



## **BRIDGING THE GAP OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: SLEAS OFFICERS' REFLECTIONS ABOUT THE 100-HOUR CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

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The professional development of the officers of the Sri Lanka Education Administrative Service (SLEAS) holds a significant position in ensuring the efficiency and effectiveness of the education system in Sri Lanka. According to Guskey (2000), a capacity development programme designed as a generic program can cater to the professional growth of any group of professionals. As (Mark,1990), highlighted, pedagogical content knowledge and reflective practices are the pathways to building effective professional learning among the participants. This study investigated the efficacy and impact of the 100-Hour Capacity Development Programme(CDP)on SLEAS officers conducted by the Department of Educational Leadership and Management, Faculty of Education, The Open University of Sri Lanka. Intending to enhance professional competencies, the CDP serves as a pivotal initiative within the realm of professional development. Through qualitative analysis of reflections provided by SLEAS officers who have undergone the program fully online, this study seeks to illuminate the programme's effectiveness in addressing the evolving demands of administrative roles within the education sector. The participants of this study were 20 SLEAS officers who followed the 100-hour Capacity Development programme during the academic year 2023, representing all three media of instruction (Sinhala, Tamil, & English). While adapting the survey research design, the data were collected using online questionnaires, online discussion forums and reflections of SLEAS officers and data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The study underscores numerous advantages of the initiative. Participants laud its efficacy in nurturing professionalism and value the opportunity for knowledge acquisition. They appreciated its relevance to their academic pursuits and its provision of practical insights for their respective fields. The accrued wisdom and collective experiences are poised to significantly propel their career trajectories. Nevertheless, hurdles such as connectivity issues and language barriers, particularly affecting Tamil-speaking officers, persist. Despite these obstacles, the meticulously structured 100-hour programme garners acclaim. Enhancement of the programme encompasses the introduction of trilingual instruction to foster inclusivity, integration of onsite activities for heightened engagement, and supplementation of the curriculum with additional modules. The implementation of strategies to incentivize active participation in the Learning Management System could augment the overall productivity of the programme.

Keywords: Professional Development, Capacity Development, Organizational Effectiveness, Professional Growth

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Hundred hours Capacity Development Programme for the officers of Sri Lanka Education Administrative Service (SLEAS) was a newly introduced programme by the Department of Educational Leadership and Management of the Faculty of Education, OUSL in 2023. This programme was offered in trilingual mode. Human resources are the most valuable assets of any organization, with the machines, materials, and even the money; nothing gets done without manpower. According to Abiodun (1999), capacity development is a systematic development of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required by employees to perform adequately on a given task or job. The effectiveness and success of an organization therefore lie in the people who form and work within the organization. Therefore, the employees in an organization to be able to perform their duties and make meaningful contributions to the success of the organizational goals need to acquire the relevant skills and knowledge. The need for improved productivity in an organization has become universally accepted and it depends on efficient and effective capacity development programmes.

Quality improvement in Education is one of the top priorities in any country. The officers of the Sri Lanka Education Administrative Service (SLEAS) play the most dominant role in maintaining the expected quality. However, the opportunities available for these officers in Sri Lanka to get their capacity building are minimal. The Department of Educational Leadership and Management of the Faculty of Education, OUSL is the only Department in the university system to develop the leadership of educational managers. Accordingly, the Department of Educational Leadership and Management (DELM) of the Faculty of Education of the Open University of Sri Lanka intends to conduct a capacity development programme for the officers of the Sri Lanka Education Administrative Service (SLEAS) for their requirements and promotions.

The main purpose of introducing this is to develop essential competencies to perform roles efficiently and effectively as Educational Administrators to implement acceptable quality educational practices to meet the national educational goals. Accordingly, the 100-hour capacity development programme was developed to achieve seven (7) intended learning outcomes by the participants as follows.

1. Identify and address the need for quality administrative and management practices to fulfill the National General Educational needs of the country.
2. Analyze and adopt appropriate measures to implement national-level educational policies effectively.
3. Design and implement acceptable quality educational practices to meet the requirements of the National General Education
4. Design and conduct research to reveal innovative strategies and practices to minimize the challenges to meet the National Educational Goals.
5. Improve innovative practices to enhance the integration of Information and Communication Technology to cope with the educational needs of the nation.
6. Design appropriate practices to encourage teachers to follow teacher education programmes to enhance their professional competencies to meet the needs of 21st-century learners.
7. Contribute to adopting necessary changes and inclusive practices in the school curriculum to meet the diverse needs of the students in the general education system.



The main purpose of introducing this is to develop and shape the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of participants in relation to the educational management and administration, enhancing the managerial and leadership skills and competencies to cater to the effectiveness of the field of education. The hundred-hour capacity development programme provides a framework to foster the pedagogical change and professional development of SLEAS officers to improve the effectiveness of the field of education.

This programme was offered as a fully online programme and interactive online contact sessions were conducted through Zoom platform. The overall programme consisted of seven (7) activity-based sessions (Table -01) which were adapted to Scenario Based Learning (SBL) pedagogy.

**Table 01**  
**Programme Outline of capacity development programme**

Session Number	Session Title	No. of hours
01	Educational Administration and Management	18
02	Analysis of National-Level Educational Policies	12
03	Educational Research	18
04	ICT for Educational Administration and Management	12
05	Contemporary Teacher Education in Sri Lanka	12
06	Curriculum Development and Implementation Process	12
07	Quality Assurance in Education	12
08	Assessment (Oral Presentation)	04
<b>Total Number of Hours</b>		<b>100</b>

Participants were assessed and evaluated through continuous assessments (Assignments, Online Discussion Forum) and final oral presentation. Accordingly, this paper presents a study based on the reflections of the first batch of the programme which was completed during the academic year 2023. It explores SLEAS officers’ reflections about the 100-hour capacity development programme based on two main aspects 1) programme content of the capacity development programme and 2) the learner support to investigate how far the capacity development programme provides a framework to foster the pedagogical change, professional development, and capacity development of SLEAS officers to improve their effectiveness in the education system.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### The Sri Lanka Education Administrative Service

Sri Lanka Education Administrative Service (SLEAS) was established in 1985 with effect from 01.01.1985 (Gunawardena, et. al. 2009). Since then, most of the managerial positions in the school education sector have been held by SLEAS officers. For the establishment of the service, service minutes of the SLEAS were published in an Extraordinary Gazette in 2002. Accordingly, SLEAS members are appointed to the school administration under four categories Grade III, Grade II, Grade I, and Special Grade.

The key roles of those officers as stipulated in the service minutes are assisting in the formulation of national education policies encompassing the general education towards the overall human resource development in Sri Lanka. The implementation, direction, regulation, and evaluation of such policies and the establishment of the interrelationship between secondary education and post-secondary education contributing towards the learning and teaching process have been administered by the SLEAS officers. Each SLEAS officer is required to follow capacity-building training courses related to SLEAS and conducted by the National Institute of Education (established in 1986) or by an institute recognized by the Ministry of Education. Accordingly, Class 1 officers of the SLEAS are required to follow capacity-building training courses including Educational Management and Administration, Analysis of Education Policies, Education Standards, Education Research, Advanced Skills of



Information and Communication Technology, Teacher Education, and Curricular Development. Accordingly, the 100-hour programme was developed for the class I officers of the SLEAS.

### **Capacity building and professional development**

SLEAS officers are considered as educational leaders and managers in the education system. In education, the term ‘professional development’ may be used about a wide variety of specialized training, formal education, or advanced professional learning intended to help administrators, teachers, and other educators improve their professional knowledge, competence, skill, and effectiveness, Miller (2018). Mathibe (2007) identified the basic characteristics of an effective professional development programme such a programme should have the following characteristics:

- It should be integrated with educational goals to improve education.
- It should be guided by a coherent long-term plan.
- It should be primarily context-based.
- It should be continuous and ongoing, providing follow-up support for further learning; and it should be evaluated based on its impact on organizational development and effectiveness.

Professional growth or professional development is a continuous learning process that enables individuals to acquire the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to cope with changing demands throughout their careers (Ilgen & Pulakos, 1999). Hence, the SLEAS capacity development programme aimed to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and abilities by SLEAS officers throughout the learning process. According to the UNorg (2024), Capacity-building is defined as the process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes, and resources that organizations and communities need to survive, adapt, and thrive in a fast-changing world. Capacity-building professional development is defined as the experiences and opportunities used by professional development specialists to engage learners in activities to improve their knowledge, skills, and intervention practices (Desimone, 2009; Guskey, 2002).

Capacity building works better when practice is based on policy, and when capacity building mediates between policy and technology (Panda & Mishra, 2020). Aiming at sound capacity development of SLEAS officers, an Online learning platform was developed under the 100 hours programme by catering to them to improve their digital learning experience throughout the learning journey.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Research Questions***

The following research questions guided this study:

1. To what extent does the programme content of the capacity development programme enhance the knowledge and skills of SLEAS officers?
2. To what extent does the learner support enable SLEAS officers to improve their knowledge and skills?
3. What are the challenges and difficulties encountered by SLEAS officers during the online learning process?

### ***Research Design***

The study adopted a survey research design. According to Weisberg et al (1996), Surveys are useful for gathering factual information, data on attitudes and preferences, beliefs and predictions, and behavior and experiences-both past and present. Accordingly, the survey research design was adopted here to investigate the existing situation of the SLEAS capacity development programme focusing on the participants’ reflections about the scope of programme content and the Learner support of the programme. Accordingly, in the context of this study, the survey research design provided an appropriate and useful methodological framework, to review the effectiveness of the SLEAS programme in upgrading and promoting professional development through their active involvement in the capacity development programme. While adapting the survey research design, the data were



collected using online questionnaires, online discussion forums, and reflections of SLEAS officers. Data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Hence, the survey research design adopted for the current study provided insights to systematically contextualize the existing trends in the phenomena and the various aspects of the SLEAS programme offered by the Department of Educational Leadership and Management.

**Participants**

The SLEAS capacity development program was introduced with a group of 20 SLEAS officers representing different provinces in the country as its first cycle. The following table (Table 2) shows the demographic information of the participants (N=20).

**Table 02**  
**Participants’ Distribution: Demographic characteristics of Participants**

Variables					Variables		N	%
1. Gender	N	%	N	%	2. Age	25 – 35 years	02	10
	M		F			36 – 45 years	08	40
	12	60	08	40		46 – 56 years	08	40
N		%		Above 55years		02	10	
3. Academic Qualification	N		%		5. Service	5 – 10 years	13	65
Degree	14		70			More than 10 years	07	35
Master	06		30			6. Professional Qualification	PGDE	09
4. SLEAS Grade	N		%		PGDEM		02	10
SLEAS -Grade-I	08		40		M.ED		06	30
SLEAS -Grade-II	09		45		MTE		01	05
SLEAS -Grade-III	03		15		MSC. (Mgt)		02	10

As shown in Table 2, about 60% of the participants were male and 40% were female. The majority of participants, 80%, were between 36 and 56 years of age. Regarding their experience, 65% of the participants have less than 10 years of experience, while 35% have more than 10 years of experience. All the participants hold various postgraduate and professional qualifications in the field of education.

**Collection and Analysis of Data**

Multiple strategies were used for data collection throughout the process, including online questionnaires, discussion forums, and self-reflections of SLEAS officers. Mainly a quantitative approach was taken in the analysis of data, based on simple statistical analysis (Frequencies and percentages). A qualitative approach (Content analysis) was also taken in the analysis of data based on thematic categorizing.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**RQ1- 1. To what extent does the programme content of the capacity development programme enhance the knowledge and skills of SLEAS officers?**

To answer the 1st research question, the research team provided ten (10) criteria participants to respond based on the Likert scale. (Table 3)



**Table 3**  
**Participants’ responses about the programme content**

To what extent do you think the programme content enhanced the knowledge and skills?	Rating Scale		
	To a large extent (%)	Somewhat (%)	Need to be developed (%)
1. Novel characteristics have been incorporated in online sessions	89	08	02
2. Abstract concepts (Theories, Principles, rules, etc.) are illustrated with concrete, specific examples	86	09	05
3. The sessions in the programme are relevant to the context	92	07	01
4. The sessions in the programme are updated with new knowledge	87	07	06
5. The time allocation for each session is sufficient	83	10	07
6. The sessions provide learners opportunities for reflection on their progress	82	16	02
7. Learning objectives of each session in the programme are clear to the learners	85	11	04
8. The content of the sessions is organized in an appropriate sequence for flexible learning	79	16	05
9. The knowledge and skills gained by the learner help to improve the effectiveness of our roles as SLEAS officers	83	14	03
10. The content of sessions provides support for learners to encounter issues meaningfully in the field of administration and management	91	07	02

According to the Table 3, the analysis revealed that the content of the programme was well organized to acquire knowledge and skills prescribed by the Ministry of Education under the SLEAS service minutes. According to Table 3, the majority of SLEAS participants (more than 85%) expressed that the content of the programme has supported enhancing their leadership and managerial skills to a large extent and the majority of SLEAS participants were satisfied with the content knowledge covered by the programme.

**RQ2. To what extent does the learner support enable SLEAS officers to improve their knowledge and skills?**

To answer the 2<sup>nd</sup> research question, the research team provided eight (08) criteria to participants to respond based on the Likert scale. (Table 4)

**Table 4**  
**SLEAS officers’ responses about the learner support**

To what extent do you think the learner supports enhanced leadership and managerial skills?	Rating Scale		
	To a large extent (%)	Somewhat (%)	Need to be developed (%)
1. Activities given are tailored to the content being studied by the learner	80	17	3
2. Activities given are tailored to the problem being solved by the learner	84	13	3
3. Activities given are tailored to the task being completed by the learner	87	11	2
4. The content of sessions enables learners to practice new knowledge and skills	83	12	5
5. The actions support learners in discussing their problems with peers via the discussion forum	80	16	4
6. Learners are encouraged to share their views and experiences in a collaborative learning environment	81	17	2
7. Develop strategies to make support available where gap is identified	80	16	4
8 provide sufficient institutional and academic support	81	17	2



According to Table 4, the majority of SLEAS Officers (Over 80%) have expressed that the learner support of the SLEAS capacity development programme has been highly effective in improving their knowledge and skills. In addition to that, the majority of SLEAS officers expressed that the online course of the SLEAS capacity development programme has supported them, especially in engaging in activities and uploading their assessment activities on time. The essential and additional learning resources provided under the online courseware are more useful for them to improve their knowledge and skills.

### **RQ 3: What are the challenges and difficulties encountered by SLEAS officers during the online learning process?**

To answer this question, responses to the online questionnaire and inputs of online discussion forums (Self-reflections) were used.

Overall, the SLEAS capacity development program has made significant progress. However, participants have reported various challenges and difficulties, which are summarized below.

1. Limited time to practice intended competencies in the programme due to heavy administrative workload in the office.
2. Difficulty in building theory into practice due to some bad practices prevailing in the education sector, especially in the school context.
3. Lack of proficiency in digital learning
4. Lack of technological tools to be involved in the online sessions.
5. Slow internet connectivity
6. Personal issues and commitments

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study underscores numerous advantages of the initiative. SLEAS officers laud its efficacy in nurturing professionalism and value the opportunity for knowledge acquisition and capacity building. They appreciated its relevance to their academic pursuits and its provision of practical insights for their respective fields. The accrued wisdom and collective experiences are poised to significantly propel their career trajectories. Amid various challenges, SLEAS officers attempted to proceed with the capacity development programme smoothly. The findings revealed that the SLEAS capacity development programme has supported SLEAS officers in enhancing their knowledge and skills. Furthermore, it has helped to improve their online learning skills to foster organizational effectiveness. Even though the SLEAS capacity development programme has made a positive impact on SLEAS officers, the Department envisages addressing the issues and challenges emphasized by the participants and considering the suggestions made by them to improve the programme from the next cycle.

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