Full Length Research Paper

Professional preparation for school leaders in developing context: The case of Solomon Islands

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The aim of the present study was to explore the perceptions of the Solomon Island school leaders on the value of the leadership training and development programme which they completed. A qualitative research design was employed for the study. Interviews were conducted with the participants who attended the leadership training and development programme to gather data needed for the study. Analysis of the data showed that prior to the leadership training and development programme the school leaders faced a lot of challenges in leading their schools because they possessed limited knowledge and skills on leadership. On the other hand, the analysis of the data showed that the leadership training and development programme has contributed positively in meeting the myriad demands of work expected of them. The findings of the study have implications to the performances, in turn, productivity of those school leaders who have not gone through the leadership training and development programme. Added to that the findings have implications for the much needed support for school leaders especially the need to mount leadership training and development programmes for them to improve their knowledge, skills, attitude, beliefs and values in order to enhance school's overall performance.

Key words: Leadership training, school leaders, school improvement, Solomon Islands.

INTRODUCTION

There are many factors that contribute towards improving the quality of education. These are for example, classroom teachers, curriculum, educational resources, physical facilities and parental involvement. While the contribution of each of these factors to school improvement and effectiveness is vital, it is the school leader who makes the most difference in terms of school success. There is an abundance of research literature that demonstrates the centrality of the school leader's role in achieving qualitative growth in education (Bhindi and Duignan, 1997; Dinham, 2005; Loke, 2001; OECD, 2006). This is so because school leaders whether they are principals or head teachers are ultimately responsible for organising and managing all aspects of the school organisation. In this regard, school leaders must have the professional competence for the job, that is, the knowledge, skills together with desired attitudes and values in order to provide a sound direction to the school. Currently, people generally believe that schools

have good leaders but this does not appear to be the case in a number of educational settings especially in developing contexts. As a result there is rising concern about the way schools are led and managed in certain jurisdictions (Bhindi and Duignan, 1997; Sinclair, 2007; Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Therefore, the quality of the school organisation ultimately depends on the quality of the people, particularly the school leader. Thus, school leadership is of critical importance in terms of school improvement and in turn for qualitative growth in education (Clark and Clark, 1996; Loke, 2001). In spite of the importance for educational leadership, some contexts have just begun mounting leadership training and development programmes for educational leaders. In such contexts, it is important to explore school leaders' perceptions of work experience before and after the leadership training and development programme. In light of this, the present study explored school leaders' perceptions of their work experiences before and after taking a leadership training and development programme. The study examined the following central research question:

What do the school leaders' perceive of their professional practice before and after the leadership training and

development programme?

This study on leadership issue is significant in a number of ways especially for developing contexts. The majority of studies in educational leadership have documented the experiences of school leaders from developed countries such as USA, Canada, Great Britain, New Zealand and Australia. However, in small island states such as those in the Pacific region, not much is known about school leadership. This is due to the dearth of research literature on the subject. This study therefore, will help contribute to the development of knowledge and understanding on leadership in developing contexts.

The findings of the present study will hopefully act as a catalyst to other researchers to undertake further research on issues relating to educational leadership in developing contexts. This study provides useful insights about the work experiences of a group of heads of schools in the Solomon Islands.

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

As mentioned earlier, leadership has been consistently identified as an important area in school's performance (Busher and Harris, 2000; Dinham, 2005; Mortimore et al., 1988). As far back as the 1970s, in relation to ten good schools the following was stated, "Without exception the most important single factor in the success of those schools is the quality of leadership at the head" (DES, 1977; Northhouse, 2001: 68). Whether it is for the purpose of school effectiveness or school improvement, leadership is a vital ingredient (Clark et al., 1989). Likewise, Coleman (1994) also emphasised the strong connection between leadership and the effective school and school improvement. School leadership has a strong influence on teacher retention by creating a stimulating and support school culture, as well as helping to buffer teachers against pressures from different stakeholders such as parents and education authorities (Mulford, 2003). Skilled and talented school leaders can make a substantial difference to various aspects of school organisation, such as in terms of ownership and purpose in the way teachers handle their professional responsibilities, developing shared leadership and building collegiality, providing professional autonomy, developing professionally and helping teachers achieve job satisfaction. Over the years, school organisations have grown and at the same time increased in complexity and this has placed extra burdens on the position which is now seen as incorporating leaders and managements as well as traditional responsibilities of head teachers and principals (OECD, 2006). School leaders' roles and responsibilities are becoming more and more demanding as they are now expected to create a collaborative work ethos, acquire and to allocate resources, promote teacher professional development, improve students' performance, build effective community partnerships and manage innovation and reform (Drake and Roe, 2003; Pierce, 2000). It is that

without training, development of school leaders for leadership positions either at the system level or at the school level, school improvement and effectiveness will remain a chimera.

As it is, teachers who are promoted to leadership positions were once subject specialists at the secondary school level or generalist teaching at the primary school level. They were not trained as leaders and or managers. However, in the current turbulent and complex educational environment with varying demands and reforms placed upon schools the need for trained school leaders is warranted (Caldwell and Spinks, 1992). Leadership is a process that can be learned (Northhouse, 2001). The view that leaders are born and not made, that is, "the great man theory" does not hold water any longer in these rapidly changing times (Coleman, 1994). If leaders are born then it carries the implication that the stringent measures need to be put in place in the selection process. There may be certain characteristics which some people possess to become successful in leadership but a more realistic approach is to assume is that appropriate training and development is necessary to improve schools and in turn the quality of educational provision afforded to the children.

Effective school leaders can create a pleasant school climate that supports high expectations for learning, collegial relationships among all and commitment to school improvement (West-Burnham, 2009). Similarly, Edmonds (1979, 1982) found that school leaders play a crucial role in the area of teaching and learning. Cox (1983) considers that school improvement is engineered by school heads and it does not just happen. Thus school heads play a key role in school improvement. Fullan (1992) and Mortimore and his colleagues (1992) also claim that school leaders can aid school improvement.

In recent years, the exponential growth of external pressures emanating from different stakeholders on schools to perform better, the roles, functions and responsibilities of school leaders is becoming demanding and challenging (Boyd, 1999; Caldwell and Spinks, 1992; Schratz, 2003). Schools are being asked to do more with few resources such as funds and educational resource materials. Those who now take up the positions of school leaders are expected to be not only competent in their work but also have integrity, ethics incorporated, character, commitment and trustworthiness. Duignan and Bhindi (1997), referred to this type of leadership as authentic. Authenticity in leadership is now gaining momentum as it is recognised as an emerging perspective in school leadership in all contexts. The ethical dimension should be at the core of any effective school leadership. However, in some school settings the actions of school leaders fail to meet ethical standards in their dealings with the clients, namely, school children (Kutsyuruba et al., 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Therefore, if we want to improve our schools and for the children to receive quality education, we must ensure that our principals and head teachers are genuine about leading and managing our

schools.

Referring to the South Pacific region, various observers, researchers and commentators of education have highlighted the need for professionally competent school leaders in the education system (Chandra, 2004; Bacchus, 2000; Umaedi, 2000, Sharma, 2005, Lingam, 2010). They all have quite rightly commented that resources, facilities and curriculum for example, no matter how good they are, will not achieve desired results unless leaders at different levels of the education system are competent in their job. This particularly applies to leaders at the school level which are the sites where the actual educational policies and plans are implemented. It is the school leader who is responsible for the overall organisation and management of the various ingredients such as the human resources, material resources and facilities, the achievement of an optimum level of performance in all activities and spheres of the school.

In some educational contexts it has been identified that schools are not geared towards improving the quality of education. For example, Bacchus (2000: 141) reporting on the situation in Fiji emphasised the need to improve both the efficiency and effectiveness of the school system. He identified the need for "improving the system of supervision and monitoring of school performance, largely with the help of better trained head teachers/principals and education officers". The importance of quality leadership in schools was also emphasised in the Education Commission (2000) report:

> [School heads] set a critical level of expectation for their teaching staff. They can motivate and inspire teachers to perform to the best of their abilities. Conversely, if they adopt a laissez-faire attitude and take little active interest in the school, especially if they are frequently absent, standards alike.

The report goes on to state that the problem is aggravated by the shortage of suitable candidates for the school heads position. For example:

> Many of the low-achieving schools are led by principals who lack motivation, initiative and direction and are often overwhelmed by the school situation they are confronted with. They have a defeatist attitude from the start. Unfortunately, our rural Fijian secondary schools fall into this category.

Similarly, Weindling and Early (1987) for example, found in their study that newly appointed school heads faced considerable difficulties in introducing any changes directed at improving their school. This could be seen as implying that the new heads of schools lack self confidence and they appear to be happy with the maintenance type of school management. However, school leaders are not only responsible for maintaining the day-to-day running of the school but also should act as a change agent (Glatter, 1988).

It is, therefore, widely recognised that efforts are necessary to train and develop school leaders. A study conducted by Jones (1987) to identify the training needs of school heads found that all needed leadership training followed by the establishment of school ethos receptive to change, with proper training and development, school leaders can better organise, manage and lead their schools. Glatter (1987) suggested the training and development programme should consist of:

i) an adequate period of time for learning.
ii) scope for reflective learning.
iii) a focus on concrete situations.
iv) application of learning in collaboration with colleagues.

The last two aspects of learning are based on the work place and provide opportunities for heads to implement new knowledge and skills gained from the training and development programmes. In addition, Glatter (1987) goes on to suggest that development should be on-going that is, it should be a career-long training process. This is a valid suggestion as various changes occur with the passage of time that requires leaders to acquire new knowledge and skills. As suggested by Southworth (1993: 85):

> As leaders in school cope with all the educational and organisational changes which recent legislation has created, they may also need to contemplate changing the way they lead.

This is true as times are changing and calls emerge for changes in the way leaders lead and manage their schools. In the same vein, Murgatroyd and Gay (1984: 47-48) provided some useful tips about the leaders' training programmes:

> Finally, training for leadership cannot be normative, prescriptive, skill-based or problem-centred. Instead it needs to focus upon the personal and interpersonal qualities of the person. It needs to develop and sustain openness, empathy and warmth and to encourage exchange, acceptance and exploration. Though the aims may be pursued by means of studying specific problems or issues or by exploring key concepts and research, such training needs to be person-centred.

Such a training programme will then surely empower the leaders as they will find the programme meaningful in terms of their professional development and in turn the nature of work required of them to carry out.

Referring to the Scottish education system, Harvard (1992) reported a nation-wide management training programme for all school leaders in the 1990s. The programme consisted of eight management training modules: the principles of management, personnel management, managing the curriculum, management of

resources, financial management, monitoring school effectiveness, the school and the community and education and the law. All aspects are important for all newly promoted teachers to school leadership positions. England for example has a number programmes for the development of school leaders, such as the headship induction programme, the creation of the national professional qualifications for headship, and the establishment of the national college for school leadership (OECD, 2006). Likewise, Australia established the national institute for quality teaching and school leadership. Interestingly, Sweden has different more robust mechanism in place: recruitment of those who want to become school leaders; induction for those newly appointed; a national professional development programme after two years on the job; and ongoing career development, such as university courses and extensive support from professional associations of school leaders (Johansson, 2002). For United States, Goldstein (2001) reports training programmes in place for prospective principals. The programmes in each country emphasise certain aspects of leadership based on the requirements for the position in the specific national educational context. In developed countries, such United States, Australia, the United Kingdom and New Zealand a strong emphasis in training is on financial management.

In the case of Fiji, a small developing nation in the South Pacific, Bacchus (2000) recommended the establishment of a centre for educational leadership responsible for the professional development of heads of schools. Even though this relates to Fiji, the idea is relevant to other developing educational contexts working towards achieving quality education. Such programmes will enable school leaders to think deeply about the nature of their professional work. Contemporary attempts to provide training to school leaders either before, or soon after, assuming the position of responsibility will be a welcome move.

In the Southern hemisphere, The University of the South Pacific initiated the diploma in educational leadership and change programme which caters for the professional preparation of serving school leaders, aspiring leaders, educational planners and policy makers in the South Pacific region. In this eight-course programme, a course in the area of curriculum and another in educational research have been included to give the breadth of professional preparation due to the instructional role which school leaders are supposed to play.

The programme aims to extend knowledge on contemporary leadership practices in the region through theory, research and practice. The programme sets out to develop leadership skills in a range of spheres of school organisation including managing the school, organising the school, managing human resources, fostering accountability, managing change and encouraging community partnership in education. Additionally, those who study this programme can later conduct school-based leadership development programmes for aspiring leaders in their schools.

What then emerges from the foregoing exposition is that the concern for development and training for leaders of today's schools warrants due consideration. The educational reforms of recent years generally emanating from world-wide educational mega-trends such as concern for 'education for all', free education, compulsory education legislation and the demand for quality education calls for professionally prepared school leaders. Added to this is the emphasis on sustainable leadership (Hargreaves and Fink, 2003). This is supported by the manifold changes that come from within a context such as the national education plans and policies, school curricula, school governing bodies, parents, employers and others who have a vested interest in education, and the escalating social and legal accountabilities such as the current emphasis on child protection (Brady and Kennedy, 2003). The rapid rate of educational change requires continuous development of school heads (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991). As Leithwood (1992) emphasised career cycle development is one required in an era of continuous change in the educational environment rather than of a one-off staff development. The absence of training programmes for head teachers, principals and other educational leaders contributes inefficiency and ineffectiveness in the schools and the school system. In the Pacific region, Fiji, the Education Commission (2000) has expressed concern over the quality of leadership in schools. Considering the valuable role school leaders play in the success of schools, it is vital to determine the perceptions of school leaders in different jurisdictions, and in this case, Solomon Islands.

Study context

The Solomon Islands is a small developing nation in the South Pacific (Figure 1). The smallness of the society, approximately 500,000 inhabitants, has an impact on the promotion process. Promotion of the head teacher or school principal is usually from deputy positions, although in exceptional circumstances a classroom teacher may be promoted to principal or head teacher position. Promotion is usually based on the recommendation of the provisional education inspectorates and the final say rests with the Solomon Islands Teaching Service Commission. Applicants may be well known socially to school inspectorates and personal knowledge of individuals can affect the selection process and procedure. This is not uncommon in the Pacific due to its small population size and people tend to know each other. As Bray (1991: 21) pointed small countries, are "highly personalised societies in which people know each other in a multitude of settings, and in which relationships are longlasting". In this regard, some who are selected to lead schools may not even meet the qualifications as advertised for and Sanga (1992) reported such appointments as normal.
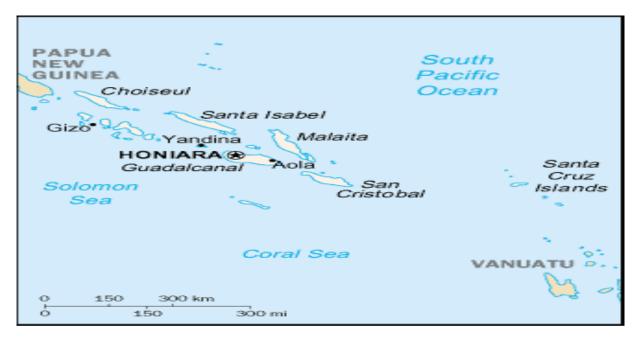
Figure 1. Solomon Islands in the South Pacific Ocean.

The leadership training programme

The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MEHRD) in the Solomon Islands secured funds from the New Zealand Government for the professional preparation of school leaders. The School of Education of the University of the South Pacific (USP) was contracted to provide training leading to the award of the diploma in educational leadership and change. The project commenced in July 2009. These types of training programmes for school leaders are readily available in many developed countries in universities and other tertiary institutions. Despite having the programme, the countries served by USP are not fully committed to the professional preparation of school leaders. One of the reasons could be the financial constraints and as a result they respond to the school leaders' professional preparation on ad hoc basis. Generally speaking, Sanga (1992: 4) pointed out that in the Solomons, "the responsibility of developing principals or potential principals professionally has never been an issue to question. No one had the resources to talk or do anything about it. One's own staff development used to be one's own responsibility". Through this programme it is envisaged that school leaders "attitude, work practices and world views based on conceptual understandings, reflective practice, and research-based knowledge can significantly influence organisational behaviour" and in turn further enhance the achievement of quality education (Velayutham, 1994: 78).

At the time of this study the school leaders had completed all the courses towards the programme. The programme consisted of eight courses. These courses were offered to them on face to face basis as well as through distance learning mode. All face to face delivery was conducted in Honiara, at the Solomon Islands USP campus. Face to face teaching was carried out during the school holidays for four weeks. After completing the 4 weeks, the school leaders then go back to their respective schools and complete another course using a distance learning mode. As mentioned, the courses were run consecutively using face to face and distance learning mode.

METHODS

The focus of this investigation was on the perceptions of school leaders on their work experiences before and after completing the training and development programme. Since the main objective was to gain an understanding of the experiences about these school leaders work practices, using interviews as a method of data collection was considered useful and appropriate (Burns, 1998). The interviews were all tape recorded with the permission of the participants and later transcribed. The interviews were conversational type and did not follow a prescribed interview schedule (Creswell, 1998). Guided by the research question, a set of checklist of topics were identified and questions framed around these. Each interview was unique and participants led the conversation and determined the direction of the interview. These interviews provided valuable insights about their work practices relating to school leadership before and after the training and development programme.

The task of analysing the data was undertaken using low-tech method, that is, the analysis was carried out manually (Vulliamy and Webb, 1992). Since all the data collected were qualitative in nature, they were analysed and categorised on the basis of themes that emerged (Patton, 1990). The use of quotes from the interviews follows the suggestions of Rudduck (1993: 19) that "some statements carry a remarkably rich density of meaning in a few words". In presenting the interview data, the respondents' confidentiality was maintained as recommended in the literature (Gay and Airasian, 2000).

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Participants

There were 35 participants altogether in the training and development programme. Of the 35 participants, 11 were females and 24 were males. In terms of qualification, 28 participants had teachers' certificate with the exception of 7 participants who had diploma level qualifications. Most of these participants were from the remote island schools. For instance two participants were from an island where no other transport services are available except by ship which makes about two trips annually. These participants came to Honiara in 2009 and remained in Honiara till they completed the programme and then they returned to their remote island school. The participants in the study represented schools of varying size and settings with the Solomon Islands.

FINDINGS

As mentioned earlier, the intention behind this study was to determine perceptions of school leaders on school management practices before and after completing the training and development programme. From the analysis of the interviews a number of themes emerged and these are presented in this segment.

Without professional training

One of the most emphatic findings and endorsed by all (100%) of the participants was that they experienced difficulties in effectively managing the various spheres of their school organisation. Some of the broad categories identified were organising the school, time management, managing human resources, fostering accountability, managing change and community participation in education.

For example, some of them (60%) experienced problems with time management. In particular, time management is important when a school organisation has to operate within a certain time-frame and the school leaders need to oversee that all school activities are carried out at a specified time. The feedback from the participants demonstrates poor time management. For example:

> One very clear aspect of management which I see that I need to improve on is time management. It is common in the Solomon Islands context that time is not taken seriously as a non-renewable resource that needs to be utilised in an optimum way. The Solomon Islands time is something that is common in every level of the education sector.

> One of the difficulties I have faced is time management…Few days after the reminder everybody will be punctual but as time goes by it will slowly fade away.

In facilitating the work of the school, a good leader will always try to delegate in a judicious way duties and responsibilities so that the school work is carried out with minimal stress. Participation in the management of the school is something to be expected of all staff, but whether this occurs depends on how the school leader utilises the potential of the staff. Since the participants (50 %) did not know much about delegation they faced difficulties in allocating duties and responsibilities. As some of the participants commented:

> The first two years of my nine years holding the post of head teacher were the most challenging years of my career. I did all the planning myself. I recalled many sleepless nights trying to plan and organise the school...After attending some organised workshops for head teachers and organised curriculum workshops I made some improvements.

> During my leadership at the school level I managed very little roles without wider knowledge...and was not to the standard of really managing a school.

The lack of management skills and competencies were highlighted by all (100%) the participants. These were in areas such as managing human resources, decision-making, and community participation in education. Some of the participants substantiated this perception pointing out that:

> In reality, I had been operating and managing my school on ad hoc basis.

> 2008 was my first year to lead and manage the school and I confront lots of difficulties due to my limitations of skills and knowledge of leadership.

> As a school leader, I have been faced with many difficulties...how to manage the staff members and students...this is the toughest challenge I have ever faced. I failed to manage staff members because of little knowledge and skills of human resource management.

> To be truthful, throughout Gela Island or Central province as a whole none other than me is a female head teacher...Being a female leader in the school with most male teachers is always challenging especially looking at cultural values and traditions. In times of decision-making they were always made according to the men's interests, ideas and views. Having no understanding of quality leadership is the greatest challenge. Teaching and getting a post of responsibility without taking a formal leadership course is very unsure about work.

> Found difficulties to manage the staff...senior teachers who had served long in school would not cooperate.

Some (60%) participants had no idea that they could network with the community who would then assist the

school in several ways. Community involvement in school work can facilitate school's performance in all areas. Thus community input in school work is vital, but the participants' limited knowledge was a hindrance in establishing a healthy relationship with the community for the purpose of making the school a more productive place for learning. As some participants remarked:

> Before attending this course I had no idea of what difference leadership will make towards quality education. I had very limited ideas on community participation and human resource management.

> I face many challenges. The first thing is my leadership. I see myself not very efficient in leadership as I judge myself as a worker teacher. Staying in a remote area I have to paddle every morning to school due to no accommodation at school, paddling about forty minutes every morning. I some times come late to school. Although I am late to school, I will also go out of school first.

> I just run the school for the purpose of running the school with experience... basically in wider context of school management is very much lacking and during those days in the teachers college they did not focus very much on whole school management...As I have said, during those early years in the position I have been working on ad hoc basis.

> I had difficulties understanding what quality education was about. I could not develop my school vision and faced difficulties in building relationship with the community.

For some (45%) participants, they had no idea how they were selected to become school leaders. They were trained to be classroom teachers and not specifically trained to manage a school organisation. This sentiment was expressed by one in the following way:

> As a school head I do not know about what a leader is supposed to be doing...I do not know how I was picked to take up such a responsibility...To tell the truth I was trained to teach inside the classroom and for 17 years I have been teaching and know nothing about school management because we were never been introduced or at least have a bit of knowledge about from our college lecturers.

> I tell that I could not do a lot of things for my school because of not knowing them.

After completing professional training

From the feedback it was evident that the training and development programme was endorsed as useful by all (100%) the participants. They perceived that the programme was well aligned with their work requirements and it has helped them to gain professional knowledge regarding overall management of a school. For instance, some of the comments demonstrate this satisfaction:

> The course has enlightened me towards my path to quality leadership.

> To be honest, the course has broaden my knowledge on some of the contributing factors that will hinder achieving quality education in our schools...it's high time that we must work on school leadership to improve school organisation and management in order to achieve quality education.

> Now after going through this course on school organisation and management, I have the courage and ideas of how to minimise the difficulties and I wish if I could go back to 1987 to start again especially after going through this programme.

> Studying this course it really helps a lot. The course gives me new ideas of dealing with different kind of situations in school. The course helps me to be confident in my school responsibilities...it helps me know how to manage a school properly and in a *wantok* or relative system.

> Since I have gone through the course I have learnt a lot from it especially about leadership and management. Managing human resources, maintaining healthy partnership with parents and communities... To be honest I really gained a lot of new knowledge, skills and techniques from this course. I will try my best to put into practise what I have learnt to achieve the goals of my school.

> I am learning quite a lot of good things from this course and it will certainly help me my school leadership, children in school and my community.

> Now I am well equipped with better approaches... to help in managing a school. The course has given me a lot of good ideas about school management which can contribute towards quality education.

> The course is about everything a school leader needs to know about on all school aspects...I will try to utilise to the fullest the knowledge and skills learnt in this course.

> Now I am fully equipped with a lot of strategies of organising and managing a school... I know now the importance of having a positive school climate and good leadership skills.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study explored school leaders' perceptions on the value of the leadership training and development programme. Feedback from the participants indicated that

they had been promoted to principal or head teacher positions based on their teaching experience and seniority. Prior to training and development programme none of them had any formal preparation for the leadership positions in schools both for primary and secondary. Added to this, the pre-service teacher education programme which they completed did not consist of any component on school leadership. Therefore, all of them were drawn straight from the classroom to become either a principal or head teacher. This is consistent with the views expressed by Sanga (1992) and despite two decades, the procedure adopted still persists.

The analysis of the feedback demonstrated the difficulties faced by most of the leaders in effectively carrying out their leadership roles. One of the school leaders pointed out about late arrival and early departure from school. This does not demonstrate authentic leadership qualities as suggested in the literature (Duignan and Bhindi, 1997) or ethical standards (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Majority of them lacked relevant knowledge and skills to run the school. This study showed that the school leaders for example, lacked time management skills, faced difficulties in managing staff, involving community participation in school work and faced difficulties in decision-making.

These are important areas and as such possessing relevant knowledge and skills in these areas can contribute towards school effectiveness (Harvard, 1992; West-Burnham, 2009). Such school leaders could be referred to as 'half baked' school leaders. This was because none of them were professionally prepared for the job and as such displayed sub-standard performance. All aspects of the school organisation are interconnected and together they all contribute towards either success or failure of a school organisation with the leader having a strong influence (Cox, 1983). As such failure in one aspect could affect other aspects and in turn lead to overall failure. However, from the research findings it was evident that prior to the training and development programme most of the school leaders were operating on 'hit' or 'miss' basis. Some of them operated the school on the basis of whatever little experiences they had and wished that they had this training and development programme long time ago. Without proper training and the development of school leaders, schools would suffer in a range of ways. This is consistent with the views expressed in the literature about the need for the initial training of school leaders and ongoing career cycle development (Caldwell and Spinks, 1992; Johansson, 2002; Leithwood, 1992).

In light of the myriad demands of work expected of school leaders in contemporary times, training and development of school leaders is even more important. Also, in this day and age considerable changes are taking place in the education system which warrants new knowledge and skills to effectively manage schools (Drake and Roe, 2003; Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991; Glatter, 1987; Johansson, 2002; Pierce, 2000). School leaders need suitable managerial knowledge and skills to effectively carry out multitude of roles and responsibilities required of them. Literature demonstrates relevant knowledge of the school leaders' myriad work and management skills and competencies are vital in order to operate school organisation successfully (Murgatroyd and Early, 1987; West-Burnham, 2009).

Apart from suitable personal attributes which all of the school leaders in this study appeared to possess some technical skills, such as controlling the school budget and preparing the master time table to guide teaching and learning, the feedback indicated that they lacked managerial skills. As mentioned earlier some of the broad range of areas of work expected of school leaders include, organising the school, managing human resources, fostering accountability, managing change and community participation in education and all these are becoming more demanding (OECD, 2006). However, the feedback obtained from the participants clearly indicated pre-existing lack of relevant knowledge and skills to effectively undertake managerial and administrative responsibilities. School leaders are in the situation where most educational plans and policies are implemented and if they do not know how to effectively carry out their roles and responsibilities then surely children will ultimately suffer in their learning.

Following their study in the leadership training and development programme, the participants reported that they gained a lot in terms of effectively undertaking both managerial and administrative duties and responsibilities. This showed that they valued the training and development programme. For school leaders today, competence in managerial tasks is imperative for the purpose of achieving school development planning and other associated aspects related to school improvement. The training and development programme therefore helped to uplift the participants in terms of knowledge and skills to manage and lead their schools. The training and development programme thus contributed positively towards school leaders' preparation for leading schools (Hallinger, 2003; Velayutham, 1994). The findings lend support to the ideas expressed in the literature about the importance and need for better leadership training to ensure the implementation of effective educational practices (Clark and Clark, 1996; Caldwell and Spinks, 1992; Johansson, 2002; Leithwood, 1992).

The Solomon Islands situation is likely to be reflected in other countries in the Region and beyond if school leaders are appointed to lead schools without any professional preparation. Not only will impoverished leaders impact negatively on the running of the institution but also adversely impact on children's education and their future opportunities in life. The study demonstrated that trait perspective which is normally described in statements such as "he is born to be a leader" or "she is a natural leader" is not enough given the intensification of school leaders' work in contemporary times. The principal stakeholders, namely Education Department need to invest in school leaders to enable them to learn about what is required of them on the job so as to make school become more productive

and in turn provide a high quality of education to the children. In this regard school leaders play a vital role and the need for them to have access to suitable training and on-going professional development deserves special attention.

The literature illustrates that school leaders are overall responsible for the effective and efficient running of the schools and the part they play in schools can contribute towards success or failure in achieving quality education. They can be successful in carrying out their responsibilities if and only if they are able to manage and organise the school, manage human resources, encourage community participation, manage change and by fostering accountability. All these areas and others intimately and collectively contribute towards school effectiveness and school improvement. However, lack of knowledge and skills in these areas as shown in the study were obstacles to creating an effective school and in turn a hindrance to achieving quality education in the small island state of Oceania. Furthermore, one off training is not enough but on-going training and renewal of school leaders is vital for qualitative improvement and at the same time for continuous development in education.

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