PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING OF SCHOOL MANAGERS: A VIEW FROM THE INSIDE

Dimitrios Vlachopoulos¹, Agoritsa Makri²

¹ Laureate Online Education (NETHERLANDS)
² European University Cyprus (CYPRUS)

Abstract

The current competitive context, as well as the need for accountability in education, highlight the importance of modernisation of educational management by improving the quality of educational practitioners’ performance, aiming at a culture of collective school effectiveness. In this context, a key role is played by the school leaders, who take on multiple roles, alternating between educational visionaries and agents of change when dealing with curriculum experts, evaluation advocates, budget analysts, facilities’ managers, special programme managers and school community builders. Since school managers are one of the main factors for success at a school, they need to receive support to achieve maximum administrative and pedagogical efficiency through investment in targeted professional development/training. The purpose of this article is to provide guidelines for the design of professional development/training programs through an extensive literature review. It is a qualitative review of the concepts, definitions, and approaches about further training and professional development, as they have globally appeared in peer-reviewed journals, government reports, and web pages. As we left no stone unturned in enquiring regarding the meanings, uses, evolution, and applicability of the revealed variables, it is our hope that this study will guide future research and support policy-making in the field.

Keywords: Professional development, training needs, school managers, standards, policies.

1 INTRODUCTION

Further training is not only a multifaceted term, but also one that is difficult to define conceptually. The majority of scholars view further training as an organised and continuous process designed to meet the training needs of an individual or a group of individuals by enhancing their capabilities and knowledge, while improving their skills and competencies. The ultimate goal of further training is to meet the organisation’s needs by improving employee performance, increasing labour productivity and supporting personal development [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]

Further training is closely linked with the term professional development due to the fact that, in the context of acquiring necessary expertise, it refers to the current process of learning and responding in the course of an individual’s overall career progress and development [6]. Further training is concerned with the redefinition [7], and entrenchment of individuals’ professional practices [8]. In this sense, the term professional development refers to lifelong further training related to an individual’s career. Consequently, through lifelong learning, teaching staff can adapt to the requirements of modern society and redefine their relationships with their working environment, satisfying their desire for learning and self-improvement.

Further training and professional development can be achieved through training programmes, whose primary purposes are to enrich professional knowledge, to fuel innovative practices, to elicit opportunities in self-development and self-education and to interact with information and communication channels and networks, all with an aim to improve professional skills and competencies [9,10].

Research shows that the quality of school principals’ performance is highly dependent upon the quality of their preparation [11, 12]. The ever-increasing interest in leadership preparation is due to the fact that school leaders can make a difference in academic effectiveness and improvement [13, 14, 15, 16, 17] as well as the effectiveness of the school climate through participation in exemplary preparation programmes [18]. For example, prospective principals at an urban university in California recognised the need to adopt specific leadership practices aimed at improving learning outcomes [19]. These practices could only be achieved through continuous further training.
Current literature has highlighted the need for continued support and training of school managers [20, 21, 22, 23, 24]. For Duta and Rafaila [25] further training presents a simultaneous challenge and necessity. It aims to increase professionalism, and provide information to those receiving the training while enhancing their knowledge through professional development. At the same time, the current debate in academic circles is concerned with what constitutes quality assurance and the efficiency of the education system. Research carried out by Shantal, Halttunen and Pekka [26] concluded that for school principals in Finland, who are considered the most qualified of professionals, professional development is a necessary component for meeting future challenges. The aforementioned researchers also emphasize the importance of cooperation on the local and international level amongst further training foundations that would encourage the participation of academic leaders in professional learning networks.

As will be further discussed in this article, the need to conduct training programmes is appearing with greater frequency on contemporary educational agendas, given that the following remains pervasively true of principals:

- They have not received substantive training in educational management due to a lack of further training upon entry into the managerial arena.
- They lack the relevant administrative capabilities to undertake administrative tasks, and feel unready to manage due to inadequate preparation during their university studies.
- As school heads, they are required to meet the demands of the contemporary educational reality.
- They face professional difficulties when undertaking their tasks
- They indicate a need to improve their professionalism.
- They seek out planned, modern, flexible and innovative forms of further training, such as remote training.

2 METHODOLOGY

In this paper, we provide a qualitative review of the concepts, definitions, and approaches that have been previously researched. We performed an extensive literature review in indexed and peer-reviewed journals, government reports, web pages, and books to collect and review all available definitions and approaches about training and professional development of school managers. In a field as evolving as professional development, it would not be worth analyzing literature exhaustively over the last five years, given that some considerations fall into disuse and become obsolete. Nonetheless, before starting to review the literature, it was thought worthwhile to re-examine this topic before 2005 in publications by widely acclaimed and internationally recognized authors. The results of this review confirmed that many of their opinions would still be valid, and many of the authors who have published work on this subject, more recently have drawn on their contributions. The results of the meta-analysis can be used to provide guidelines for the design of professional development/training programs to the policy makers.

3 SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' TRAINING NEEDS

Principals take on multiple roles, alternating between educational visionaries and agents of change when dealing with educational leaders, curriculum experts, evaluation advocates, budget analysts, facilities' managers, special programme managers as well as school community builders [27].

At the same time, they manage the communication and information needs associated with running the school; they are responsible, in general, for the smooth operation of the school unit and simultaneously organise, administer and coordinate specific groups of people. For this reason, the state must support and show confidence in school leaders and aim at achieving maximum administrative efficiency through investment in targeted training programmes and seminars.

A basic prerequisite to, and defining element in, the successful performance of a training programme, is the process of identifying, investigating, evaluating and analysing the training needs of trainees [28]. Drummond [29] defines the analysis of training needs as a thorough review of training that can affect the improvement of knowledge, skills and attitudes of individuals or groups in the workplace. Rothwell, Hohne and King [30], on the other hand, define it as the process of clarifying that which individuals
must know and successfully execute. This should, however, be distinguished from the evaluation of needs, due to the fact that the evaluation of needs includes a comparison of what should be taking place with what is actually taking place. “What should be” corresponds to the targets set and is therefore dependent upon the depth and extent of the analysis of needs [31]. To conclude, the managerial needs which have been identified and the requests consequently formulated are what should determine the features and specifications of a training program.

On the whole and as confirmed by Saitis and Eliophotou [32] specifically, research has shown that weaknesses exhibited by principals can be attributed to a lack of further training around the organisation and administration of school units. It is worth noting that school managers themselves welcome the value of training programmes as an aid to more efficiently dispensing their management duties and maintaining up-to-date knowledge and practices. Lingam [33] studied the value of a training programme carried out on the Solomon Islands by exploring the self-perception of school leaders who underwent the training. Before the programme, leaders faced overwhelming difficulties in guiding their schools due to their limited knowledge and skills regarding management and leadership. Upon completion of the programme, it became clear that the training programme had a positive impact on the fulfilment of demands regarding their expected work output.

Research on the subject at hand tends to focus on two areas: the training needs of newly-appointed principals and of those who already have a number of years in managerial service. The needs of these two groups are differentiated by their respective levels of experience in the field of educational administration and organisation. The findings from recent research conducted by Ng and Szeto [34] on secondary school principals indicate that newly-appointed principals are expected to be equipped with human resource management skills. There is a marked interest in issues such as empowering leaders, handling underperforming personnel, and in practical techniques regarding financial management, response skills regarding legal issues faced by school management and the performance of both the curriculum and educational leadership. Atieno and Simatwa [35] reached similar conclusions on the difficulties faced by newly-appointed managers with regard to financial management, who, in addition to their job duties, also have to manage students and educators, provide staff support and deal with little parent participation in school activities. To add to these challenges, they may also have to deal with discipline issues, non-payment of tuition fees, threats, truancy, staff incompetence and the school budget. In actual fact, many principals are not provided with even a basic education in financial management prior to taking on the role of school principal.

Miriti and Moses [36] agree that secondary school principals face challenges in the management and performance of their schools’ financial resources, while their training in financial management often proves to be ineffective due to a lack of motivation and too little time dedicated to training programmes. Suleman [37] not only confirms the aforementioned challenges in his research, but goes even further to place an emphasis, amongst others, on negative attitudes, a lack of ethics, frequent educator and support staff absences, unruly student behaviour, unsatisfactory results, insufficient funding, minimal communication with school staff, a lack of facilities and political interferences which can be disruptive to the maintenance of positive school spirit. Additional problems faced by newly-appointed principals may include, but are not limited to, violence, negative family attitudes towards the school, unintegrated students, teachers’ unions, the attitudes and behaviour of the educators towards the principals and increasingly undesirable behaviour in class/school.

Experienced educational leaders seek training in technological skills, orientation, counselling, cooperation in extracurricular activities as well as management skills. The latter especially applies to financial management. Hussain and Zamair [38] consider management of the school unit to be very significant and covers different areas to focus on, such as academic management, management of teachers, the curriculum and the office, administration of human resources as well as general administration, communication, maintenance of official correspondence and efficient archiving, staff retention, student monitoring, the presentation of credible reports, evaluation, motivation and development of skills. An analysis of further training needs of principals in seven Asian countries targeted a number of functions, such as management of staff and students, financial management and teaching and administrative support, which require further training for effective implementation of government policies affecting secondary education.

Research conducted by Hayat, Abdollahi, Zainabadi and Arasteh [39] focusing on the importance of lifelong learning through professional development revealed that the most important professional needs encompass sections of educational leadership, such as the organisation of resources, complex problem solving, an understanding of development and student learning, development of the school vision and mission based on group commitment, an understanding of metrics, and analysis and
evaluation of strategies. The principals participating in research conducted by Güngör and Yıldırım [40] agreed, on the whole, that in-service training focused on the development of managerial skills has a positive impact on their professional development and uplift in work performance, while gives credence to the importance of the administrative role of principals and is in line with the aforementioned research.

As already mentioned, educational leaders must also be pedagogical leaders so as to ensure the success of their educational organization and achieve positive learning outcomes by promoting communication both within and without the school environment. This can only be made possible through a group effort made by all the school unit’s human resources. Following this line of thought, Salazar [41] asserts that the most critical professional development needs are the promotion of group bonds, the creation of a learning organisation, the provision and maintenance of motivation with regard to continuous improvement, teaching direction and effective communication. Cardno [42] agrees and proposes a model of holistic professional development for principals, including four notable dimensions: a) management development, b) the curriculum, c) the school, and d) personal development. Brauckmann and Pashiardis [43] developed and proposed a holistic theory of administration by which effective school leaders can make use of various leadership styles, such as educational, structural, participatory, and entrepreneurial. The model requires an assessment of the staff development style to define which would be the most appropriate for each circumstance. This holistic model can serve as a guide for the design of appropriate training programmes for school principals.

School leaders in the information society are considered primarily technological leaders who should promote the use of new technologies (NT) and ensure both the professional development and integration of activities that focus on technology [44] at both the administrative and pedagogical level. Considering that NT has entered the field of educational administration quite dynamically, the focus of research has shifted towards how best to introduce and efficiently utilise it. Leaders do favour further training; however, they are quick to emphasise the need for more focused programmes using NT in educational administration and management. Weng and Tang [45] consider technological leadership strategies an integral part of any development programme and training aimed at principals, correlating such strategies with efficiency in school administration. Makewa, Meremo, Role and Role [46] agree with the above assertions, reaffirming the need for principals to have tech training. They argue that technologies now occupy a dominant place in progress-oriented education, and conclude that IT provides tools that contribute to the effective implementation of the school administrative process by strengthening communication networks within the school community.

As such, the necessity of planning and organising educational programmes aimed at the professional development of managers in various areas of school administration, management and leadership training is amply demonstrated.

4 INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR TRAINING & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Candidates and trainee school leaders must be prepared if they want to achieve positive learning outcomes. In many US states, the training of leaders through postgraduate programs is considered essential and mandatory, while 35 US states have adapted the standards of the InterstateSchool Leaders Licensure Consortium (I.S.L.L.C.) [47]. However, despite the mandatory nature of this system of preparation, leader training has continued to vary across the board and so specific training standards for school leadership have been established.

In the US, principals must have successfully completed an accredited postgraduate university course before taking on their new leadership role [48]. The NISL Executive Development Program focuses on models aimed at transforming the principal into a pedagogical leader. Aspiring principals follow a funded, year-long, in-school program called the New Leaders Program. They maintain a mentoring relationship with an existing school principal and together they work as management team members. Despite the common framework, each state sets its own guidelines for properly preparing school leaders: in the state of Texas, principals are required to obtain a certificate, renewable every five years, and to be trained in the following areas: a) instructional leadership, b) human capital, c) executive leadership, d) school culture, and e) strategic operations [49].

In Ontario, Canada, aspiring principals have to complete the Principal’s Qualification Program (PQP), which includes 125 hours of teaching as well as 60 hours of practical exercises. The programme is
based on managerial practice standards and it deals with professional knowledge and practice, leadership in learning communities and continuing professional education. Moreover, principals are guided by the revised Ontario Leadership Framework 2012, which sets out ways to build relationships and develop people and provides guidance in organisational development to support desired practices. The Framework also tackles improving educational programmes and ensuring accountability in schools [50].

In Europe, educational institutions are themselves setting standards and implementing training programmes. In England, the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) is a good example. The college trains future principals though the National Professional Qualification for Headship (N.P.Q.H.) [51], which is in turn supported by the National Standards for Headteachers. These standards are a guide that defines both the professional knowledge and the necessary personal skills for effective school leadership. Incoming principals also follow an e-learning programme, which is designed to help aspiring principals to develop, improve and maintain the high quality teaching staff.

In Sweden, the National School Leadership Training Program (NSLTP) was introduced in 2009. It focuses on preparing school leaders to guide educational activities, and ensures that the rights of students and parents are respected. The training programme covers three integrated areas of knowledge: (i) school legislation, (ii) management goals and objectives, and (iii) school leadership [52].

In Cyprus, principals have historically received inadequate preparation for their leadership responsibilities. The preparation the majority have undergone is limited to an informal apprenticeship model in which, as teachers, they have observed their principals and decided what to reject and what to adopt when they themselves become principals [53]. This has recently changed, however, as prospective principals are now trained through graduate courses in educational management offered by public and private universities, or indeed via in-service training programmes as part of their professional development subsequent to their promotion to a managerial position [54]. In 2013, the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute organised and implemented a training programme for newly-promoted principals that focuses on several educational leadership and management topics and consists of six modules:

- School legislation
- Development of the school unit
- Planning of the organisation, administration and operation of the school
- Development of culture and climate
- Management and human resource development
- Promotion of teaching and learning

However, it is the educational system of a country that decides whether official managerial training programmes will become established. Thody et al. [55], upon finishing a project on the production of training materials for school principals, conducted research on the necessity of managerial training and concluded that Greece and Cyprus, with their more centralised education systems, offered less professional development compared to their less centralised counterparts in England and Sweden. For the purposes of a successful managerial appointment, the range of available training seems to play less of a role compared to effectively choosing the most appropriate and deserving individual, regardless of the fact that even a good leader can be made more effective through training.

In Greece, given the centralised nature of the education system, organised planning of training programmes is notably absent, as are project management training support activities, which would normally emanate from academic institutions or official bodies. This lack of adequately trained school leaders is due to the fact that, up until a few years ago, graduates with degrees in education had not been instructed in topics relating to the administration of educational units. To make up for this, a training effort was launched in 2010 by the Public Administration and Local Government National Centre addressed to primary and secondary teachers for obtaining a certificate in management adequacy. The goal of the programme is to give relevant skills and knowledge to potential school administrators. The programme itself consists of 11 management modules. This was a positive step, but for the best results programme needs to be implemented in a decentralised context and be applied in a compulsory and uniform fashion.

In Greece, individual online training programmes are not offered at public universities for the purposes of formal, remote training of school leaders. However, supplementary training support does exist
through electronic platforms as part of the standard curriculum. With regard to private university
education, the Open University of Greece offers an integrated master degree in Educational Credit
Management.

In the context of non-formal learning, the University of Athens and Aegean University are higher
education institutions that offer online learning programmes for education managers. These
programmes vary in duration and cover a diverse range of topics. In 2014, the Educational Policy
Institute carried out training sessions on assessment issues using an asynchronous learning model. A
seminar called “E-administrative theoretical approaches and practices” captured a particular training
effort, which was implemented through blended learning.

The standards for school principals in Australia have been developed in a way that can be classified
into two groups: professional practices and leadership requirements [56].

5 REFLECTION AND NEXT STEPS

The professionalisation of school unit leaders is now an accepted state of affair in education. This
has also changed the way we perceive principals. In short, principals are evolving from bureaucratic
staff / facilitators into real human resource and academic leaders, with an ability to innovate and
transform their school units into learning organisations. This new paradigm lays the foundation for
building their professionalism on the basis of professional knowledge and skills, rather than on
theoretical, surface-level scientific knowledge.

The current global trend requires the school leader to be empowered both theoretically and
scientifically on administrative and organisational issues relating to education and leadership based on
pre-existing research, professional practice, leadership models and behaviours. Moreover, in view of
the evolution of education systems and the changes in their roles as educational leaders, effective
support for principals is essential, together with progressive professional development and the
enhancement of professionalism through training programmes. Presently, most of the developed and
developing countries around the world have formally established processes and certification standards
for aspiring and practicing school leaders. Moreover, these countries have adopted statutory schemes
relating to introductory training and lifelong professional development and improvement.

However, the design and implementation of training programmes often prove to be time-consuming
and costly. For this reason, other training schemes may be applied, such as mentoring and coaching
programmes, interactive and reflective practices, and training programmes that focus on remote
learning and / or blended learning and e-mentoring. The training programmes which prove to be
valuable and comprehensive are usually those which, at the time of planning, have made sure to
research the training needs of their trainees. Leaders must be proactive in defining their training based
on their real needs and must intervene dynamically and interactively at all stages of the application,
implementation and evaluation of the programme.

These observations, which have emerged through an exhaustive literature review, provide a frame of
reference for educational policy-makers to push governments towards the professionalisation of
management and the adoption of more accreditation standards. In addition, they provide a basis upon
which those responsible for designing training programmes may rely when planning, organising and
implementing programmes that take school leaders’ training needs into account. Finally, this
theoretical and conceptual framework can provide an incentive for the same educational leaders to
raise awareness for their own level of professionalism and their new role as transformational
education leaders.

REFERENCES

Prakashan, 2008.


