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**TITLE**

**Leadership Development in the Seychelles: Recruitment, Experience and Impact**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In common with many other countries, criteria for appointment as a head teacher in the Seychelles was not formalised but, in practice, promotion was based mainly on teaching qualifications and experience, level of commitment shown to education and contributions made to public life.

Since 2002, educational leadership training has been offered to senior school leaders through a partnership between Seychelles and UK universities but it is not clear whether these qualifications enable head teachers to lead their institutions effectively. In practice, the acquisition of such training is being considered in the selection and appointment of senior school leaders but this is not an official policy.

This paper reports research focused on people in headship and other senior leadership positions in Seychelles who have followed one of these programmes. The project is an evaluation of the leadership development project designed to inform senior ministry officials of its impact.

In a survey involving 100% of these trained leaders, the interview responses highlight issues related to the basis of their selection for training and subsequent appointment in post; their training experiences, the extent to which they have been able to put into practice what they have learnt, and how their learning has impacted on their respective schools. Responses obtained from senior Ministry officials show how the trained leaders' performance after training is perceived within the Ministry.

## **KEY WORDS**

Leadership, Development, Recruitment

Experience, Practice

Impact

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **The Seychelles Context**

The Republic of Seychelles is one of the smallest island developing state (SIDS) in the world. This is partly because it has a very small economy and depends largely on tourism, with a total population of 85,000. The Seychellois people are trilingual whereby they can speak and write in Creole, English and French (Seychelles in Figures, 2002).

The Seychelles government has in the past few years engaged in the quest to bring about positive change and improvement in the performance of schools through its leaders, and through leadership development.

Seychelles is characterized by a highly centralized and bureaucratic education system. The Ministry of Education regulates school activities through the headteachers and controls facilities, resources, staffing, and budgetary allocation. The intention is to provide equal opportunities for all and to distribute resources equitably (Leste, 2002).

In common with many other countries, criteria for appointment as a head teacher in the Seychelles is not formalised but, in practice, promotion is based mainly on teaching qualifications and experience, level of commitment shown to education and contributions made to public life.

Since 2002, educational leadership training has been offered to senior school leaders through a partnership between Seychelles and UK universities but it is not clear whether these qualifications enable head teachers to lead their institutions effectively. In practice, the acquisition of such training is being considered in the selection and appointment of senior school leaders but this is not an official policy.

### **The Purpose of the Research**

Developing school leaders in order to bring about improvement in school outcomes has become a priority for many developed and developing countries around the world. Seychelles and has recently invested much in the partial development of its leaders.

The term 'partial' is used as there are aspects of leadership development that are still untapped.

This research is partly an evaluation of the leadership development project, designed to inform the Minister and senior Ministry officials of its impact in line with the project goals. The research focuses on leadership development, notably on people in headship and other senior leadership positions in educational institutions in the Seychelles who have taken one or more of these partnership programmes.

## **LITERATURE**

The role of school leaders has changed over time, with a radical shift from administering the education system to one of leading and managing it (Adair 1998, Bush 2003). A lot of research has been carried out and literature published on educational issues such as professional development and training of people with key roles in the management, planning and finance of educational institutions (Bush & Jackson, 2002; Blandford and Squire, 2002; Brundrett, 2001; Jenkins, 1997).

Adair (1998) argues that it is unfair, if not immoral, to give a person a leadership job without giving him or her some training for leadership. It is unfair on that person, but it is even rougher for those whom he is expected to lead (ibid). Heads require subject degree qualifications, teaching certificates, experience of classroom teaching, expertise in managing people, organizational and communications skills (MacBeth and Myers, 1999). These are obtainable qualities that all stakeholders in education expect from the people leading educational institutions.

High-quality leadership is widely acknowledged to be one of the most important requirements for successful schools (Bush and Jackson, 2002). However, much less is known about what forms of leadership development produce enhanced leadership that leads to school improvement (Bush and Glover, 2004).

Given that people are the most important resource in educational organizations, it is a truism to say that appointing such people is the most important task that managers undertake (Middlewood, 1997). The task itself involves encouraging the 'best' people for the job (ibid) but that is not always easy, especially for countries, such as the

Seychelles, where the selection criteria are not officially documented and the posts are not advertised.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **The Research approach**

The approach chosen for this research is primarily interpretive or qualitative. This is because the study involves people as subjects rather than objects of the research. It deals with human experience and offers an insight into the real dynamics of situations and people (Cohen et al. 2000).

A survey was conducted with the aim of obtaining a large amount of information, with the possibility of not simply describing what had happened but to also provide explanation as to why it happened (Johnson, 1994). This approach was selected with the intention of using the information to ascertain facts and opinion so as to generalise in a valid way (De Vaus, 1991 and Bell, 1993).

### **Data collection method used**

Semi-structured interview was the main method of collecting data from participants. They were all asked the same questions in, as far as possible, the same circumstances for standardisation purpose. In conducting the interviews, knowledge was gained of the trained leaders' experience of their training and how the training has influenced their leadership practices, as well as the impact of such practices. It has also provided the basis for a better understanding of how senior school leaders are selected for training, for appointment and of other related issues of induction and mentoring based on insights from officials and senior leaders.

Considering the limitations of the chosen approach and method of collecting data, through good use of interviewing techniques, greater depth was achieved. Being an 'insider' researcher, some limitations of survey research were eliminated. This was particularly helpful with respondents in need of encouragement and a sense of rapport in order to provide factual information and opinion on sensitive issues. As surveys often do not have the flexibility to provide this kind of supportive atmosphere, it is

sometimes unsuitable for ‘sensitive’ issues (Cohen and Manion, 1994). However, this was not the case in this research as less ‘sensitive’ issues to do with leaders’ training and professional experience were being discussed.

### **The sample**

100% of the population of trained leaders in (a total of 46 MBA/MA course participants) in educational institutions were interviewed for the survey, and 10 senior MOE officials relevant to this enquiry.

## **INTERIM FINDINGS**

The research is still in progress. For the purpose of this paper the survey findings obtained so far are analysed using a thematic approach. The participants’ responses from all four cohorts are summarised and presented in a generalised manner as differences in opinion among cohorts were minimal. Inputs from senior MOE officials are also included where relevant.

### **General information and career progression of the survey participants**

Currently, out of the 46 survey participants (100% of leaders trained); 76% are institution based, 20% system based (Ministry of Education headquarter), 2% outside the country and 2% at Community level. 78% of the participants are female and 22% male. This is because, unlike most countries, there are more female leaders in Seychelles than male. Their age ranges from 30 - 60 years, with 26% in the age range of 30 - 40 years and 74% in the range 40 – 60 years.

The majority of them have a career progression ranging from a primary school teacher to studies coordinator and to headship, including few of them up to director level at the Ministry of Education (MOE) headquarter. Some once qualified with a degree as a primary teacher were deployed to teach at secondary level and climbed up the hierarchy ladder from middle leader to headship, with A few in post secondary institutions and at the MOE.

## **Recruitment for Leadership Training**

All survey participants believe that their selection was based on one or more of the following criteria:

- A practising senior leader
- Academic qualification
- Teaching experience / years in the service or experience as a leader
- Display of leadership qualities, dedication and commitment
- Recommendation based on performance and aptitude
- Personal interest

However, the MOE criteria for identification of leaders for training is not clear based on current practices and respondents listed practising leaders, years of experience and academic qualification as the main criteria. These are similar to those stated by MOE senior officials along with appraisal performance and recommendation from immediate supervisor. Participants went through a similar process upon recruitment involving contact with senior MOE officials to be informed of their selection followed by a short meeting (for some) and filling of forms, and 86% were inducted prior to the training proper.

## **Expectations and Participants' Training Experience**

### *Expectations*

In terms of participants' expectation of the Ministry once enrolled in the programme and after completion of the programme; 90% stated that the MOE expected them to successfully complete the course, go back to school and to put into practice what they have learnt so as to bring about positive change. While their expectations of the MOE were more to do with financial and emotional support, provision of learning resources and efficient internet facilities, a salary increase or incentive, continuous professional development, ongoing support and provision of resources, were strong expectations of the MOE upon completion of the training. 50% of the participants were clearly aware of the MOE expectations of them prior to enrolment on the programme. The

majority expectations of the training programme itself were to empower them with the necessary knowledge and skills to lead educational institutions more effectively and to empower others to perform their duties better.

### *Training Experiences*

With minimal differences in opinion among the cohorts, the most valuable aspects of the training programme were perceived to be:

- The modules which covered a wide aspect of educational leadership
- The International Experience Programme
- The Leadership Journal for professional growth
- The relationship and interactions with lecturers, tutors and colleagues
- The independent study
- Objective discussion, reflection and sharing of experience
- The research aspect of the course in choosing own topics and method
- The level of thinking in critically analysing issues in education in lectures

Strategic and development planning, high performance and teams, organisations and change, leadership and quality in education, and managing people are the most valuable course topics for the majority of participants. The least valuable aspects of the programme according to the participants are:

- Access to text books, journal articles and library facilities initially
- Space and lack of facilities for internet access, printing and photocopying
- The financial and research aspect of the International experience programme
- Lack of regular contact on a one to one basis with tutors
- Lack of local empirical evidence
- The amount of assignments given and submission deadline
- The intensive study school programme initially

They mentioned finance and marketing as the least valuable course topics due to lack of specificity of issues to small islands developing states (SIDS), the context of a highly centralised education system, and local empirical evidence.

### ***Skills Development***

Based on their experiences, all participants stated that they are different professionally in terms of: being more knowledgeable, more assertive and confident, in their dealing with people, planning and implementation of tasks. Through vision building, delegation of duties, staff empowerment, good communication, building trust and effective teams, and involvement of staff, parents and students in decision-making and school activities, they all feel they are better leaders. All participants stated that they have developed leadership and research skills. Other popular skills mentioned are communication, interpersonal skills, planning and organisation, and ICT.

### **Identification for Post Training Roles**

According to senior MOE officials, the leadership training programme is an in-service programme, targeting practising senior leaders in educational institutions and system based. After following one of the leadership training programmes, 48% of the participants were promoted to a more senior leadership post and 50% retained their leadership post as Head teacher, Deputy Head, Education coordinator or Director. The majority of participants that changed roles believe that their identification was based on the following criteria:

- Successful completion of the training programme.
- Deployment of other senior leaders to attend leadership training so there were vacancies to be filled
- Experience as a senior leader
- Leadership qualities displayed and commitment

### **Impact of Leadership Development on Leadership Practice**

According to the majority of participants, they have been able to put into practice two or more of the following aspects of the training programme course content:

- Effective team building
- Delegation of duties and involvement of staff in decision making through distributed leadership style adopted

- Empowerment of their staff in school-based training sessions through transformational leadership style adopted
- Sharing of knowledge and experience acquired through tutoring, module writing and facilitating sessions
- Empowerment of leaders at MOE level through training and networking session
- Involvement of school leaders in decision making at MOE level
- Conceptualise and implement small projects at MOE level involving school leaders
- Monitoring of teaching and learning through classroom visits and records check – instructional leadership
- Staff motivation
- Better ways of keeping records
- Induction and mentoring of teachers
- Conduction of termly performance review of staff
- Involvement of parents and students in school activities decisions, through committees and bodies
- Marketing of their school by sharing their achievement and good practices through meetings and open days, newsletter publication, participation in networking sessions and forums.

As a result of these modified practices through various strategies employed, the participants expressed the following as observable changes that have taken place:

- Noticeable improvement in; cleanliness of institution environment, noise level, attractiveness of compound and buildings
- Less conflicts among staff, students and with parents
- More collaborative team work, thus tasks get done
- Middle leaders and teachers are more confident to carry out delegated tasks
- Students bring out their concerns to staff members
- More parents participation in institution activities
- Less vandalism and wastage
- Mutual respect among senior institution leaders and senior MOE officials
- Improvement in teacher attendance and punctuality

- Improvement noticed in students performance in certain subject areas
- More institutions are sharing their concerns and achievement to students and parents, some even in the media
- More institutions are publishing newsletters and MOE as well
- School leaders are more open to criticise and assertive enough to question decisions taken at MOE level.
- More team planning at MOE and institution level

The senior MOE officials interviewed acknowledged certain of the noticeable changes listed above and the fact that some of the leaders are putting into practice what they have learnt. Most of them feel however, that such changes are not impacting much on teaching and learning so as to bring about noticeable improvement in students' performance. They believe that if trained leaders were more pro-active and innovative enough especially in getting all partners in education on board especially the community; they could make much difference in school outcomes. They stated that although they are knowledgeable and have recognised status as leaders; social ills, to be accountable for the performance of their school and implementing strategies for change in the improvement of their school by putting into practice what they have learnt, are the trained leaders biggest challenges.

### **Programme completion and Leadership effectiveness**

About 6 % of participants interviewed stated that they followed a brief and informal induction programme prior to deployment and 4 % were informally mentored once deployed. In terms of the support that was made available to them in order to facilitate smooth transition to their leadership post, the majority of participants that were promoted after training received little support. They stated regular visit by Education coordinators and meetings with senior MOE officials whereby advice and backing of their initiatives were provided. This shows that there is a lack of a proper induction and mentoring programme, and limited appropriate support for enhancement of senior school leaders' effectiveness. Although there is the perception among senior MOE officials that trained leaders are provided with ample amount of support but acknowledge that there is no proper induction and mentoring of leaders.

## **Ongoing Support and Professional Development**

Very few participants acknowledged the existence of structures at MOE level that provide ongoing support and professionally develop graduate leaders. Although some stated that Education coordinators regularly visit them and conduct training and networking sessions, these are not supportive and do not necessarily develop them professionally. However, the majority believes that several strategies are employed by the MOE to professionally develop them, although very few qualified leaders are involved. They stated:

- Network and linkage with other organisations locally and abroad although funding is sometimes lacking
- Create opportunities to participate and present research findings in workshops forum and conferences locally and internationally whereby your expertise is exploited, shared, valued and in some way consolidated
- Participate in projects at MOE and school level
- To pilot research at school level
- Involvement in committees and working group at MOE level to conceptualise project, write policy guidelines and evaluate projects
- Tutor leaders enrolled in the training programme
- Facilitate training sessions for leaders
- If opportunity arises one can be sent for short specialised training abroad.

## **DISCUSSION**

The interim findings show that, in the Seychelles, selection of leaders for training is not influenced by gender, age, marital status, or ethnicity. The fact that the criteria for selection are not officially published may cause speculation among selected leaders as to why he/she has been selected. So it is important to have an agreed official list of criteria for the country.

Providing leadership training, taking into consideration the specificity of the country of origin of the participants and the type of education system, is valuable as small islands developing states encounter several constraints and limited provision for

higher education. Financial consideration is vital in ensuring that the main resources and facilities are in place to facilitate knowledge acquisition and skills development to take place, especially as contact with lecturers and tutors between study schools is through internet facilities.

The findings also highlighted the need for leaders to be properly inducted prior to deployment and to be mentored once deployed, which have shown to be lacking. This is an area of weakness on the part of the MOE to ensure that trained leaders are supported to attract them to remain in post. The provision of leadership training for leaders in small island developing states like the Seychelles is a huge investment. But training leaders without the necessary ongoing provision to enhance their leadership effectiveness, there is little chance that they will be able to bring about change to make a positive difference in school outcomes. The need to retain trained leaders is crucial, and ongoing support alongside continuous professional development must be ensured for them to be in a more favourable position to put into practice what they have learnt.

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