

Developing Management Skills for the Learners of Educational Management and Leadership Programs in Vietnam- Challenges and Solutions

A/Prof.Dr.Nguyen Thi Mi Loc

University of Education, VNU, Hanoi.

Abstract

Management skills are an important component of educational leader and manager competencies. There are two ways of forming a skill: imitating and practicing. Practice is the most effective. To develop a skill, learners have to do practical assignments following the four skill formation steps, dealing with practical things and practice in real situations. It is necessary to have systems of practical assignments for the learners to practice during the learning, demonstration schools where they can learn real experiences and practice their skills. In the 21st Century educational managers and leaders have to master the skills to lead 21st Century schools, in particular they need ICT and English skills to use ICT in their management job and need to update with new knowledge. However, in Vietnam, the learners of educational leadership programs have not been trained to develop management skills due to the lack of rational parts of theory and practice in the programs, passive teaching and learning methods, poor facilities and, most importantantly, the lack of knowledge about skill formation and the ability of training management skills of instructors. Vietnam has tried to overcome these challenges, but has not been successful. We need both domestic and international cooperation in our renewal process of preparing and training our educational managers and leaders.

Introduction

Koontz H. Odonnell C. and Wehrich H. (1994) have indicated that the quality of managers plays the most decisive role in the success of an organization. In terms of the quality of a manager there is a component of knowledge, skills and ethical values that a manager possesses to do his/her management job well. It is said: “[With willing hearts and skillful hands, the difficult we do at once; the impossible takes a bit longer](http://thinkexist.com/quotations/skill)” (<http://thinkexist.com/quotations/skill>). This component of the quality of a manager is called management competence ([Robert N. Lussier, 2000](#)).

Applying the understanding about management competence in educational leadership, we can define educational leadership competencies as the knowledge, skills and the ethical values that an educational leader masters to accomplish management tasks.

Skill is understood as the ability, coming from one's knowledge, practice, aptitude, etc., to do something well. At the advanced level a skill is a competent excellence in performance; expertness; dexterity ([Dictionary.com](#)).

Many studies show that, management and leadership skills are a very important component of leadership competencies. In the 21st Century, educational leaders need competencies that allow them to manage 21st Century schools that are based on ICT. They are skills of planning, instructional leadership, assessment, organizing and implementing plans, managing finance and school infrastructure, communication, information management, skills of effective group working, etc. (Ubben, Hugies, Norris, 2004 and others). Instructional skills and transformational leadership have great impact on teaching and learning and, therefore, determine the educational quality of a school (Blase J&J, August 1999; Marks, Printy, August 2003 and others). And in a digital age, educational leaders have to have ICT skills and ICT leadership skills to use in their everyday lives and in their management jobs (Department of Education and Children’s Services, 20 Jan 2009; TSSA, November 2001).

There are two ways to obtain a skill: by practicing and by imitating. “[Knowledge is gained by learning; trust by doubt; skill by practice; and love by love](http://thinkexist.com/quotations/skill)”.(Thomas S. Szasz, <http://thinkexist.com/quotations/skill>).

Illina (1973) and Tsebuseva (1972) show that, to develop a skill, a learner must go through four steps: Obtaining the knowledge of the skill; Understanding the tasks of forming the skill; Applying the knowledge of the skill and implementing tasks to form the skill; and Assessing how well the skill has been formed.

According to these authors, skills are formed through the systems of practical assignments the learners have done in their learning process. For example, to form problem-solving skills the learners have to solve some problems occurring in their practical job. Practice with making speeches on given topics can help to develop skills of making speeches...

However, Merleau-Ponty (Dreyfus H.L (1982) showed us a very important factor, in that skills are acquired by dealing with things and situations. The same as noticed by Merleau-Ponty, Tsebuseva (1972) worked on technical training and emphasized the importance of practicing on the learners in the real situations. For example, students are asked to work in the repaired car services if they want to develop skills for car repairing. In different countries, especially in the US, the master learners of leadership programs have to spend a long internship and practicum in the schools to practice how to lead a school. The internship takes place under strict observation and assessment of instructors and the school principal or senior administrator.

Lieu (28/01/2008) explains real situations or practicing environment here relate to the demonstration schools where learners can come to watch the real tasks principals are doing or where they can exercise their skills. The practicing environment may also relate to training facilities (video clips that demonstrate management skills, TV programs with guidelines, etc) that learners can use for their study.

According to Lieu (28/01/2008), coaches are important to guide learners how to do the tasks to form skills. Some learners can put themselves through guidelines given in the program, but most learners need help from coaches. Coaches must be proficient in the skills they guide

learners to develop. Usually, during the process of doing assignments or practicing real tasks, learners have many questions to ask and the coaches or instructors must understand well the theory and practice to answer their questions and help them. And instructors have to know how to deal with practical problems: they can ask additional questions to clarify the situation of the problem so that they know how to guide learners to solve this or that problem matching the guidance to the learners' own situations. One similar problem may occur in different schools but solving it must be based on the situation of each school.

Learning from international experience, I see that, to help the learners in educational leadership programs to form management skills, objectives of developing management competencies for the learners are required to be set in the curriculums. The programs have to be divided into rational theoretical and practical parts so that learners can learn both theory and practice.

For example: in the Master of Education in Educational Leadership (M.Ed.) of Dallas Baptist University, the internship is as follow:

EDAD 6389 (3-3-0) Internship in Educational Administration (S-L)

A practicum designed to provide field experiences in school administration. The intern is assigned to an appropriate administrator in an approved elementary or secondary school. The field experience is under the supervision of a university professor and requires monthly seminar meetings at the university. The intern is given experience in developing and applying proficiencies in learner-centered leadership, learner-centered climate, learner-centered curriculum and instruction, learner-centered professional development, equity in excellence for all learners, and learner-centered communication. Specific activities and assignments ensure that the intern obtains practical experience in these proficiencies, determined collaboratively by the student, the university professor, and the cooperating administrator. Application for an internship must be made one semester prior to the semester of

enrollment. This course contains a field-based service-learning component. Fall, Spring.

(<http://www3.dbu.edu/graduate/education.asp>)

In concluding, I must say management knowledge is important, but management skills are more important as they help educational leaders to be successful in their job. It is not easy to form a skill, as forming a skill required systems of practical assignments or special conditions for the learners to practice in real situations with real objects of instruction. It is not easy either to develop systems of practical assignments or to create good environments for the learners to practice.

Challenges in developing management skills in Vietnam

From what we have known about requirements of education leadership preparation and training, especially about skills training, I must say that educational leadership and management preparation in Vietnam is facing different challenges of programs and instructional methods, instructors' and learners' competencies, practicing environment and the lack of good facilities for instructional process.

The first challenges are programs and instructional methods. Research conducted by a PhD student (Hàng, 2006) in three main educational institutions, where educational leaders were trained, found that only 22.3% of the content of Master's programs met the requirements of the educational management job. Lecturing is used in almost all lessons (from 80% to 100% lecturers used this style of delivery) as the sole instructional method. There were some discussions, problem solving and only a few other active teaching methods used. The programs consisted of about 80% theory and only about 20% practice (such as some short visits to observe school activities, solving management problems or doing some assignments.) There were no standards and no item bank for assessment. In 2006-2007, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) in Vietnam asked Vietnam National Institute for Educational Management in Hanoi (NIEM) to develop standards for assessing school

principals. These standards are still in the piloting process, but they are already outdated because they do not reflect new requirements for school leaders in the 21st century.

In Lieu’s research recently (Lieu, 2009) in five educational institutions, the assessment of the learner learning is focused mainly on knowledge. The most popular assessment method is minor essays where students are asked to narrate what they have learned. The combination of objective and subjective tests is very rarely used. In the survey that Lieu asked instructors, learners and program administrators how often the instructors assess management skills of their learners, the frequency is very low. Table 1 below shows the frequency of assessing management skills of the learners in the master programs for educational management in five educational institutions: (The survey was taken with students graduating from master programs for educational management in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 years).

Table 1. Frequency of assessing management skills of the learners in the programs for educational management in Vietnam

Q: How often do instructors assess management skills of their learners? (For program administrators)

How often do your instructors assess management skills of the learners? (For the learners)

How often do you assess management skills of your learners? (Students)

Skills	Program administrators (27 pers)	Instructors (58 pers)	Learners (189 pers)
Strategic planning	36,88	34,8	30,4
Developing annual school plan	62,54	45,8	57,9
Communication	55,4	55,8	46,5
Organization management	32,9	55,7	41,5
Human resource management	48,9	54,5	44,3
Making speech/presentation	28,3	44,5	52,8

Making decision	28.3	44,5	52,8
Guiding and counseling	28.3	41,1	56,2
Instructional leadership	48.1	55,6	54,8
Assessment and evaluation	55.3	66,2	50,0

The second challenge is competency of instructors

There are no statistics of instructors who have PhD degrees in education and educational management and leadership that teach in master and PhD programs for educational management and leadership in Vietnam, however, the number is small. Most of the lecturers are recruited from other disciplines or from young graduated students who have no or very little experience in school management.

In Lieu's interview, she found that instructors don't understand well the components of skills and steps of skill formation. Some instructors cannot list all the components of the management skill they are teaching. They cannot provide the learners clear guidelines of how to develop the skills and usually give the learners lectures without practice. Moreover, they have not been properly equipped with assessment methods. One lecturer gave the learners a final exam to analyse a school strategic plan and she thinks that this assignment is for assessing strategic planning skills of the learners. In fact this assignment cannot assess strategic planning skills of the learners. It is easier for people to analyse and give comments on a strategic plan than to develop a strategic plan by themselves. It is like you try a cake, but you do not make it by yourself.

The third challenge is the lack of demonstration school systems

The learners of educational leadership programs are adult learners. Adult learners learn best when they use knowledge in their practical job and they feel the knowledge is useful for their

job (Lieb, 1991). By participating in the school activities under supervision of an experienced school principal, aspiring principals can learn the school administrative job easily as they apply the theory that they have learned into practical situations. However, in Vietnam the relations between universities or colleges (where educational leaders are trained) with schools are very loose. The good schools and the highly qualified principals can be counted on the fingers. School principals don't want to have learners to come to observe their activities for long periods. Most principals in Vietnam are promoted before or without graduating from any educational leadership and management programs. And those who have graduated from programs for educational management don't possess the needed set of management skills because the programs don't provide them. Therefore, school principals cannot help the learners of educational management and leadership program very well and the learners will not be very benefit from the internship if they are allowed to take one.

The fourth challenge relates to the lack of good facilities for instructional process

Educational institutions in Vietnam don't have good libraries and internet access for the learners. Most books translated into Vietnamese on educational leadership and management are outdated. Libraries don't have enough funds to buy new books. Recently, thanks to international cooperation, some colleges and universities have been equipped with English-language books. However, the learners don't have enough English to read them.

The fifth is the weaknesses of ICT and English skills of the learners

Although the learners are selected from teachers, educational leaders and managers, their ability, especially in English and ICT skills is still limited. Most learners come from rural and disadvantaged areas where internet access and English usage are not popular. The lack of ICT and English prevents learners from reading English learning materials; therefore, they cannot update with necessary knowledge.

And, last but not the least, is the unavailability of systems of assignments for the learners to practice during their study.

As the instructors don't know well enough about management skills, assessment methods and the process of skill formation, they cannot develop systems of practical assignments to use in their instruction. Therefore, they teach theory more than practice.

These challenges require educational institutions to reform programs, enhance capacity of lecturing staff to develop standards, tools and systems of demonstration schools for the learners of educational management and leadership programs.

Solutions for solving the above problems in Vietnam

Many efforts have been made in education renovation, especially in educational leadership and management training. In many legal documents promulgated by the Communist Party of Vietnam and the Ministry of Education and Training in Vietnam, educational management and leadership is emphasized as a breakthrough for educational improvement of the country. On June, 15, 2004 The Politburo of the Communist Party of Vietnam released Decree 40 on developing and enhancing the quality of teachers and educational leaders. This Decree focuses on developing professionalism for teachers and leaders, reforming programs, applying ICT in instructional processes so that instructors are encouraged to use active teaching methods and learners are encouraged to be creative and to develop their teaching and management skills (Ban Chap hanh Trung uong, 15/6/2004). Implementing this Decree, educational institutions have tried to reform their training and have carried out research in educational management. However, the status of educational management and leadership training has not improved much, as analyzed above.

In an effort to improve the quality of educational leadership preparation and training, educational institutions have sought international cooperation and several cooperation projects have been implemented.

Cooperation to develop programs at the international standards

I can be proud to say that, my University of Education is the leading institution in international cooperation to reform educational programs for teachers and leaders.

In 2000 we were the first institution to open joint program of educational leadership with the University of New England, Australia. **Until now we have 216 graduated students from this joint program.**

Later, we have a joint program of Master in Educational Leadership with the Dalarna University, Sweden. The Program consists of 7 courses equivalent to 60 ECTS taught by professors of the Dalarna University and of other European Universities based on European standards. The program taught in Vietnam is the same as a program taught at the Dalarna University and at other European Universities. The degree awarded to students in Vietnam has the same value as a degree awarded to students who learn at the Dalarna University.

Until now this joint program has been prepared 120 students. Students of the first course will graduate in 2010 spring.

From 2008 to 2012 The Netherlands Program for the Institutional Strengthening of Postsecondary Education and Training Capacity (NPT) represented by the Netherlands School for Educational Management of Amsterdam University in collaboration with VU and Chinese Hong Kong universities has supported my University to develop and pilot a Master of Arts (MA) programme in Educational Leadership, Management and Administration up to international standards. For a sustainable development of these MAs staff of 4 universities and NIEM will be supported in the acquisition and development of competencies in curriculum development, new training methodology and training of trainers, next to learning and applying new content. Vietnam National University is the principal partner of NSO and other universities and NIEM are beneficiaries. Eleven modules have been developing and

will be piloted in March 2010 with an orientation on using authentic learning and assessment to develop management skills of the learners.

1. Mission Building and Strategic Management
2. Leadership Styles
3. Using ICT as part of the Learning Environment
4. Management of Learning and Instruction
5. Management of School Culture
6. Guidance and Counseling
7. Management of Change
8. Management of Finance
9. Management of Quality
10. Organisation Management
11. Human Resources Management

Another project which has been implemented nationwide is the SREM (Support Renovation of Educational Management) project supported by the European Union together with the National Institute for Education in Singapore that helped MOET to change the training methods and content for principals on short courses at the Vietnam National Institute for Educational Management (Hanoi). In this program, seven topics are offered for training: 1) Change management and leadership; 2) Renewal of school management and leadership; 3) School culture; 4) Strategic planning; 5) Staff development; 6) Resource mobilization for school development and, 7) Round development of school pupils. In this program new sights on school management and leadership are developed compared to the old programs have been provided at this institute. School management and leadership is analyzed and taught in the new contexts of internationalization, globalization, changed environments and decentralization. Active teaching methods are required to be used to help the learners actively

take part in the learning process. In 2007-2008 the preparation stage was conducted to train the trainers. In 2009 and in the next few years, about 3,000 principals are and will be trained. Until now only five provinces in Vietnam have taken part in the program.

Thanks to these cooperation programs, new knowledge on educational management has been disseminated in Vietnam, our teaching and physical capacities have been enhanced and active teaching methods have been used more often. Students can read the reference books to learn deeply and understand widely the theory. Students have to do assignments therefore, they become active learners.

However, the process of reforming educational leadership preparation and training has happened slowly. We have to continue to solve the problems of

- 1) Equipping teaching staff with knowledge about skill formation so that they can guide the learners and help them form management skills.
- 2) Training practical trainers who can guide students in the practical tasks of forming skills during their learning in the classroom and when they are on the internship in the schools. The practical trainers will work along with instructors.
- 3) Restructure programs so that students can have time to go internship at schools and practice more.
- 4) Develop demonstration schools where learners can learn best experiences for their learning of educational management and leadership.
- 5) Develop systems of practical assignments to use in instructional processes. Lieu (2009) in her research project has found foundations for development of the systems of practical assignments for the learners of educational leadership programs. She indicates that, to develop systems of assignments, instructors have to know the four steps of skill formation process, types of assignments, the features of adult learners and the strengths and weaknesses of each type of assignments and assessment. There are different

assignments that can be developed and used in training processes: management problems, small exploration, portfolio, essays, practical activities (making speeches/presentations, organizing a meeting, etc). These assignments can be used in the different steps of a skill formation process to form different management skills. The instructors have to know the features of adult learners to develop appropriate assignments. Knowing the strengths and weaknesses of each type of assignments and assessment helps instructors develop and use different assignments, different types of assessments to promote advantages of each assignment or assessment type and limit their disadvantages. There are two types of assessment that instructors have to use together: assessment for learning and assessment of learning or formative assessment and summative assessment. Assessment for learning or formative assessment is used during the lessons to help learners identify their weaknesses and strengths to move on. Assessment of learning or summative assessment is used at the end of each module/subject or at the end of a program to make sure that the learners have mastered the needed knowledge and skills.

6) Upgrading and specific skill training: the management job and school life are changing more rapidly and require new knowledge and management skills to help principals adapt their school to the new context. This training can be taken in different places and at different times and becomes life-long learning for learners.

Conclusion

The more we gain understanding about the importance of management skills, the more we see it as being urgent to train our learners of educational leadership programs to form these skills. We can overcome all challenges if we have good cooperation among domestic universities and schools, international cooperation that gives us good experiences and knowledge and supports us in physical facilities. There are many things to do in Vietnam to renew our educational managers and leaders preparation and training – from reforming the

programs, improving the recruitment process for learners, renewing and using active teaching and learning methods and carrying out more practical activities to help the learners form management skills. Especially, we have to focus on ICT and English-language skills so that our educational leaders can catch up with new requirements to the school management in the 21st Century.

References

- Blase J&J (August, 1999), Principals' Instructional Leadership and Teacher Development: Teachers' Perspectives, *Educational Administration Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 3, 349-378, eaq.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract
- BAN CHẤP HÀNH TRUNG ƯƠNG (15 tháng 6 2004), Số: 40-CT/TW Chỉ thị 40 của Ban Bí thư Về việc xây dựng, nâng cao chất lượng đội ngũ nhà giáo và cán bộ quản lý giáo dục (Central Politburo of CPV (15 June 2004), No 40-CT/TW about Directions for enhancing quality of teachers and educational leaders)
- Dallas Baptist University, Master of Education in Educational Leadership (M.Ed.), <http://www3.dbu.edu/graduate/education.asp>
- Behrman J, Hoddinott J., Maluccio JA, Soler E ... (October 2006) What Determines Adult Cognitive Skills? Impacts of Pre-Schooling, Schooling and Post-Schooling Experiences in Guatemala, *PIER Working Paper No. 06-027*, repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&context=psc_working_paper
- Department of Education and Children's Services (20 Jan 2009), *E Strategy framework*, Government of South Australia, www.decs.sa.gov.au/learningtechnologies.
- Dictionary.com
- Dreyfus H.L (1982), *A Phenomenology of Skill Acquisition as the basis for a Merleau-Pontian Nonrepresentationalist Cognitive Science*, Free Press, socrates.berkeley.edu/~hdreyfus/pdf/MerleauPontySkillCogSci.pdf
- <http://thinkexist.com/quotations/skill>
- Koontz H. Odonnell C. and Weihrich H. (1994), *Essentials of Management, Technology and Science* Publisher, Hanoi (Vietnamese)
- [Robert N. Lussier](http://www.managementfundamentals.com) (2000), [Management fundamentals: concepts, applications, skill development, Business & Economics](http://www.managementfundamentals.com)
- Hàng Nguyễn Thị Thu (2006), *Phát triển đội ngũ cán bộ quản lý giáo dục trình độ thạc sĩ ở Việt Nam*, luận án tiến sĩ, Đại học Quốc gia Hà Nội (Vietnamese version) (Nguyen

Thi Thu Hang), Develop management cadre at master level in Vietnam, Doctoral dissertation, Vietnam national University in Hanoi.

Liều Trần Thị Bích (28/1/2008), Đào tạo kỹ năng quản lý cho hiệu trưởng, *Hội thảo khoa học: “Các giải pháp nâng cao chất lượng bồi dưỡng hiệu trưởng trường phổ thông Việt Nam”*, Học viện Quản lý giáo dục (Vietnamese). (Lieu Tran Thi Bích (28/1/2008), Training skills for school principals, *Workshop proceedings “Measures to enhance quality of upgrading programs for principals in Vietnam”*, Vietnam national Institute for Educational management.

Liều Trần Thị Bích (2008-2009), Research project priority ministerial level “Develop tools to assess and evaluate programs for Educational Managers in Vietnam” (2008-2009), Support: Ministry of Education and Training, Vietnam.

Thanh Nguyễn Thi (2007), *Đổi mới phương thức kiểm tra - đánh giá kết quả học tập của học viên các trường Cán bộ Quản lý Giáo dục và Đào tạo*, Đề tài Khoa học cấp Bộ, Học viện quản lý giáo dục (Vietnamese) (Nguyen Thi Thanh (2007), *Renewing examination and assessment of the learners' learning in College for Educational Managers in Vietnam*, Research project ministerial level, National Institute for Educational Management).

Tbuseva V.V. (1972), *Tâm lý học dạy học lao động (kỹ năng, kỹ xảo và những điều kiện dạy lao động)*, Nxb Giáo dục, Hà Nội (Tbuseva V.V. (1972), *Psychology of labor training (skills, habits and labor conditions)*, (Education Publisher, Hanoi)

TSSA Collaborative (November 2001), Technology Standards for School Administrators, <http://www.ncrtec.org/pd/tssa/tssa.pdf>

Ubben C.G, Hugies W.L, Norris J.C. (2004), *The principal Creative leadership for Excellent in schools*, Peason

Lieb S (1991), [Principles of adult learning](http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/adults-2.htm), honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/adults-2.htm

