

What are the professional development needs of novice principals in Sri Lanka?

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This paper presents part of the data from my doctoral study, which is a phenomenological qualitative study on the professional development needs of novice school principals in their initial leadership roles. The study focused on understanding the lived experiences of participants regarding the induction training offered for novice principals by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the National Institute of Education, Sri Lanka. The participants included policymakers and implementers, who are administrative officers, as well as policy recipients, who are principals. The study employed qualitative interviews and documentary analysis to collect data and understand the stakeholders' perspectives. The findings revealed that novices in their initial leadership roles perceived that their professional development needed to focus on developing their leadership skills rather than just their roles as leaders. This suggests that novice leaders' professional development needs centred on acquiring hard skills that help them perform their leadership roles efficiently and effectively. This emphasis on hard skills as a professional development need by the novice principals was imagined in their initial leadership role and fits with the 'apprenticeship' model (p. 461), as illustrated by Bush et al. (2008). Conversely, policymakers and policy implementers perceived that the professional development needs of novice principals should be centred on leader development rather than focusing solely on leadership. Their perspective emphasises the importance of developing intrapersonal and interpersonal skills within novice principals, which are soft skills that enhance a leader's personal growth and effectiveness. In line with this, policymakers have designed the training to focus on leader development with soft skills rather than leadership that facilitates hard skills. This finding aligns with the deficit model as discussed by Chaudary (2013), where the training is being designed based on the deficit thinking of policy makers. Thus, the findings revealed that intra- and interpersonal skill development has positively impacted leaders' performance in adjusting to new school contexts and facing challenges. However, the findings also indicated that novice leaders had faced difficulties in school administration due to a lack of training in hard skills, which caused dissatisfaction among them. Finally, based on the findings, the study suggests several recommendations for national-level policymakers and provincial-level policy implementers to improve induction training and meet the professional development needs of novice leaders in their initial leadership roles.

Keywords: novice principals, leader development, leadership development, soft skills and hard skills