



**Action research points the way forward for leadership training to enable school leaders to improve the quality of teaching and learning in primary schools.**

EdQual's Leadership and Management of Change project set out to identify effective school leadership practices for improving the quality of education for the most disadvantaged learners. It did this through facilitating primary school headteachers in both Tanzania and Ghana to conduct an action research project in their school. This involved identifying a specific issue in their school, collecting and analysing data to understand it better, creatively planning and implementing actions to tackle this issue, which often involved mobilising teachers, parents and/or community leaders, and then evaluated the impact. The project also conducted a survey on headteacher views on leadership in relation to the quality of teaching and learning, gender, poverty reduction and decentralisation and conducted case studies of effective practice (Ngcobo and Tikly, 2010).

Successful initiatives included mobilising community support for a feeding programme; persuading local officers and NGOs to fund school development, instigating remedial classes for working boys, reducing girls' exposure to sexual risk and improving the communication skills of hearing impaired learners. Facilitators supported these initiatives through annual two-day workshops and regular school visits. Local support was organised in the form of cluster support groups and district officers were kept informed of the project's progress.

For some, participating in action research transformed attitudes to leadership. It generated a belief amongst headteachers that they could make a difference to learning and teaching in their schools. There was a clear change of mind-set from headteachers seeing themselves as bureaucrats and functionaries to a view that they could act as 'instructional leaders' (Bush & Glover, 2003). This brief focuses on findings and lessons from the research in Tanzania.

### *EdQual RPC and education quality*

The Leadership and Management of Change project is part of the EdQual Research Programme Consortium. EdQual's research focuses on how to improve the quality of basic education. Education quality is key to attracting and retaining learners in basic education and ensuring education contributes to other areas of development.

## Key Policy Messages

**Headteachers have a key role to play in improving the quality of education for the most disadvantaged learners within increasingly decentralised systems.**

Create enabling conditions for locally initiated and designed quality improvement initiatives by:

- Making head teacher preparation in leadership a condition for appointing primary school headteachers;
- Putting in place a programme of continuous professional development to support headteachers as reflexive leaders of quality improvement in their schools;
- Involving school leaders in the design as well as implementation of school improvement projects;
- Identifying and re-distributing resources to schools that are severely under-resourced, under-staffed and have large numbers of disadvantaged pupils or serving especially poor communities;
- Investigating the role of district and ward level officers in quality improvement.

Training for school leadership should equip school leaders with skills for evaluating school quality and leading change. These include:

- Collecting and analysing information on school quality;
- Presenting information clearly to mobilise staff and community members;
- Working collaboratively with colleagues, parents, the community and district and ward education officers to solve problems;
- Reviewing the impact of changes implemented and reflecting on practice.

## Background to the project

A baseline study revealed that only 25% of headteachers in Ghana had participated in any leadership training. In Tanzania this figure was 60%. Other findings from the baseline study show that in Tanzania there are glaring variations in how headteachers perceive problems that they encounter in planning and implementing school quality improvement. There were also wide variations in school quality indicators such as pupil to teacher ratio, pupil to classroom ratio and performance in the Primary School Leaving Examination (PLSE). For example, pupil to teacher ratio ranged from 23 to 1 up to 66 to 1 within one district and the percentage of grade seven pupils continuing onto secondary education ranged from fifty up to one hundred per cent. These findings suggest that schools in Tanzania face a range of very different quality issues and hence there is a need for quality improvement initiatives designed and implemented at the school or local level.

### The role of the head teacher

Decentralisation has extended the leadership and management roles of headteachers, intensifying their workload. The baseline study and consultation with headteachers through a needs analysis workshop revealed that headteachers now have greater responsibility for managing the school budget and mobilising resources from various sources. The universalisation of primary education in Tanzania has extended the administrative task of enrolling children in standard one to included seeking entrants out in the surrounding community. In this respect, headteachers are the frontline of the battle for universal primary education and are intensely interested in children's realities and social contexts. Despite the increase in administrative responsibilities, headteachers still view themselves as responsible for supervising teaching and learning activities in the school, including teacher professional development. They also see themselves as playing an important role with respect to promoting inclusion and gender equity, although a minority did not see themselves as having a role in combating sexual harassment and promoting health education.

### Why an action research approach?

In a broad ranging review of reform in sub-Saharan Africa, Samoff, Sebatane and Dembélé (2003) concluded that it was more important to nurture the local roots of innovation by re-creating the conditions for successful reform than it is to reproduce the elements of successful reform. So what are the conditions that nurture school level innovation? How can school leaders be enabled to respond creatively and effectively to the specific needs of their learners? EdQual's leadership and management of change project set out to find this out through supporting and observing action research projects in twenty primary schools in Ghana and ten primary schools in Tanzania. Action research is ideal for studying the change process and the local conditions for realising change. It connects directly with the local realities, understandings and perspectives of learners. This brief focuses on findings from Tanzania.

## Majani Mapana Primary School, Tanga Drawing on School Resources to Support Disadvantaged Pupils

*Mwl. Juliet Makrita, Head teacher*



Mwl. Makrita wished to find ways the school could meet the needs of pupils living with difficult home conditions as a result of poverty and related factors, such as being orphanhood. It was found that around 45% of pupils in standards six, 20% in standard five and 13% in standard three were affected.

Fifteen vulnerable children were the focus of the inquiry, identified through analysis of attendance registers. She started by finding out more about the home backgrounds of the 15 children and raising parental awareness on the importance of regular school attendance through home visits and face to face administration of pupil and parent questionnaires. School's self-reliance funds were then used to address practical problems that children faced by purchasing uniforms, stationery and food. A horticultural club was started for the 15 project children, so that they could grow food to improve their nutrition and raise some income. However, this proved hard for the children to maintain. The individual attention and practical support given to children did lead to an improvement in attendance

for some and also greater engagement in class. Teachers also were more pro-active in finding ways to improve their teaching, such as looking for new text books.

This was already an effective school, in which children spoke highly of their school and their teachers. It was due to the leadership's ongoing entrepreneurship and creativity, particularly in the use of the school farm, that the school had self-reliance funds which it controlled autonomously. This increased the headteachers' agency for bring about change. Mwl. Makrita was particularly effective in nurturing collaborative staff relations and discussed all interventions with the school committee. She also reviewed the impact of her actions and adjusted her plans accordingly.



## Research Findings at a Glance

### Instructional leadership

Headteachers were more ready to act to improve teaching and learning in the upper years, which are preparing for the leaving examinations than in the earlier years. The early grades are vital for laying a strong foundation for literacy and numeracy skills. Incentives are not yet in place to motivate school leaders to prioritise instructional leadership in standards one to five.

### Evaluate and monitor school quality

All the projects started with analysis of data on attendance and/or performance that schools collect as a matter of course. This was followed up by regular monitoring of individual pupils and in some cases teachers also. The analytical techniques used by Mwl. Shehumu, Mwl. Makrita and others were developed into simple school evaluation tools that headteachers can use to monitor school quality and identify pupils needing extra support.

### Work closely with community leaders and parents

Armed with clearly presented data on school quality, headteachers such as Mwl. Shehumu mobilised community leaders and parents to support the school. Support might take the form of financial and material contributions, as in Kilimani, or changing attitudes to children's participation in schooling. For example, some participants persuaded parents to make sure children had breakfast before leaving home and came to school with basic stationery equipment.

### Draw on all available resources

Some communities can offer very little support to schools—maybe they lack strong leadership, are fragmented, parents work long distances from the family home or people are simply too poor. This was the position for Azimio Primary School but Mwl. Mndolwa, the head teacher, was still able to secure financial support for orphans from a local NGO. Mwl. Makrita (box on left) drew on the school self-reliance funds raised from the sale of seedlings and plants.

### Collegial staff relations

Effective headteachers developed strong collegial relationships between teaching staff. Regular meetings with teachers and delegation of responsibilities were important for maintaining collegiality but so was caring for staff welfare. Effective headteachers brought staff together through a social fund or morning tea, to which all staff contributed.

### Approachable by pupils

The most effective headteachers were observed to be approachable by pupils as well as by staff. Children interviewed at Changa Primary School described being individually helped with mathematics by Mwl. Maruchu (see box on right). At Azimio School, also in Tanga, children were observed to enter freely in and out of the head teacher's office. All projects started with headteachers listening to pupils and learning about their individual school and home experiences.

### When headteachers cannot initiate change

In a minority of schools, headteachers did not seem able to bring about change. There was no capacity to support the school in the local community and in one case the school was understaffed. In some schools, quality improvement in these kinds of schools is dependent on outside intervention and not school leadership.

## Changa Primary School, Tanga Raising Achievement

*Mwl. Gadrick Maruchu, Head Teacher*



Mwl. Maruchu identified poor pupil performance in mathematics as a key problem facing the school. The school had a good reputation for quality but nearly all the staff were young and inexperienced. Interviews with pupils suggested that teacher absenteeism was a problem. The project focused on the standard six year group and continued with them as they moved into standard seven the following year. In a class of 46 pupils, 22 were failing in mathematics prior to the intervention. Through talking to the students and diagnostic testing Mwl. Maruchu ascertained that parents and pupils were dissatisfied with the teaching of mathematics and most pupils had not yet mastered their multiplication tables.

Mwl. Maruchu's individualised his teaching so as to build on pupils' strengths. He instigated group work, in which pupils discussed problems and the quicker pupils acted as 'peer teachers'. He also administered tests regularly and set work for private study time. He showed pupils how to set their own learning targets and monitor their own progress. He then urged other teachers in the school to adopt similar techniques and to strive to make mathematics teaching more enjoyable.

Mwl. Maruchu had developed these techniques in a previous posting as a mathematics teacher. The innovation in this project was his demonstration of these techniques to other teachers in his school. He could now build upon this project by focusing on this staff development element.

## Kilimani Primary School, Korogwe Mobilising Staff and Community

*Mwl. Shehumu, Deputy Head Teacher*

Mwl. Shehumu set out to reduce truancy and improve academic performance. He performed simple analysis of attendance data using pen and paper to show parents, community leaders and his teaching colleagues the extent of truancy and its impact on learning. Consultation with parents, pupils and teachers led to the identification of a range of individual, environmental and school causes.



Parents agreed to contribute to a school feeding programme and set up a committee for tackling truancy. Community members became more proactive in observing and reporting children out of school during the school day. Within school, teachers made efforts to make their teaching more engaging and classrooms more colourful. The use of corporal punishment was curtailed and a greater emphasis placed on academic performance, including regular testing.

## About the Research

The initial phase of the project in both countries encompassed a baseline survey of a sample of schools which focused on school leadership practices, together with a systematic literature review centred on effective educational leadership practice within an African context. Following this phase a small group of headteachers was chosen to become involved in the project.

In Ghana a group of twenty-one school leaders attended a workshop in February 2008 where they were introduced to Participatory Action Research (PAR) techniques by facilitators from Pakistan, the United Kingdom and Ghana, and guided to identify problems they would like to try to solve using these techniques. Similarly, in Tanzania 12 headteachers attended a training workshop on PAR organized by the Faculty of Education University of Dar es Salaam and facilitated by colleagues from the universities of Dar es Salaam, Bristol and the Aga Khan University. The aim was to empower the headteachers to use these techniques so their practice of leadership would enhance their capacity to improve pupil achievement. We sought to identify good practices from the headteachers' Action Research interventions to provide insights into leading and managing change to enrich educational quality within their schools. Headteachers were encouraged to focus on issues or concerns that directly impacted upon the quality of education for the most disadvantaged pupils within their schools.

By the conclusion of the initial workshops in February 2008 all participating headteachers had identified their specific issue of concern and had started to build up a picture of their approach. A key element in both countries was the direct and ongoing support offered by facilitators from the universities and critical friends, who were co-participants in neighbouring schools. The network of professional relationships built up over many years was seen as a vital ingredient in both maintaining research momentum and in emphasising the South-South nature of the research collaboration. Contact was maintained between project school leaders and their facilitators through regular school visits in Tanzania. In Ghana, issues of distance, school location in difficult terrain and poor transport infrastructure meant that a smaller number of face-to-face meetings had to be supplemented with cellular phone contact.

All headteachers were encouraged to keep a log of their actions in relation to their chosen issue and to develop data gathering instruments to provide them with evidence of any resultant changes emerging from their actions. They were also asked to write summary reports for a workshop held in March 2009. University facilitators in both Ghana and Tanzania kept logs of their regular meetings with case study headteachers.

The emphasis throughout both the initial workshops and follow-up contacts has been on developing the headteachers' sense of agency linked to a belief that they could affect the quality of their pupils' education through their actions. The emphasis throughout was on focusing on issues of 'social justice' through identifying concerns that centred on severely disadvantaged pupils (Bosu et al, forthcoming).

## References

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## Further Reading

[www.edqual.org/leadershipmanagement](http://www.edqual.org/leadershipmanagement)

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