

## LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES FACED BY NOVICE TEACHERS WORKING IN NIGER'S PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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### ***Abstract***

This article examines the adaptation challenges of novice teachers as educational leaders in the context of Niger. In Niger, the newly recruited teachers are supported officially by the school principals who control and evaluate their lesson booklet every day and visit them at least once a month for evaluating and supporting them on duty. On the other hand, the supervisors, advisers and inspectors visit the teachers at schools according to the Ministry's supervision program. The current low quality of primary education may be affected by this supervision process which is seem to be inefficient for improving leadership skills of teachers who are expected to make changes in school and education system . Nevertheless, for handling this problem and increasing the quality of primary school education, the government should implement a new policy for educating “teacher leader” during the pre-service and in-service education.

**Keywords:** Teacher Leadership, Educational Reform, Republic of Niger.

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### **Introduction**

Teachers in societies have a role of change agents, they are supposed to educate the current and the future generation. Therefore, the educational system and the role of teachers should be shaped according to life expectancy, which seems to be progressively faster, complex, uncertain, and compressed. So, this calls teachers to do their job with appropriate leadership. Regarding that teachers could be viewed as instructional leaders who should be well educated during the pre-service education and continuing professional development. They are expected to be ready to face the concept of compression of time and space, which affect their professional working environments (Fullan, 2005). “Teachers have a central role to play in the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that enable learners to live in harmony and peace with others. In practice, transformative pedagogy which leads to “a change in behavior” and allows teachers to realize this role and become facilitators of learning rather than transmitters of knowledge is needed (UNESCO, 2019).

This new concept of teacher leader as a model or change maker emerged with varieties of definitions. However, teachers leaders are teachers who promote “student achievement”. In this regard, the pre-service educational program should prepare teachers in order to become leaders, with high level of skills which can help them to do efficiently their profession. However, good selection process of candidate, well organized pre-service education program, hiring qualified teachers in the educational systems are frequently cited among the factors of high performing education systems. When teachers are well educated with good working conditions with vision and motivation, they are expected

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incessantly to be “teachers leaders” who may affect others positively by developing their skills and behaviors. It is worth to mention that, this kind of educated teachers can gradually raise her/his skills and take easily organizational perspectives (Harris, 2005).

Though, teacher leadership is defined as “knowledge, skills, and dispositions by teachers who positively impact student learning by influencing adults... beyond the classrooms” (Vanita, 2016, p. 2-17). So, teacher leadership is viewed as a mechanism that teachers utilize to empower the educational environment. (York-Barr & Duke, 2004 Vanita, 2016, p.8).

Teachers leaders are those who master self-improvement, improve others and can initiate the change of curriculum. This kind of teachers should have autonomy to work and to have free areas to express their ideas and know how to motivate others for establishing their own goals. Self-esteem of teachers and work satisfaction also improve the quality and capacity of teachers (Lambert, 2003). Therefore, generally the presence of strong teacher leaders in education system is synonymous of good student achievement (Lambert, 2003; Vanita, 2016, p.16). The teacher leaders are assisted by instructional coach who provide daily support both formally and informally in the framework of in-service education. During the process the coaches should use variety of strategies such as, research-based programs, planning collaboratively with teachers, coaching with feedback (Knight, 2007; Vanita, 2016, p.6).

In Niger there is a policy for the initial and in-service training of primary school teachers developed with UNESCO's support through the Capacity-Building Program for Education (CapED). It is mentioned that, the ultimate objective of the teaching policy is to improve the quality of learning. Therefore, only around 20 % of primary school teachers have been trained in teacher schools. Pre-service teacher training programs in Niger is hold in the different teacher training schools .The candidates from middle school are selected every year by national exam. The successful candidates receive government’s full scholarship during the training program, it is one year for owner of high school diploma and two year for owner of middle school diploma. Meanwhile, unsuccessful candidates have a right to register as a private students. Niger's teaching policy for primary training provides evidence-based guidance. The program aims to enable teachers to be empowered, adequately recruited and remunerated, motivated, and to evolve within systems that are effectively and efficiently managed and adequately resourced. Within the in service program the online system, in the framework of the CapED program the country organized the training of 80 primary school principals. (<http://www.iicba.unesco.org/?q=node/222>).

The “CapED Niger” program is implemented by a country team, including the relevant Ministries of Education, the National Government Coordinator and the UNESCO Technical Assistant. Supervision is provided by UNESCO-Dakar under the overall coordination of the CapED program team at UNESCO-Paris. The program is supported by the UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA) and the logistical support of the Niger National Commission for UNESCO and ISESCO (UNESCO 2018). The UNESCO and the International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA) are supporting this process of teacher policy formulation within the framework of UNESCO's CapED, funded by voluntary contributions from Sweden, Finland and Norway in the framework of national education and training program (2014-2024). It revealed that since the launch of the program in Niger, a participatory and dynamic approach has been adopted which involves national actors, managers and structures in the design of activities which are in line with national priorities. The relevant Ministries of Education also supervise and monitor activities with support from or in consultation with other external partners, where appropriate, who are involved in the same field (Swiss Cooperation, UNICEF, LuxDev, IFADEM, GIZ, etc.).

The program has been implemented in a number of stages:

- Stage 1: Mobilizing Stakeholders (2012)
- Stage 2: Assessment of needs and capacities (2013-2014)
- Stage 3: Formulation of a capacity building plan (2014)
- Stage 4: Implementation of capacity building activities (2014-present).

We realize that there is no any project about “teacher leadership” as a concept or a new implementation, which may be the 5<sup>th</sup> stage among those stages. The implemented program through CapED focused on curriculum and teacher training program especially about the introduced bilingual education in pre-service teacher training (UNESCO, 2018a). Niger faces the major challenge of increasing the number of teachers and improving their professional skills in order to meet the increasing demand for education of school-age children. (UNESCO, 2018b). So, this study aims to explore the concept of teacher leadership and the challenges facing by novice teacher leader in the context of Niger’s education system. This study suggests the implementation of teacher leadership in the system for shaping the environment of schools, influencing collaboration within the teachers and empowering student learning. And explains how the knowledge of teacher can be prepared for instructional, social and economic change in the country.

## **Background**

The teacher candidates are prepared for the profession of teaching by pre-service education, after this training session the novice teachers often appear to be in need of helpful feedback in their first years from the seniors, experienced colleagues and administrators what is commonly called induction. Induction is a process of introduction, initiation, training and support for new recruited teachers (Dishena, 2014, p.20).

The challenges of novice teachers have been cited by many studies, among the most encountered challenges by novice teachers: classroom management, nature of initiation, lack of instructional materials and resources, training and support, to deal how to motivate students, how to use effective teaching methods, to deal with individual students’ interests, abilities, and problems, and how to communicate effectively with school environment (Koca, 2016; Öztürk and Yıldırım, 2013).

According to this conception, teachers are expected to face the compression of time and space, which accelerates the ongoing change and impacts the educational systems and the professional working environments of teachers (Fullan, 2005). Leader teachers are teachers who love and have passion for their profession they do not let any negative teaching environments to affect them. Leader teachers should be prepared also to work easily with parents, colleagues, and administrator; academic, organizational and social problems, material and technology using concerns (Koca, 2016). Finally, we realize that the quality of teachers depend of the quality of selection, education and hiring systems.

An effective teacher preparation program can solve an important part of problems of novice teachers. Therefore, peer coaching method can be an effective way to overcome the problems and increase the capacities of novice teachers for developing their leadership skills (Koca, 2016). The same thing was mentioned in another words, that the effective assessment of teachers through their “value added” “*in entering*” and “*in function*” (Hanushek and Rivkin, 2012).

The process of adaptation of novice teachers differs from one system to another, according to Dishena (2014) the process starts firstly with an initiation and introduction of the vision and mission, policies and procedures of school, explaining him/her role and responsibility, resources and school activities. In another words, the induction is used for introducing the employees (teachers) the goals, policies, procedures and values of the organization (school) and to their co-workers (teachers) (Nghaamwa, 2017). It should be in their first years after preparation program as extension of teacher preparation with encouragement and support to enable them to enjoy positive learning experiences and a pleasant start in their careers. (European Commission, 2010, p.16, Nghaamwa, 2017, p.29).

The novice teacher leader should be a professional who can create a culture of collaboration across the school. According Harris (2015) there are four broad supports for helping early-career teachers to succeed and stay in the profession: (1) comprehensive induction programs,(2) supportive administrators,(3) skilled mentors, and (4) helpful colleagues. So, ignoring induction in an education system can result in an erosion in the teacher development continuum. However, in the context of Niger, number of studies (Lauwerier and Akkari, 2015; Lanoue, 2014; MEN/DESAS, 2015; Nkengne and Marin, 2018; PASEC, 2015) about the quality of education recommended to the authorities to improve the meaning of professionalism of teachers and should organize efficiently their professional continuum education. Teachers should be supported by utilizing a variety of techniques and strategies such as;

research-based instructional practices by conducting one-on-one meetings, planning collaboratively with teachers, modeling instructional strategies, co-teaching, observing and providing teachers (Nghaamwa, 2017, p.12).

### **Major Leadership Challenges faced by Novice Teachers Working in the Primary School of Niger**

Nowadays, education is used to increase the rate of literacy and to decrease indirectly the poverty which improves the wellbeing of the society. So, according the evidence that said that the quality of education system depends of the quality of teachers we realize how much the systems are in need of teachers leaders. These realities were proven for decades by high performing educational systems around the world. They achieved this high performance by reforming their educational systems by selecting and hiring qualified teachers with good working conditions and providing social and academic assistances for students in need.

This study attempts to identify the factors that can challenge the development of novice teachers to become leaders and innovators in the educational systems. Therefore, researches notified that the novice teachers in many countries start their job as “teacher candidate” or “junior teacher” under the supervision of the senior teachers in the framework of induction program (Nghaamwa, 2017, p.30). Currently, in many countries, teachers are educated and supported for being leaders and change makers in the school systems, they are prepared for overcoming the “practice shock” (McCann, Johannessen and Ricca, 2005).

The challenges of novice teachers working in primary schools in Niger are such their newly recruited around the world in need of an adaptation program. For example, the level of preparation of teachers can probably be a source of low self-esteem of teachers due by lack of knowledge and leadership skills. In Niger, the newly recruited teachers in primary schools begin their job like experienced teachers, because without the initiation and booklet control there is no formal induction program for novice teachers. Recently, the quality of teachers have been identified as the main problem of the Niger’s educational system. Nonetheless, the literature that supports more the crucial role of teachers in educational transformations should be prevailed. So, the focus should be on teachers and teaching for their critic roles in education systems (Muijs and Reynolds, 2011).

### **Educational Challenges Faced by Novice Teacher Leaders**

In Niger, during these last three decades, the training program of primary schools teachers in Niger has linked with the international educational reform programs. The reform was suggested to the countries through their level of development and rates of literacy. The suggested program to the low income countries was recommended that the education budget should be reduced regarding the economic capacity of the countries. The budget and time of pre-service and in-service training programs have been reduced for overcoming the problem of teacher shortage in the primary schools.

In Niger, the students from middle schools are selected every year by national exam for teacher schools. The duration of pre-service education depends on the level of teacher candidates, two years for middle school and a year for high school level certificates holders. Meanwhile, the non-selected group of students have a right to register as private students. But, the training program seems to be insufficient for teachers to do comfortably their duties. In Niger, the newly recruited teachers are supported by the school principals who control and evaluate their lesson preparation booklet every day. Meanwhile, in one hand, it was emphasized that, the principals of schools should visit their teachers in their classrooms at least once a month. In another hand, the pedagogical advisors and inspectors of the Ministry of Education visit the schools for supervising and supporting teachers (Sagayar, 2011 p.39-41).

Therefore, teachers or leaders teachers are expected to respond to the skills such as communication, written and oral skills, teamwork, creativity, critical thinking, and problem solving and the use of technology to convey ideas, evidence, images and emotions were mentioned for being teacher leaders. But unfortunately, because of the disparity between education and local languages, the use of educational language is some time remarkably low or is judge inefficient due by the difference of language between student and teacher or both of them and educational language. (Kihara, Graham &Hawken, 2009).

## **Lack of Resources and Adaptation of Challenges for Novice Teachers**

Niger is a developing country and consistently is one of the lowest-ranked in the United Nations' Human Development Index (HDI). The economy is concentrated on subsistence and some export agriculture clustered in the more fertile south, and the export of raw materials, especially uranium. Niger faces serious development challenges due to its landlocked position, desert terrain, inefficient agriculture, high fertility rates and resulting in over population without birth control, poor education and poverty of its people, lack of infrastructure, poor health care, and environmental degradation; (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niger>).

In this condition the novice teachers in rural or urban areas are facing a lack of resources mostly. Therefore, teachers in rural areas are facing most of the time a lack of resources. Some teachers are so desperate for obtaining materials that they find themselves spending their own money to get pencils, paper and art supplies for students. Some schools use textbooks that are years or even decades old, and teachers must try to find ways to supplement those books with new and free materials to keep students informed. Under-resourcing is the major challenge to carry out their duties. Through these challenges the novice teachers should be strong under these difficulties and they should be supported for doing their jobs. "Under-resourced" is interpreted as; not being given opportunities to develop their knowledge, access to information, or obtain adequate support, to fulfil specified role tasks.

The researchers explained the impact of lack of resources in six areas, first, how to transfer curriculum changes into the classroom? Second, how to deal with students from diverse cultural backgrounds? Third, what programs to adopt to address students with special needs? Fourth, how to deal with the greater range of student behavior encountered? Fifth, the teachers feel that there was also pressure for them to adopt the latest technology, but according to them there is little willingness for schools to finance and provide time for them to develop in this area. Sixth, there is a perceived need for more training in mentoring and preparing other staff for new roles. As results, government and parents blame teachers, who in turn blame training, education system and school authorities (<http://www.ascd.org/ascd-express/vol5/507-reeves.aspx>).

## **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The findings indicate that teacher leadership as a concept is still new to certain education systems and teachers. For example in Niger, for increasing the quality of education system the government in the latest decades tried to increase the instructional quality by reforming the curricula but now the focus is on the quality of teachers. Lastly, the Ministry of Education decided to evaluate all contract teachers working in primary schools. This assessment helped the Ministry to identify good and weak teachers. After listing the teachers according their marks, the Ministry decided to cancel the contract of those didn't get acceptable marks for teacher qualification. So, now there is need to organize professional development for all these teachers by using variety techniques and strategies with coaching with feedback. The government should also enhance the teacher professionalism of all novice teachers and those who are judged as in need of ongoing training. The program should include organizational capacity skills.

In this regard, the school principals should have weekly programs in the framework of education of teachers leaders. Principals have to build trustworthy relationships and help teachers feel confident that they possess the requisite skills to successfully lead others. Especially in the case of curriculum change or when the novice teachers begin new units of work which acquire new teaching styles, when teachers begin to work in a different school size....

In another hand, the coaching system should be implemented in the districts or schools. The coaches firstly are expected to be a group of persons who have already trained about instructional leadership for increasing their ability to diagnose teachers' needs and adjust their responses to meet the particular instructional needs in classroom.

Through these initiatives the Ministry of Education can allow municipalities or local authorities the opportunities to hire math or reading coaches to provide ongoing training and quality professional development to enhance instructional practices and student achievement. The school authorities should organize and train the teachers to have them working together as a team by creating collaborative areas



within colleagues. They should also consider the professional side of novice teachers by using comprehensive induction programs, and benefiting from supportive administrators, and skilled mentors.

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