



A PARADIGM SHIFT IN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: PRINCIPALS' REFLECTIONS ABOUT THE PROGRAMME OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

W.M.S. Weerakoon, C. Hewapathirana, P. Ramathass, M.N.C. Fernando

Faculty of Education, The Open University of Sri Lanka

INTRODUCTION

School Management is a newly introduced programme by the Department of Educational Leadership and Management of the Faculty of Education, OUSL since 2022. This programme is offered in three mediums of instruction with the same content. The main purpose of introducing this is to develop and shape the knowledge, skills and attitude of participants in relation to the field of school management, enhancing the managerial and leadership skills and competencies to cater for the school's effectiveness. The school management programme provides a framework to foster the pedagogical change and professional development of school principals to improve the school's effectiveness. This programme was offered as an online programme and interactive contact sessions were conducted via zoom technology. The overall programme consisted of 12 activity-based sessions which were developed as Scenario Based Learning (SBL) pedagogy. This paper presents a study based on the first cycle of the programme which was introduced in January 2022. It explores principals' experiences and the reflections in the school management programme in enhancing their leadership and managerial skills and practices to improve their school effectiveness.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE & CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

School leadership

According to Miller (2018), school leadership has four dimensions, which are: social (focused on society), personal (leader's agency), environmental and relational. The research evidence suggests that school leaders have followed leadership through leading change, entrepreneurialism, partnership building and management, and policy management and implementation. Accordingly, building and sustaining leadership capacity was introduced with attention to three areas: (1) personal capacity and commitment to growth; (2) interactions and interpersonal capacity grounded in a culture of trust, collective responsibility and appreciation of diversity, and (3) organizational capacity in high functioning teams that take responsibility for a child-centred vision and help diffuse that vision throughout the school (Ylimaki and Brunderman, 2022).

Leadership is a critical aspect of all social endeavours. In schools, talented leadership is essential for student achievement. School leadership impacts all facets of education: teacher motivation, shaping the conditions and the environment in which teaching and learning occur, and interaction with the broader community. A large-scale six-year study reported by Louis et al (2010) covering 180 schools in 43 school districts in the US found that there is no single cause of a school improving its student achievement record in the absence of skilled school leadership. In many school systems, effective school leadership is far from the norm. It is often simply assumed that school leaders, irrespective of capacity, will discharge responsibilities and initiatives assigned to them. Moreover, programs to prepare and or support school leaders are either lacking or ineffective.

Stephen et al (2005) mention that successful school leaders influence student achievement through two important pathways — the support and development of effective teachers and the implementation of effective organizational processes. This consensus is increasingly reflected in preparation and licensing requirements, which generally subscribe to a set of common expectations for the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of school leaders.

Mathibe (2007) stated that leadership characteristics such as motivation and creating a vision are important. Many principals were described as strict, but they were specifically taking care of the learners in very difficult situations, which makes the difference that the schools in difficult socio-economic contexts are also able to perform. Principals can lead schools to improve the academic results by focusing on a people-oriented leadership approach with strong relationships between leaders and followers and intrinsic motivation as the key factors.

According to Dinham (2005) both subject departments and teams responsible for cross-school programs, leadership was found to be a key factor in the achievement of outstanding educational outcomes. Often, this leadership was exercised by the principal, but additional key personnel included Head Teachers (heads of faculties/departments), Deputy Principals, and teachers playing leading roles in faculties and programs. Analysis of data revealed certain attributes and practices of the principals of schools, which are explored, central to which is a focus on students and their learning.

William and Chua (2019) stated that school leadership is a key factor in the success of schools and educational system reforms. Furthermore, the quality of a school system rests on the quality of its school leaders, that is, high-performing school systems are good at focusing on three fundamental aspects of the education system: (1) Effective mechanism for teacher selection; (2) Effective processes for training and development of teachers; and (3) Effective systems and support structures. Accordingly, the leadership of the principal is one of the key factors in the successful implementation of educational reforms.

Pedagogical leadership

According to Whalan (2012), the three aspects of leadership aimed at school improvement: how school leaders in the schools participate in and support teacher learning for Quality Teaching; how they establish and communicate school goals and expectations for student learning; and how they structure professional development for program coherence to sustain school capacity to improve student learning. (see Figure 1)

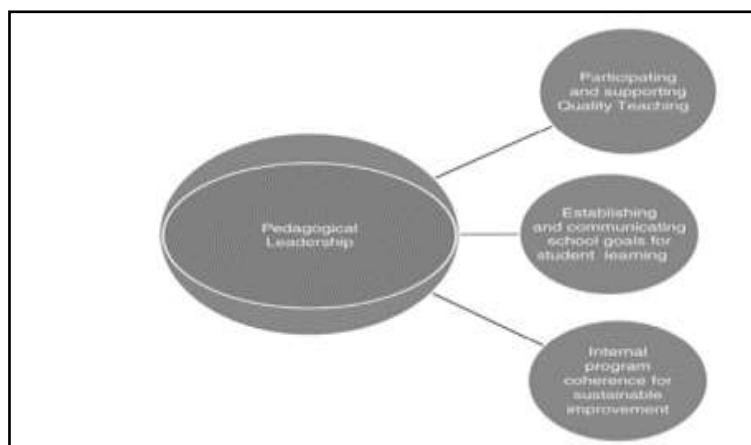


Figure 1: Aspects of pedagogical school leadership-Source - https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6091-882-7_8

Professional development

Professional development is defined as activities that develop an individual's skills, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics as a teacher.

In education, the term 'professional development' may be used about a wide variety of specialized training, formal education, or advanced professional learning intended to help administrators, teachers, and other educators improve their professional knowledge, competence, skill, and effectiveness. When the term is used in education contexts without



qualification, specific examples, or additional explanation, however, it may be difficult to determine precisely what “professional development” is referring to.

In practice, professional development for educators encompasses an extremely broad range of topics and formats. For example, professional-development experiences may be funded by the district, school, or state budgets and programs, or they may be supported by a foundation grant or other private funding source. They may range from a one-day conference to a two-week workshop to a multi-year advanced-degree program. They may be delivered in person or online, during the school day or outside of normal school hours, and through one-on-one interactions or in group situations. And they may be led and facilitated by educators within a school or provided by outside consultants or organizations hired by a school or district. The list of possible formats could go on. Mathibe (2007) identified the basic characteristics of an effective professional development programme for principals. Such a programme should have the following characteristics:

- It should be integrated with educational goals to improve education;
- It should be guided by a coherent long-term plan;
- It should be primarily school based;
- It should be continuous and ongoing, providing follow-up support for further learning; and
- It should be evaluated on the basis of its impact on school development and effectiveness.

According to him, the present school management programme compromises most of the above characteristics.

Nasreen et al (2018) identifies the areas for improvement in terms of the process of Continuous Professional Development. The data revealed that the principals were not satisfied with the current CPD opportunities and the content of the training programmes. In addition, the principals reported several constraints that they encountered in their pursuit of CPD, relating to time, finance and workload. This research provides distinctive findings that can enhance the development of CPD programmes for school principals in order to improve the quality of their leadership.

School effectiveness and principal’s role

According to Park, (2012), the leadership style of the principal significantly affects how the teachers perceive the school climate in terms of support for innovation. The principal’s leadership style as an initiator or a manager, rather than a responder, can provide support for an organizational climate that enhances innovation in schools. The principal’s primary marker of success is the improvement of student achievement and a small number of additional student outcomes such as high school graduation, college matriculation, college readiness, or attendance rates. All schools, irrespective of their high or low current achievement levels, can do measurably better.

Teacher Effectiveness- Teacher quality is the most important in-school factor relating to student achievement. Principals drive effectiveness through their role as a human capital manager – including teacher hiring, evaluation, professional development, retention, leadership development, and dismissal – and by providing instructional leadership. Ultimately, to increase student achievement school-wide, principals should be evaluated by their ability to increase the number of teachers rated as effective or highly effective once a system has been established that differentiates the performance of teachers based on rigorous, fair definitions of teacher effectiveness.

Leadership Actions- Principals must take effective action to reach these outcomes for student achievement and teacher effectiveness. When turning around low-performing schools, principals should receive a streamlined assessment of their progress in implementing the



highest priority principal actions and school-wide practices that have been shown to differentiate rapidly improving schools. The successfulness of principals as effective leaders depends on their background, experience, qualifications, capacities, and leadership practices that they apply. Principals' leadership role is extremely influential in achieving the mission and objectives of any school (Tschannen-Moran, Barr, 2004). Building sound leadership styles is a vital aspect for the effectiveness of an organization. Instructional and transformational leadership is associated with the strategic orientation of principals (Vekeman et al, 2016). Accordingly, programmes such as school management programmes can be contributed to enhancing the knowledge, capacities, and competencies related to school leadership.

METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How does the school management programme support enhancing the leadership and managerial skills of principals?
2. How do the experiences catered by the programme enhance the competencies of school leaders to support the effectiveness of managerial roles?
3. What are the difficulties encountered by school principals in implementing the intended competencies in the programme ?
4. What are the suggestions from principals to improve the school management programme ?

Research Design

The study adopted a survey research design. A survey has several characteristics and several claimed attractions: typically, it is used to scan a wide field of issues, populations, and programmes. In order to measure or describe any generalized features, it is useful (Morison, 1993:38-40). According to Weisberg et al (1996) Surveys are useful for gathering factual information, data on attitude and preferences, beliefs and predictions, behaviour and experiences-both past and present. The survey research design investigated the existing situation of the school management programme focusing on the principal's reflections that affected the effectiveness of the programme; and introducing an innovative framework and mechanism to improve the quality of the programme to cater to the professional development of principals. In the context of this study, the survey research design provided an appropriate and useful methodological framework, to review the effectiveness of the school leadership to upgrade and promote professional competencies and development through their active involvement in the school management programme. Accordingly, survey research design adopted for the current study provided an insight to systematically contextualize the existing trends in the phenomena and the various aspects in the school management programme offered by the Department of Educational leadership and Management

Participants

The school management program was introduced with a group of 75 principals as its first cycle. The following table shows the demographic information of the participants (N= 75). (See Table 1)



Table-01 Participants’ Distribution: Demographic characteristics of participants

Variables					Variables		N	%
1. Gender	N	%	N	%	2. Age	25 – 35 years	09	12
	M		F			36 – 45 years	27	36
	34	45	41	55		46 – 56 years	31	41
3. Academic Qualification		N	%	Above 55years		08	11	
G.C.E.A/l	18		24		4. Experience	Less than 5 years	20	27
Degree	40		53			5 – 10 years	29	39
Master	17		N			More than 10 years	26	34
5. Principal Grade	N	%		6. Professional Qualification	Trained Teacher	27	36	
SLPS -1	14		17		PGDE & PGDEM	48	64	
SLPS – 2	20		27		7. Type of School		N	%
SLPS – 3	21		28			1AB	21	28
Performing & other	20		27			1C	13	17
						Type 2	12	16
						Type 3	16	21
					Pvt+ International	13	17	

As shown in Table 1, about 45% of the participants were male and 55% were female. While considering the age limit of the participants 43% were between 25 to 48. Another 42% of the participants were between 46 to 55. According to the service of experience 66 % of the participants have less than 10 years’ experience. Another 44% of the participants have more than 10 years’ experience.

In Sri Lanka, schools are categorized into four (4) types. Accordingly, 28 % of the participants belong to 1AB schools, 17 % of the participants belong to the 1C schools. The other 37% of the participants belong to type 2 and type 3 schools. Also, another 17% of the participants represent the private and international schools. One foreign participant (1%) also followed this programme. When considering the academic qualification of the participants, 24% qualified in GCEA/L, 53% of the participants are degree holders and 23% of the participants have masters level qualifications. According to the professional qualification, 36% of the participants have trained teacher certificates. The other 64% of the participants have post-graduate-level professional qualifications.

This School Management Programme is specially introduced for the school principals and the other personnel related to the educational administration. According to this, 72% of the participants belong to the Sri Lanka Principal’s Service in grades 1, 2, and 3. Also, another 28% of the participants belong to the performing principal’s category and other managerial levels.

Collection and Analysis of Data

Multiple strategies were used for data collection throughout the process, including online questionnaires, self- reflections of principals. Mainly a quantitative approach was taken in the analysis of data, based on simple statistical analysis. Qualitative approach was also taken in the analysis of data based on thematic categorizing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RQ1- 1. How does the school management programme support enhancing the leadership and managerial skills of principals?



To answer this question, the online questionnaire and their reflections were employed where principals responded with knowledge and understanding they gained by participating in the school management programme. The analysis revealed principals' development of leadership and managerial skills around the content of programme related to school management.

Table 2: Principals' Responses to the contribution of the content knowledge to enhance the leadership and Managerial skills

To what extent do you think the learner support enhanced the leadership and managerial skills?	Rating Scale		
	To a large extent (%)	Somewhat (%)	Poor (%)
1. Activities given are tailored to the content being studied by the learner	80	17	3
2. Activities given are tailored to the problem being solved by the learner	78	18	4
3. Activities given are tailored to the task being completed by the learner	87	11	2
4. The content of sessions enable learners to practice new knowledge and skills	75	21	4
5. The actions support learners to discuss their own problem with peers	80	16	4
6. Learners are encouraged to share their views and experience in a collaborative learning environment	81	17	2

According to Table 2, the majority of principals (More than 80%) expressed that the content of the programme in relation to the school management has been supported in enhancing their leadership and managerial skills to a large extent. According to Table 2, content of the programme covers ten (10) separate aspects and the majority of principals were satisfied with the content knowledge covered by the programme.

Table 3: Principals' Responses about the learner support to enhance the leadership and managerial skills

To what extent do you think the following supports enhanced the leadership and managerial skills?	Rating Scale		
	To a large extent (%)	Somewhat (%)	Poor (%)
1. Novel characteristics have been incorporated in sessions	85	13	2
2. Abstract concepts (principles, rules, etc.) are illustrated with concrete, specific examples	80	16	4
3. The sessions in the programme are relevant	87	13	0
4. The sessions in the programme are updated	75	20	5
5. The time allocation for each session is sufficient	80	17	3
6. The sessions provide learners opportunities for reflection on their progress	82	16	2
7. Learning objectives of each session in the programme are clear to the learners]	78	17	5
8. The content of the sessions is organized in an appropriate sequence for flexible learning	85	13	2
9. The knowledge and skills gained by the learner help to improve the effectiveness of school management	76	20	4
10. The content of sessions provide support for learner to encounter issues meaningfully	77	17	6

According to Table 3, the majority of principals (over 80%) have expressed that the learner



support of the programme in relation to the school management programme has been highly effective in improving their leadership and managerial skills..

Table 4: Principals’ Responses about the online courseware to enhance the leadership and managerial skills

To what extent do you think the motivation to learn enhanced the leadership and managerial skills?	Rating Scale		
	To a large extent (%)	Somewhat (%)	Poor (%)
1.The content of sessions stimulate further inquiry	90	8	2
[2.The content of sessions are enjoyable and interesting for learners	85	13	2
3.The content of sessions provide opportunities to extend their experiences	87	11	2
4.The content of the sessions meet learners’ expectations	91	8	1
5.The content of sessions provide learner opportunities to make decisions	80	16	4
6. The content of sessions provide learner with experiences that promotes their success.	89	7	4
7. The content of sessions provide learners opportunities to engage in authentic situations	80	17	3
8. Facilitators adapt a variety of methodologies to motivate learners during sessions	85	10	5

According to Table 4, the majority of principals (over 80%) expressed that the online course of the programme in relation to the school management affected in enhancing their leadership and managerial skills to a large extent. It has supported them especially to engage in activities and upload their assessment activities on time. And the essential and additional learning resources provided under the online courseware are more useful for them to improve their knowledge and skills

Table 5: Principals’ Responses about the motivation to learn for enhancing the leadership and managerial skills

To what extent do you think the online courseware supports enhanced the leadership and managerial skills?	Rating Scale		
	To a large extent (%)	Somewhat (%)	Poor (%)
1.The online course is user friendly	78	20	2
2.Text (font, style, color, saturation) are easy to read on-screen	75	15	10
3.The important information are placed on the screen so that the participants can easily catch them	87	11	2
4.It is organized so that the learner can easily find the relevant text/content	75	20	5
5.The online course is free from technical problems (hyperlink errors, programming errors et	79	17	4
6.The online course provides access to a range of learning resources (web links, presentations, activities) appropriate to the learning context	80	16	4



Table number 5 describes the participant's motivation in the learning process. Accordingly, more than 85% of participants agreed with the statement that the content of sessions stimulates further inquiry. According to them, they have been guided. According to the responses provided under motivation to learn, the programme provides opportunities to extend their experiences (87%), content of the sessions meet learners' expectations (91%), the content of sessions provide learner opportunities to make decisions (80%) and, also provides learners with experiences that promote their success (89%). These statements revealed that the school management programme supports the enhancing leadership and managerial skills of principals.

The following reflections of principals emphasized how the school management programme contributes to develop their leadership and managerial skills

“To go through various other related sources to fulfill the pre- and post-activity requirements. That was a good opportunity [for us] to inquire bot the new knowledge on school management and leadership”

(EM/F/03)

“To get to know the new trends in school management from various perspectives”.

(SM/F/02)

“The content has been organized to keep the learners engaged in the course, with no any stress, so that they are gradually reaching the expected outcomes, step by step. Hence, the learning is somewhat joyful”

(TM/M/06)

Participants in the sample are happy about the possible linkage between the content of the course and their day- to- day experience. According to table number 5, 87% of participants agreed with the statement that the content of sessions provides opportunities to extend their experiences.

:

“The theoretical background provided here can be easily related to the day to day activities in our schools. [hence] [we] find the content facilitates [us] to get the practical experiences more meaningful”

(EM/F/03)

Furthermore, 91% of participants agreed with the statement that the content of the sessions meet learners' expectations. They find the content of the course is not conventional, as of many courses available locally in this regard.

“[we] are able to relate what we learn here to the day to day issues encountered by us. So, this course empowers us to be practical problem solvers, and that is what I actually need”

(TM/F/05)

According to the table, 85% of participants agreed with the statement that the facilitators adapt a variety of methodologies to motivate learners during sessions.

RQ 2: How do the experiences catered by the programme enhance the competencies of school leaders to support the effectiveness of the managerial roles?



To answer this question, principals’ self-reflections were used. Even though the pandemic and the socio economic situation of the country hampered the implementation of practices gained through the programme in schools, it has made a positive impact too. On the whole, the analysis of principals’ self-reflections demonstrates positive contributions of the school management programme in enhancing their leadership and managerial skills to support the effectiveness.

A summary of key points are listed below along with the quotes extracted from the self-reflections of the principals:

Table 6- Self-reflections and views of the principals about the school management programme

Positive Contributions of the programme	Excerpts from principal reflections
Realize the importance of content knowledge, and technological and pedagogical knowledge in relation to the field of school management	<i>“I gained lots of knowledge and experience related to the school management, that help me to effectively manage my school activities”</i>
Became aware of useful new concepts related to school management	<i>“Although I have ten years’ experience as principal in a leading school, I was able to aware on new concepts and practices related to the school management after participating the programme”</i>
Developed skills in online platform	<i>“This is my first experience in online education and it gave me a big opportunity to develop my digital learning skills”</i>
Supported professional development of principals	<i>“My managerial and leadership qualities were developed after participating the programme”</i>
Support improve the competencies related to the school management	<i>“This programme helped me not only to develop my leadership and managerial skills, IT knowledge but also the English language proficiency. I improved my knowledge and skills related to the internet searching also”. Online discussion form gives us the opportunity to share our views and ideas with other principals in various schools”</i>

RQ 3: What are the difficulties encountered by school principals in implementing the intended competencies in the programme ?

To answer this question, responses of the online questionnaire were used.

Overall the progress of the school management programme has been kept at the expected level. Various difficulties as reported by the participants, are summarized below.

1. The sudden closure of schools from time to time due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and socio-economic issue of the country.
2. Limited time to practice intended competencies in the programme due to heavy workload in schools, and personal issues.
3. Difficulty in building theory into practice due to some issues prevailing in the school culture
4. Limited resources available in the school.
5. Negative attitudes among students and teachers
6. Lack of proficiency among teachers

RQ 4: What are the suggestions from principals to improve the school management programme ?

To answer this question, responses of the online questionnaire were used. A summary of key points are listed below extracted from the responses of principals:



1. Use of case -study approach with scenario-based learning approaches for teaching - learning process to improve the quality of programme
2. Conducting of short sessions (3 hours) rather than conducting six-hour (6) sessions
3. Providing recording sessions and upload into LMS
4. Providing prior schedule for interactive sessions in advance
5. Organize face-to faces sessions at least for selected few sessions of the programme
6. Used more online tools to build the interaction more effectively
7. Providing a session for project management
8. Providing a session for school-based research

CONCLUSIONS/ RECOMMENDATION

Amid various challenges with the COVID-19 pandemic and the socio-economic issues of the country, the principals attempted to proceed with the school management programme in a smooth manner. While the adoption of practices in their schools has been quite slow, the school management programme has made principals realize the significance of improving their leadership and managerial skills to facilitate the school effectiveness. The findings revealed that the school management programme has supported principals to enhance their leadership and managerial skills. And also to improve their online learning skills, fostering school effectiveness. Even though the school management programme has made a positive impact on school principals, the Department envisage to address the issues emphasized by the principals and consider the suggestions made by them to improve the school management programme from the next cycle.

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