it was postponed till the follow-up workshop was conducted. However, the following questions arose in the tutors’ minds regarding workshop:

a) Would the participants be willing to pay their travel expenses for this workshop?
b) Would it be possible for all of them to take time off from their duties?
c) Would they be motivated to come all the way to IED just to attend a follow-up workshop?

Given the above-mentioned perceived challenges, it seemed highly unlikely to have the workshop as desired. However, the Bureau of Curriculum and Extension Wing Sindh, Jamshoro agreed to get these participants released and paid their allowances in order to hold a one-day workshop at Hyderabad in September 1998.

Lessons Learnt

Though we remained informed of the participants’ progress in their journey of change through a variety of sources yet due to several constraints we could not visit their work places. We needed to plan field visits as quickly as possible so that we could provide further professional support to them on their jobs. We realized the need to have a more organized follow up schedule whereby we should be able to hold three or four days workshop at least twice or thrice in a year with the same group. We learnt that people could change at any time in their lives through reflective practice and conducive learning atmosphere.

So it is better to light a candle than curse darkness. We also need to develop an appropriate strategy to work with those participants who were passive and resistant and had difficulty in conceiving and appreciating change.

Conclusion

Senior education officers believe in having “absolute” authority which leads to a generally practised autocratic style of management. They believe that people have to take up the role of “heroic figures” for their teams in order to ensure efficiency and quality in education. Their perception of their role towards school improvement is also that of “know all figures” who are there to show the right path to their staff; school improvement, for them, is all about strict discipline, obedient students, submissive staff and the assurance of a process which leads to their desired outcomes i.e. reasonably good examination results. But after the completion of the programme, a significant difference was noted in their perspective, attitudes, professionalism and perception of school improvement. On day one of the programme, most of the participants believed to be either aggressive or passively resistant to change but as the programme went on they started critically reflecting on their existing management practices and exploring alternatives for further improvement. This indicates that the reflective practice helped them to change thinking and actions. Kouzes and Posner cite in Snowden and Gorton’s (1998, p. 68) mentioned that “successful leaders keep their promises, align their actions to be consistent with the wishes of the people they lead, believe in the inherent self-worth of others, are capable of making a difference in the lives of others, admit their mistakes, arouse optimism about success, and create a climate for learning characterized by trust and openness.”

Acknowledgement

We acknowledge and are thankful for the moral and professional support of the Bureau of Curriculum and Extension Wing Sindh, Jamshoro.

References


Training and Development Journal, April, pp. 34-35.


Van Velzen, W. et al., 1985, Making School Improvement work: Leuven: ACCO.