

Leadership and Management Training for School Heads: A Milestone Achievement for Fiji

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Abstract: *This study reports on how a group of Fijian school leaders felt about a leadership and management training programme they had just completed. As a preliminary study, it gathered data by means of a survey questionnaire and document analysis. The data analysis reveals the principals' positive perceptions of the programme overall, although they felt some areas need more attention, notable among them being both context-specific and field-based learning, which the leaders consider essential in future training programmes in leadership and management to meet the special circumstances of the school. Implications of the study's findings are also pertinent to other jurisdictions within and beyond the Pacific region for leadership preparation and development to improve leadership practices, an essential ingredient in school effectiveness.*

Introduction

School leadership is widely recognised as a critical factor in the process of achieving school effectiveness and improvement (Bush & Oduro 2006; Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd 2009). This suggests that the manifold transformations occurring in education in contemporary times make leadership development more deserving of considerable attention than ever before. In contexts where leaders have undergone no professional preparation for their role, beyond years of classroom teaching experience, they could be faced with a myriad of contemporary problems. To cope with these new demands and challenges, school leaders require relevant knowledge, skills and competencies to enable them to meet the particular circumstances of the school and also offer better service to the learners, teachers and communities they lead. In light of the increasing importance vested in school leadership, this study is a preliminary investigation of the reception of a leadership and management training programme conducted in the Fiji Islands, a small island developing state in the Pacific region.

Literature Review

In contemporary times and in the pursuit of sustainable school effectiveness and improvement efforts, the growing complexity of education systems has placed school leaders under greater pressure for accountability. School leaders in Fiji, like their counterparts in Australia and New Zealand, are experiencing role overload, complexity and tension due to various reforms introduced in education (Cardno & Howse 2005). Schratz (2003) claims that pressure is exerted from a

variety of contexts such as political, social and economic conditions and these have an impact on educational systems in all jurisdictions. These new demands, challenges and external pressures warrant suitable forms of training and development for school leaders (Wong 2004; Walker & Dimmock 2006; Bush 2007). Similarly, Crow (2006) affirms that in light of the complex changes occurring within schools and the changing environment of schools, principals' knowledge and skills are likely to become obsolete and thus require ongoing training and learning. On the basis of these considerations, Lumby, Crow & Pashiardis (2008) and Bush (2008) emphasise the significance of leadership preparation for aspiring principals as well as continuing professional development for serving principals to improve their performance in all jurisdictions, but more so in developing contexts. Relying solely on previous knowledge and training can no longer satisfy the complex nature and changing role of school leaders. On this account, Taylor, De Guerre, Gavin & Kass (2002) conclude that 'global challenges now occurring demand approaches to leadership education that are profoundly different from those that have served well in the past' (p. 353). Such pressuring demands require highly skilled and well-prepared school leaders with the necessary leadership and management tools to lead schools successfully. Otherwise they may be seen to be 'lacking as [school leaders]' (Coleman & Fitzgerald 2008).

Even though the leaders are experiencing daunting challenges stemming from dramatic changes in the work expected of them, many jurisdictions still do not require their incumbents to go through any mandatory training programme for school leadership positions. In South Africa, for example, promotion to the position is generally based on teaching experience and teaching qualifications rather than leadership potential (Van der Westhuizen & Van Vuuren 2007; Bush & Oduru 2006; Mestry & Singh 2007;). In the same vein, Australia (Anderson, Kleinhenz, Mulford & Gurr 2008) and New Zealand (Cardno & Fitzgerald 2004) do not require any formal training before appointment to the school headship position. Similarly, the authors' personal and professional work experience in most of the Pacific Island countries indicates that specific training does not appear to be required for the job in this part of the world either. As a result, most of the school leaders lack suitable skills. On the basis of study findings from two countries in the Pacific region, Fiji and Tonga, Cardno and Howse (2005) proposed that change management and problem-solving skills are regarded as an essential element of any management development programme. Also, they suggested the need to 'develop higher order cognitive skills of critical reflection that relate to both individual learning and organisational learning' (p. 43). In the Fiji study, school leaders identified several such skills as problems needing attention: prioritising visioning, interpersonal skills, empowering others and effective management (Cardno & Howse 2005).

Leadership and Management Training

With the changing circumstances in mind, leadership and management training programmes are vital for developing and sustaining effective leadership practices. Through suitable design and content of leadership and management training programmes, school heads can be developed and groomed to carry out their leadership and management roles more effectively within the special circumstances of their schools. Despite the lack of consensus on what kind of preparation is necessary or best for developing appropriate leadership behaviours (Bush, Kiggundu & Moorosi 2011), leadership development is a must. In the context of this debate on scope and contemporary approaches to leadership preparation and development, it is not surprising that a multitude of development programmes for school leaders has evolved across the globe, mostly in developed countries (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe & Meyerson 2005).

Analysis of Training Programmes

Based on the realisation that headship is a specialist position and requires specific professional preparation for sound leadership practices (Bush 2008; Bush et al. 2011), some countries, such as South Africa and other developing contexts, are slowly embracing the idea. In South Africa, a course badged as the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) was introduced in 2007 for aspiring principals (Bush et al. 2011). The ACE programme consisted of five modules: understanding school leadership and management in the South African context; managing teaching and learning; leading and managing people; managing organisational systems, physical and financial resources; and managing policy, planning, school development and governance.

The analysis of materials used in the ACE programme showed that in addition to being too detailed and over-theoretical, they lacked constructive alignment to the work situation of many principals heading disadvantaged schools in South Africa (Bush et al. 2011). Apart from this, one other frequent response of the principals was that the materials were too long or bulky. McLennan (2000) reported of an earlier training programme in the Gauteng province in South Africa, which used the workshop model of development, that it was poorly organised and irrelevant to their work realities as principals.

On a positive note, mentoring, networking and site-based assessment were part of the ACE programme. The literature illustrates the great potential that effective mentoring and coaching have for supporting school leadership development (Daresh 2004; Hansford & Ehrich 2006; Barnett & O'Mahony 2008). However, mentors need to provide ample opportunities to the mentees to generate their own context-specific solutions to any school management problems. Even the role of mentor principal could be a way forward in real workplace learning. They could work in partnership with principals in clusters of schools not only to develop but also to implement best leadership strategies (Clarke & Wildy 2011). Likewise, networking is another fruitful way of promoting leadership development. Bush et al. (2011: 36) refer to this as 'live learning'. The idea of networking to support each other in collaboration could lead to improvements in leadership practices. By actively engaging in professional communities, new leaders can gain better insights about school leadership (Anderson, 2003; Leithwood 2010). Similarly, Bottoms & Fry (2008) advocated that professional learning must be embedded in principals' daily professional work. In this way a reflective approach can become a philosophy of their *best practice* (Togneri & Anderson 2003).

Therefore, training programmes need to encourage professional learning networks because working with high-performing and experienced principals of successful schools can enable ongoing learning that would be of great help after the life of the training programme. Also, to help transfer knowledge and skills to specific contexts, some school-based assessments need to be included, but they need to be reasonable to yield better learning outcomes (Bush et al. 2011).

In the case of Ethiopia, Tekleselassie (2002) reported that a one-month in-service course on school management was not popular with the principals. He identified the following features as marring the training programme: irrelevant and repetitive curriculum; unresponsive and ill-prepared trainees; incompetence of trainers; lack of nexus between the training and the kind of profile the Ministry of Education seeks; and short duration of training and thus undue strain on trainees' time.

Most of the training programmes are funded by overseas agencies and once the funds are completed the training ceases (Oduro 2003). This is common in most developing countries where funds for educational developments are sought from overseas aid agencies.

With reference to Hong Kong, the Education and Manpower Bureau (2003) commissioned a review of the four-year-old Newly Appointed Principals' programme during the years 2000 to 2003. Through the review, they explored principals' perceptions of the programme after they had completed it. The principals believed the programme had a positive impact on their work in schools and they indicated the following elements as having had a beneficial impact on their learning: interaction that provided opportunities to raise questions and discuss solutions; opportunities to see good practices and reflect upon issues pertaining to themselves and their schools; networking with newly appointed principals for professional exchange of knowledge and ideas, sharing experiences and mutual support; and liaison with experienced principals who could provide constructive help in dealing with problems.

Also, the review's recommendations called for a more applied, contextually relevant focus and the greater involvement of experienced principals in the programme. In a later in-depth study of new principals who participated in the Newly Appointed Principals' programme in Hong Kong, Cheung (2004) also found that beginning principals preferred that their mentors be experienced practitioners. Further, Cheung's study suggested that programmes should provide opportunities for principals to engage in more discussion and sharing of ideas, use of suitable case studies, and problem-based learning. In conclusion, the strongest suggestions were for involvement of more experienced and focused practitioners, as well as contextual relevance together with more support from academics in their training programme.

Apart from short courses and on-the-job training, there needs to be a systematic and specific leadership programme for the role. As rightly mentioned by Clarke & Wildy (2010: 15):

There is no substitute for deep understanding of leadership concepts, a personal leadership philosophy and a thorough articulation of the links between theory and practice. Such knowledge and understanding are not learned by trial and error but by reading, reflection, writing, debate and critique in a scholarly manner over a prolonged period.

This followed on the heels of an earlier study that had suggested continuing professional development at every career phase of school leaders (Ribbins 1999). The USA, for example, has a long history in the preparation and development of school leaders (Huber & West 2002) and its first college-level leadership course can be dated back to 1987 (Murphy 1992). Leadership development in the USA includes pre-service preparation through both the university graduate field and in-service programmes that offer leadership preparation via master's, specialist or doctoral degrees. Another development in school leadership preparation in the USA was the creation of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). The new ISLLC standards have been embraced by many state education institutions and universities across the USA and many states now use them to improve their leadership preparation programmes (Institute for Educational Leadership 2000; Young, Crow, Orr, Ogawa & Creighton 2005).

Despite the length of the history of development in the preparation and training of school leaders in the USA, many university-based programmes have been heavily criticised. The divergence of scope and content of leadership preparation programmes in different universities led several taskforces and scholars to examine the content and nature of the university-based programmes in school leadership. This produced recommendations for more emphasis to be placed on leadership preparation (Young, Peterson & Short 2002). Levine's (2005) scathing report, titled *Educating School Leaders*, was based on school leadership training programmes in the USA. On the basis of his study of more than 600 education institutions, he identified characteristic problems in most of the

programmes, such as irrelevant curricula and weak research, leading to the award of degrees that are inappropriate to the needs of today's schools and school leaders.

Notwithstanding the extensive criticisms of some university preparation programmes for school leadership, there do exist programmes that look promising. Examples include the courses offered by Stanford University, the Harvard Graduate School of Education, the University of Wisconsin, and the University of California (Tucker & Coddling 2002). An earlier study of the Danforth programme (Milstein 1993) concluded that changes made to leadership preparation – including programme content with emphasis on skills and knowledge, experiential learning, networking and cohort support systems and continuous evaluation of programmes – proved to be worthwhile. Some writers, such as Daresh, Gantner, Dunlap & Hvizdak (2000), state that some school leadership preparation programmes that have used case studies, simulations and learning based on problems that reflect the issues principals face in the 'real workplace' have achieved better results in the professional formation of school leaders.

The foregoing review of literature illustrates the importance of school leaders and the need for them to have a better know-how of their leadership and management roles and practices to take their schools to greater heights. In this regard, leadership and management training programmes are vital for school leaders' professional preparation in ensuring they cope effectively with work in the prevailing changing circumstances of the school and education systems. Review of some of the training programmes has shown that consideration of some context-specific factors, such as the real work contexts of school leaders, and then planning the programme accordingly would help achieve better learning outcomes. Otherwise they will not benefit much from the programme and thus continue to face daunting challenges in the performance of their day-to-day work.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

This study investigates the perceptions of a group of school leaders who recently completed the leadership and management training programme under appraisal. The following research question guided the study: *How do the school leaders perceive the leadership and management training programme they completed and what would they like to see in future offerings of the programmes?* Despite the widespread endorsement of the critical role of school leaders, several scholars point out a dearth of scholarly literature on school leadership in developing contexts (Bush 2008; Lumby et al. 2008); studies in most developing contexts are scant as well as under-reported. The little that is known about school leadership in developing countries could explain why the arrangement of any kind of support for school leaders is limited (Kitava & Van der Westhuizen 1997). The current study attempts to address these understanding gaps by contributing a report on an empirical study about the perceptions school leaders had formed of a leadership and management training programme they had just completed. Since this is carried out in a small developing state in the Pacific, Fiji, it provides an authentic Pacific perspective on the leadership and management training programme.

It is envisaged the findings will provide useful information on the nature and scope of leadership and management training programmes, a valuable resource for informing the decision-making of policy-makers and providers of such training programmes, like the Ministry of Education as well as the universities and teacher training colleges. The findings also have the potential to inform future international professional development initiatives in the Pacific region. An initiative such as the one funded by the Commonwealth Foundation and other donor partners may, for instance, be moved toward providing support for further educational enterprise in the Pacific arena.

In view of the importance of effective school leadership and its influence on student learning achievement, information gathered from this study may be of great importance to educational authorities, academics and other stakeholders who have a vested interest in the provision of education of an acceptable quality in developing contexts such as Fiji's. Further to that, the findings insights into the state of leadership and management training of school leaders would be intrinsically insightful for all stakeholders.

Despite being a small-scale study, it has the potential to inform and assist Fiji's Ministry of Education in formulating plans for future leadership and management training programmes. On the basis of the findings, various providers could refine and undertake further initiatives in future so that the programmes have a more forceful impact on leadership preparation. Extrapolation to other countries in the Pacific region could be useful in allowing them to draw a better model when embarking on their own leadership and management training programmes.

Finally, the objective of the Commonwealth Council of Educational Administration and Management (CCEAM) – to enhance the practice and research of educational administration, management and leadership in developing nations – drove this research initiative. Perhaps it may act as a catalyst to propel other *inside researchers* to undertake further studies on leadership issues in developing contexts.

Fiji: The Context of the Study

The 300+ island nation of Fiji, now formally styled The Republic of Fiji Islands, is situated in the tropical southwest Pacific Ocean. The two largest islands of Fiji are Viti Levu (about 10,429 square kilometres) and Vanua Levu (about 5,556 square kilometres). The two cities in Fiji are the capital, Suva, in the Central Division and Lautoka in the Western Division of Viti Levu. The most recent census report (2008) put Fiji's population at 918,675 (Ministry of Education 2009), made up of ethnic groups, the two major ones being indigenous Fijians (*iTaukei*) and Indo-Fijians, outnumbering other significant minority groups, such as Rotumans, Chinese, Europeans and other Pacific Islanders as well as several mixtures of these. This multi-racial and multicultural nation includes several of the major religions of the world – Christian (52.9 per cent), Hindu (38.1 per cent), Muslim (7.8 per cent), Sikh (0.7 per cent), with others making up 0.5 per cent. The diversity of religions and ideologies is a source of social and cultural richness, though not without causing concern regarding respecting the rights and meeting the needs of all citizens. This is particularly problematic for the Ministry of Education, charged with delivering education programmes that satisfy all these groups while at the same time fulfilling the vision of the national government.

In addition, academic performance still appears to be negatively affected by several concerning factors: ethnic differences (indigenous Fijian students lag behind other ethnic groups in major external examinations results); the rural–urban divide; and socioeconomic conditions of the communities, whether rural or urban. Rural dwellers have a lot of difficulty in finding income-generating activities and the lack of proper infrastructure such as roads and transportation is another major obstacle faced in the delivery of good-quality education as well as any kind of economic development. In the urban areas, the rapid population rise attendant on rural–urban migration, and the increase in the number of squatters in settlements with sub-standard living conditions and without any formal employment, create further barriers in the education sector. These factors pose major challenges to school leaders in their efforts to provide education.

Educational Context

In the context of Fiji, most schools can trace their origin, and still owe their existence, to the initiatives of Christian missions, especially in the British colonial period after 1874, and later to various socio-religious organisations by 1900. The majority of the 170 secondary schools in Fiji are owned by socio-religious organisations and local communities; the government owns only 12 secondary schools. Although schools receive government assistance and follow the ministry's policies and curricula, the school management board is the major contributor to the maintenance and development of school facilities (Lingam 2009). The multiplicity of ownership of schools contributes to major differences in the standards of school facilities and resources and places a huge burden on families of low socio-economic status, especially those living in rural areas and solely reliant on subsistence farming. Furthermore, the marked differences in schools and settings are exacerbated because school heads are often expected to carry out a variety of roles, including teaching, apart from managing the school (Cardno & Howse 2005).

The Ministry of Education is responsible for the administration and management of education policy and the delivery of educational services. It provides the curriculum frameworks, policy guidelines and directions, and qualified teaching personnel, with some of the prescribed text books that support all schools in the delivery of education for students. This centralisation is seen as some measure of quality control over the education provided. Administratively, the Ministry of Education operates through four Education Divisions, each managed by a Divisional Education Officer, and nine Education Districts, each managed by a District Senior Education Officer.

The distribution of schools has profound implications for the provision of a good quality of education in Fiji. The geography of the country places constraints on accessibility in that many rural areas are isolated either by virtue of being on isolated islands or being located in the rugged terrain of the larger islands. In addition, the wide demographic distribution also increases transportation and communication difficulties and costs, adding to the problems the Ministry of Education faces in providing supervision and in administering and evaluating various services to schools in remote locations. Since such problems make it difficult for ministry personnel to provide professional help, they depend on school leaders for professional support. The 2009 government decision to suddenly lower the retirement age forced many experienced school leaders to leave the profession for good; the shortfall in numbers called for, and still calls for, the preparation of incumbents abruptly promoted to positions as school leaders (Lingam 2012).

The implication of this is that Fiji needs very competent, professional school leaders who can provide a high quality of service to the school community, regardless of their location. All this requires the Ministry of Education to give more attention to leadership and management training, with the ultimate aim of helping these beleaguered leaders to become more proficient in their leadership and management roles for school effectiveness and improvement.

Methodology

Instrument

This is a pioneering study that investigates principals' perceptions of the leadership and management training programme they had completed. A survey questionnaire was considered a suitable way to gather information from the principals, who were geographically dispersed (Gay 1992). The questionnaire consisted of closed and open-ended questions asking them to respond to the questions after critical reflection on the training programme that they had completed. For the

closed questions, a 5-point Likert-scale was utilised, 1 being the lowest level and 5 the highest level of satisfaction. The propositions for inclusion were based on the review of literature on leadership and management training programmes and the authors' many years of work experience in Fiji schools, particularly at the secondary school level. Also, an open-ended question was posed relating to what they would like to see in future leadership and management training programmes. This is similar to the open-ended approach used in phenomenographic research (Marton & Pong 2005). In addition to the survey questionnaire, document reviews were undertaken to gather more insights about the training programme (Merriam 2009). The document reviews included the annual report of the Ministry of Education. The combined use of questionnaires (closed and open-ended questions) and document analysis triangulated data and ensured authenticity of the findings (Patton 2002).

Sample

The participants included for the study were the principals who had completed the leadership and management training programme. As a preliminary investigation, an invitation was extended to 40 principals and the rate of return of the completed questionnaire was 75 per cent. As Merriam (2009) claims, it is not so much the number that matters as the 'potential of each participant to contribute to the development of insight and understanding of the phenomenon' (p. 105). Likewise, Patton's (2002: 246) suggestion that 'specifying a minimum sample size based on expected reasonable coverage of the phenomenon given the purpose of the study' was considered. A guarantee of anonymity was given to the participants; their participation remains unidentifiable in any document published on completion of the investigation (Lewis 2003).

Analysis Techniques

The survey included both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data were analysed using the basic statistics of means and standard deviation (Mehrens & Lehmann 1991). On the other hand, the qualitative data obtained from the open-ended questions were analysed in terms of the themes and patterns that emerged from reading and re-reading the data (Creswell 2005). In particular, some significant themes emerged from the analysis of qualitative data, such as content, strategies to deliver, context-specific training, and field-based learning to enhance school leaders' preparation for leadership roles. Some relevant quotations are presented on the basis of Ruddock's (1993: 19) suggestion that 'some statements carry a rich density of meaning in a few words'. In terms of document analysis, information such as the courses offered, duration and the funding agency was obtained, as well as other vital information about the leadership and management programme.

Findings

The summary of the findings is presented in two major categories, documentary analysis and survey data. The latter is further categorised as quantitative data and qualitative data.

Documentary Analysis

According to the Annual Report of the Ministry of Education (2009), the purpose of the leadership and management training programme was to develop leadership capacities for the successful operation of the school organisation. The analysis of the document showed that the content topics of the programme included:

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- developing personal leadership skills
- financial management and school improvement using standard management monitoring
- change management, school planning and policy.

The Professional Development Unit of the Ministry of Education was responsible for the training. The training programme was funded by AusAID under the Fiji Education Sector Programme (FESP). A workshop-based mode of delivery was employed. Consultants from Australia worked with local counterparts in the Ministry of Education to design and decide the content of the programme. The Ministry of Education was the principal provider of the programme. Selected current heads from both primary and secondary schools attended the same training programme, which went through a series of workshops in different education divisions, each lasting for four days. The offering cycle is summarised in Table 1. A perusal of Table 1 offers insight into the content topics and duration of the full programme.

Table 1: Schedule for the Training Programme, Fiji, 2004–09

Phases	Modules	Year of offer	School Division
1	Developing Personal Leadership Skills	2004 2005	Eastern/Western Central/Northern
2	Financial Management and School Improvement using Standard Monitoring	2006 2007	Eastern/Western Central/Northern
3	Change Management, School Planning and Policy	2008 2009	Eastern/Western Central/Northern

Survey Data

Analyses of the survey data are presented under the headings quantitative and qualitative data.

Quantitative Data

Table 2 displays the results for the quantitative data. The high mean scores calculated from the Likert-scale ratings indicate a view that the leaders perceived the leadership and management training programme positively; the low mean scores reflect areas of less satisfaction.

Table 2: Summary of the response from the school leaders

Survey items	Mean (N = 30)	Standard deviation (SD)
The training was beneficial to my leadership role	3.6	0.61
The content of the programme was relevant	3.0	0.72
Training materials were of high quality	3.4	0.55
Ongoing workshops on school leadership and management could help schools to deal with ever changing / increasing challenges in teaching and learning	4.0	0.45
Strategies used to deliver the programme were useful	3.0	0.66
The training provided opportunities to learn from other colleagues	3.1	0.44
The training provided ample opportunities for interaction to raise questions and discuss solutions	3.2	0.33
The training created opportunities for networking to exchange information	2.9	0.67
The programme was well aligned to the specific circumstances of my school	2.0	0.33
The training better prepared me for leadership and management roles	3.4	0.74
The training developed my ability to reflect critically on my practice to improve the quality of my leadership and management roles	2.8	0.45
The training provided adequate theoretical knowledge about best leadership practices	3.5	0.56
The training developed my ability to engage with staff and share leadership practices	3.8	0.76
Suitable cases were used to illustrate key issues in leadership	3.2	0.55
There were site-based assessments, linked to leadership and management practice	1.0	0.33
It was practical-based provision	2.8	0.66
It was theoretical-based provision	3.5	0.69
The duration was sufficient	2.9	0.77
Ample opportunities were available for interactive learning	2.8	0.87
The training was linked to a qualification	1.0	0.00
The programme provided opportunities to network with high-performing principals / experienced principals	2.5	0.44
The programme was grounded in the realities of Fijian schools	3.0	0.79
The facilitators were competent	3.2	0.89
Had opportunities to share my experiences and problems	3.0	0.65

Qualitative Data

Four major areas were identified by the school leaders as needing attention. In future leadership and management training programmes, they recommended (in descending order) more work on financial management; a context-specific training programme; use of a variety of strategies to deliver the content; and field-based learning.

With regard to content in the programme, an overwhelming majority of the participants (92 per cent) felt that more emphasis should be given to financial management in future leadership and management training programmes. For example:

All three modules basically had different types of leadership and management training: a bit of time management, resource management, financial management and a lot of work is needed on financial management because it impacts the education system in Fiji quite significantly.

Strong views were also expressed about the relevance of the training materials to their leadership practice. However, according to most participants (90 per cent), the greatest impact of the training will be when the learning is aligned to the local context of Fiji. For example:

I think the materials used in my view were well researched and of course it came from Western Australia and it referred to Western Australian research. This is where there was slight difficulty because the cultural context of Western Australia and the cultural context of Fiji in terms of economic context, demography and social context and education context are different. The contexts are not compatible.

Most of the school leaders (90 per cent) felt that some field-based learning such as internship under the guidance of an experienced principal would be vital in future programmes. For example:

Rather than getting things out of a book, actual learning takes place at the workplace. Training programmes through workshops only brings the question: How can the principals deliver in their schools? Therefore, it is important that principals should be given hands-on experience through internships.

The majority of the school leaders (85 per cent) expressed the idea of having the content based on their specific needs, such as whether schools are rural or urban. They felt they needed to be consulted on the content of the programme. Two typical comments illustrate this opinion:

The content of the programme should be developed in consultation with the school leaders. As it is our specific needs as principals, basically it was based on general needs of the leaders. I believe if leaders were consulted on their needs and the modules were prepared based on our needs then we would have benefited more from the training.

The needs analysis should be taken into consideration so the content is appropriate to the needs of school leaders.

Also most of the participants (75 per cent) felt that the facilitators did not employ a sufficient variety of strategies in the delivery of the programmes. They suggested that varying the strategies would have provided them with more options to learn about their leadership roles. This is elaborated on by one participant:

Most of the programmes that I had attended had first theory work, then they would discuss and in between we had activities in groups, then group discussions and presentations. The activities were quite general but in some cases principals came up with their problems. Through discussions we were able to get views from group members and from various

group presentations we were able to get more ideas and the use of different strategies would have been better in helping to make things more meaningful to us.

Discussion

The aim of the present study was to explore school leaders' perceptions, in hindsight, of the leadership and management training programme they had completed. Analysis of documentary evidence illustrates that hardly any formal leadership and management training programmes were conducted for school leaders in Fiji in the decades prior to 2004. Over the years the system generally allowed teachers to ascend to school leadership positions with very little preparation or opportunities for professional development. Usually the path to headship follows an apprenticeship model: a teacher trained for and building up experience in classroom teaching is promoted through the ranks to the position of the head of the department, to assistant principal, vice-principal and eventually to principalship. Thus, the school leaders were (and often still are) appointed on the basis of teaching record and experience rather than leadership potential (Bush & Odura 2006). Unfortunately, the literature illustrates that excellent teaching ability does not necessarily indicate that the person appointed will be an effective principal. Therefore, those who were school leaders prior to 2004 may have faced considerable challenges in their leadership roles. In contrast, contemporary notions of leadership, especially in most of the developed countries, prefer that prospective candidates be required to complete leadership training courses or take advanced degrees in school leadership. Bearing this in mind, the initiative to engage and improve leadership and management skills for school leaders by the principal stakeholder, the Ministry of Education, is a welcome move, especially at a time when a myriad of educational reforms have been introduced (Walker & Dimmock 2006). However, this appears to be a one-shot affair for school leaders in Fiji as funding for the project, which was from a development partner, has finished. It was a fixed term project. This is similar to what other developing countries have experienced when projects are funded by overseas agencies (Oduro 2003). Like other developing countries, Fiji too does not have a buoyant economy and depends quite heavily on development partners for aid to assist in various educational development efforts.

In terms of the school leaders' perceptions of the leadership and management training programme, the analysis of the quantitative data points to areas of positive perception and areas needing more attention (Table 2). Taken as an aggregate, the quantitative data indicate that the school leaders perceived their leadership and management training programme positively. This is reflected in the fact that the means calculated for most of the items exceed 3.0 (Table 2). The responses relating to the materials, learning from one another, content, facilitators and theoretical knowledge were positive when compared to the findings of studies conducted in other developing contexts (McLennan 2000; Tekleselassie 2002; Bush et al. 2011). However, most of the items were rated barely above the mean of 3.0. The school leaders, though, gave even lower ratings to the following items relating to school-based assessment: critical reflection, constructive alignment of curriculum to work, networking, and duration of training. The finding relating to duration of the training programme is consistent with the findings of the Ethiopia case (Tekleselassie 2002). A leadership and management training programme with a short duration and high expectations can cause undue stress and strain, lowering the achievement of learning outcomes. Networking could have been encouraged as it would continue beyond the life of the leadership and management training programme (Anderson 2003; Leithwood 2010). Also, emphasis on critical reflection would have helped the school leaders to continue improvement in their leadership role (Togneri & Anderson 2003; Cardno & Howse 2005; Bottoms & Fry 2008). In particular, reflective practice would have helped develop higher-

order thinking skills and contributed towards continuous development of their leadership role. That the programme did not align constructively with school leaders' work in schools is consistent with the findings of other studies (Bush et al. 2011).

Even though the ratings were barely above the mean, the exposure and opportunity afforded to school leaders for a formal leadership and management training programme is a significant achievement for a small developing nation. Since this was the first ever formal training programme to be conducted, the Ministry of Education could strengthen future programmes in light of the feedback obtained from the participants. For future leadership and management training programmes, the feedback indicates areas where the school leaders suggest the programme could be strengthened, including more work on financial management, context-specific training, use of a variety of strategies for delivery, and field-based learning. The low means in the quantitative data relating to these areas also reflect this (Table 2). This illustrates the apparent disjuncture between the programme content and the work realities of the school leaders. The school leaders regard as essential a better alignment of the training programme with their professional needs of employment. This is consistent with the findings of studies conducted by Bush et al. (2011) and McLennan (2000). It would be better to undertake a study to determine school heads' professional needs prior to determining any future leadership and management training programmes for them. This would ensure that the programme is well grounded in the realities of work expectations of Fiji's schools. Thus, in future it is advisable that more effort be devoted to fostering more context-specific training programmes. The feedback from the school leaders is consistent with Lauder's (2000) assertion that the traditional 'one size fits all' approach, with a straightforward, common curriculum for all participants, proved neither effective nor efficient. Lauder's views suggest that leadership and management practices work in varying ways in different situations, rendering the choice of the design of an appropriate approach anything but simple. The views expressed by the leaders in this study are quite consistent with this assessment. In addition, the delivery of the programme could be further strengthened by including a variety of strategies, such as more problem-based learning and site-based assessment (Cheung 2004).

Conclusion

Through funding from AusAID, the Ministry of Education was able to provide a leadership and management training programme for school leaders. Notwithstanding some of the weaknesses in the programme, the initiative to prepare school leaders for leadership roles is a step in the right direction. Overall, the findings show that the perceptions of school leaders of the leadership and management training programme are not dissimilar to the findings of studies in other contexts, both developing and developed (Walker & Dimmock 2006). Given the importance of leadership for school improvement and effectiveness, this is a milestone achievement for Fiji. The lessons learnt from this, the first leadership and management training for school leaders to be conducted in this education system, could be helpful not only in planning but also in implementing better programmes in future. The present study of the perceptions of the school leaders of the leadership and management training programme may say little about how successfully these leaders have been able to put their training into practice in their respective schools. Future investigation of the same cohort of school leaders to determine how they have transformed themselves as a result of the leadership and management training programme could be revealing. While the effects of training remain to be seen, future inquiry is called for to examine the changes brought by the leaders in their respective schools as the result of leadership and management training. Embarking on such studies would yield useful information about the potential, or lack thereof, to transform leadership

practices. Also, feedback from such a study would provide further insights about future training programmes, especially the content of the leadership and management training programme to help school leaders cope better with the ever changing demands of work. Though this was a small-scale study with a small number of respondents, comparable countries (especially those in the Pacific region and other small island developing states beyond the Pacific) may find this study of Fiji school leaders' experiences relating to a leadership and management training programme useful and relevant.

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