
Morality or Mechanics: A Dilemma for Educational Leaders of 21st Century

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Abstract

The present century has added a number of challenges to educational leaders: the growing competition, high community expectations, economic challenges and hyper connected technological globalization which require manifold decisions on the part of educational leaders. The study in hand is an endeavor to explore the conflict of moral preferences against highly task oriented or mechanical decisions opted by educational leaders. The study adopted qualitative paradigm for in depth phenomenological inquiry of the perceptions and experiences of 12 educational leaders about their preferences, either moral or mechanical, in the sense of task oriented demands. The purposive sample comprised deans, directors and heads of departments at a Pakistani women university who were individually interviewed. Thematic analysis of the transcripts revealed that the educational leaders faced pressures of imposing high workloads to the staff, irrational downsizing, intruding personal privacy of staff by demanding 24/7 technological availability, reducing flexibility, being stern to conflicts, being less empathetic and insensitive to individual problems and imposing deadlines to be met by the staff. In addition, they found less time to listen to the individual problems of their staff or to motivate them. They were deeply concerned about the external and internal organizational policies that might demoralize the staff. The educational leaders confessed that the increased number of credit hours and changed social and technological environment had reduced opportunities of character building and moral grooming for students. The study shows implications for balancing the mechanical challenges of the 21st century with moral emphasis and priorities of ‘right action’ in the field of education.

Keywords: Morality, mechanics, dilemma, educational leaders

Introduction

Discussions and debates on the changes occurring in the 21st century have been conducted since its inception. People are more excited and are expecting something new in this century because it has shown a rapid and sudden revolution in technology and globalization. All human and mechanical sectors have been influenced by the new philosophical and

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technological approaches. A prominent change has occurred in globalization of nations, cultures and societies which has resulted in several conducive and non-conducive effects on isolated communities and their systems. The nations of the third world, especially in their era of post colonialism have even greater challenges to keep abreast of with the developed nations and join the global race of progress. Where all human and mechanical sectors have been influenced, educational sector is prominently under criticism (Greig, Hulme & Turner, 2007).

Consequently, educational leaders of the 21st century, particularly belonging to the developing countries, are bearing excessive responsibilities for coping with the demands of the new century. Dilemma of moral values and the complex phenomenon of multiple contemporary challenges of the current era, has urged the researcher to investigate the moral conflicts within a highly task-oriented context which educational leaders face during their decisions.

Research Questions

The study intended to answer the questions like what are the perceptions of educational leaders about moral leadership, what are the extra challenges for educational leaders in the 21st century, how modern technology and globalization has influenced the process of administration, what are the conflicts/dilemmas between the task done and the ethical consideration of human rights for moral leaders. Further it intends to explore, what are the core values which are least considered/ ignored while achieving the competitive targets of modern world at university level and how can educational leaders contribute to the moral grooming of their staff and students?

Significance of the Study

The study holds possible implications for educational leaders to reflect, plan and act for upholding moral values in the era of complex, multiple and rapid decision making. It highlights the underlying human and ethical considerations vulnerable to be ignored during administrative process.

Literature Review

Challenges of the 21st Century for Educational Leaders

Adeel, Farhan, Shahzad and Shaheen (2012) have identified challenges of the 21st century as: globalization and cultural fusion, rapidly changing technologies, increased market and community demands, maximizing profit and chaos on a large scale. In addition, they expressed that globalization of standards for world ranking of institutions and universities

have exerted tremendous pressures over educational leaders. These global convergences, increased mobility of students, productive researches, high marketing demands and academic standards have compelled educational leaders to adopt and change their curricula according to the international standards and raise instructional standard for better equipment of their students while keeping in view local and foreign scenarios (Reimers, 2006).

In Bryant (2012) and Jules (2008) state in the Caribbean perspective as, '*Small states are not only faced with the challenge of overcoming educational deficits that are the postcolonial legacy but they are also faced with the promise and peril of globalization*' (p. 204).

The changed context of education demands has introduced new ways to deliver, communicate and prepare for instruction. '*Teachers cannot teach as they were taught; they must update their current practices in regard to changing school populations, increasing technology, and new ideas about how children learn*' (Hargrove & Prasad, 2010, p. 5). So Reimers (2006) suggests that the main objective of educational leaders should be to exhibit democratic attitude in order to respect others, and work with them while keeping their rights and views in consideration.

Moral Leadership

An extensive analysis of leadership researches reveal that a vast conceptual and theoretical framework of moral leadership is present in literature but unfortunately an ideal and normative approach has been adopted to mention characteristics of moral and ethical leadership (Dantley, 2005; Sergiovanni, 2007; Sergiovanni, 1992; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014; Burnes, Hughes & By, 2018).

What are the realistic implications of moral and ethical beliefs and how moral standards can be maintained during actual conflicts, is a scarce area in leadership studies. The traits like altruism, authenticity, sacrifice, empathy, care, service and justice (Singh & Krishnan, 2008; Sosik & Cameron, 2010) though seem golden words but are hard to practice. Several situational factors, when the tasks are on the priority and resources are scarce, are difficult to abide by and demand strong nerves to be practiced.

Ciulla (2003) commented that morality on the part of leaders is 'magnified' as compared to other people because leaders are more influential. They have vision, responsibilities and obligations towards institutions, therefore, morality is fundamental for leaders and especially in the field of education which is 'a moral enterprise' (Khanam, 2010).

Rhode (2006), cited in Chari (2012), explains that concept of moral leadership is replete with literature of Greek theologies and Middle ages discussions that promote the central idea of distinguishing right and wrong, justice, honesty and integrity of moral leaders to achieve goals.

Daft (2011), Miller (2009), Donaldson (1982), are the proponents of ‘serving leadership’ which they espoused in the context of military and business fields. They proposed that moral leaders should think globally, act according to their personal philosophies, uphold the greater good and make decisions in the wider interest of the community and humanity but keep in view the priority of their own organizations.

Apart from the nature of leadership in different disciplines, the educational leadership is somewhat different as Senge (1990) said, *‘The new view of leadership in learning organizations centers on subtler and more important tasks. In a learning organization, leaders are designers, stewards, and teachers. They are responsible for building organizations where people continually expand their capabilities to understand complexity, clarify vision, and improve shared mental models- that is, they are responsible for learning’* (p. 340).

Sum (2010) proposed a model for moral leaders as, “a servant leader” a concept coined by Greenleaf in 1970. It was emphasized that a moral leader should have awareness about her/his internal and external environment, situation and norms. S/he should be aware of psychological, philosophical, social, political, financial, technological, cultural and organizational contexts. Sum (2010) says it ‘self-leader’ which emphasizes interpersonal efficacy of leaders. Sum (2010) then operationalizes how a leader can practice his/her knowledge in actual situation.

In order to produce moral environment, educational and moral leaders should create such environment which is helpful in character building of students. As claimed by Kohlberg (1984) moral leaders can create ‘just community’ by democratizing the process of decision making by engaging all stakeholders in decisions and can uphold moral values by transparent and just decisions.

Another trait of moral leaders is described by Evans (1996) as, *‘Integrity is a fundamental consistency between one’s values, goals, and actions. At the simplest level, it means standing for something, having a significant commitment and exemplifying this commitment in the behavior’* (p. 185). Likewise Gilligan, Ward, Taylor, and Bardige (1988)

claims, *'The ethics of justice focuses on problems of oppression, problems stemming from inequality, and the moral ideal of reciprocity or equal respect'* (p. 27).

Quick (2015) explained that a moral leader should make all decisions while keeping in view for whom, where and why they are made. Justice means not to maintain equality but equity. The moral leaders should make decisions in the best interest of the staff and students. It is important to know that all decisions have consequences for promoting either righteousness or immorality. Moral leaders maintain balance in relationships and task fulfillment. They assure that institutions cooperate with community and stakeholders. They develop system to assure assistance to young people, enabling them to fully realize their potentials and understand their relationships in the family and in society and recognize their role and place internationally. All these obligations lie to the educational leaders if they want to become moral leaders.

Bennis and Nanus's (1985) identify moral leadership practices as, *'Managers are people who do things right and leaders are people who do right things'* (p. 21). Rost (1991) defines moral leadership as that moral leaders 'influence' their followers by recognizing their autonomy which indicates volunteer compliance and not forced implementations. Ciulla (2003) commented as, *'What is good leadership'*? The word good have two meanings here as *'morally good leadership and technically good leadership'* (i.e., effective at getting the job at-hand done). Gardner (1990) emphasizes core moral values as, *'We should hope that our leaders will keep alive values that are not so easy to embed in laws—our caring for others, about honor and integrity, about tolerance and mutual respect, and about human fulfillment within a framework of values'* (p. 77).

The question of the present study still remains unanswered because all the above quotations claim a 'should' situation. What happens in actual situation is indicated by Ciulla (2003) as, *"Leaders cannot be moral so where does this leave us? On the one hand, it is admirable to aspire to high moral standards, but on the other hand, if the standards are unreachable, then people give up trying to reach them"*(pp. 167–183).

In Pakistan the reports of Higher Education Commission (HEC, The federal institution for supporting and evaluating higher education institutions in the country), from 2006, to 2012-13 criticize the present situation of universities in the context of global challenges. The frequently identified factors were shortage of faculty at universities, especially in social sciences; lack of scholarships for scholars and faculty development; inefficient leadership practices; typical instructional strategies; inefficiency to quality

assurance on the part of universities and lack of standard researches in the country. According to Tribune (2015) information, only six universities of Pakistan have succeeded to find place in world 800 best universities.

The consistent demands for meeting national and international standards mentioned above have pressurized educational leaders to cope with conflicts of moral decisions and the tasks to be done. How to put staff on work without intruding their rights is a big dilemma for educational leaders. The study in hand is an endeavor to find out educational leaders' personal experiences to cope with the challenges of the 21st century while maintaining moral values, and to highlight the conflicts of mechanical era with moral sustainability in educational context.

Methodology

The study was conducted in qualitative paradigm and opted phenomenological approach (Byrne, 2001) for investigating the educational leaders' perceptions and experiences to face difficulties in maintaining moral and ethical values in highly task-oriented era.

Selection of Participants & Data Collection

As suggested by Etikan, Musa and Alkassim (2016) and Gentles, Charles, Ploeg and McKibbon (2015), purposive sampling was conducted to find authentic information from key persons. All educational leaders; deans, directors, heads of department of a Women University in Lahore, Pakistan constituted the population of the study. The researcher selected 12 leaders purposively; having a wider influence, running programs with large number of departments or faculties. The sample consisted of three deans of faculties, 3 directors of institutes and six heads of departments. The researcher sought consent of the participants and conducted interviews for finding their perceptions and experiences for the phenomenon under study.

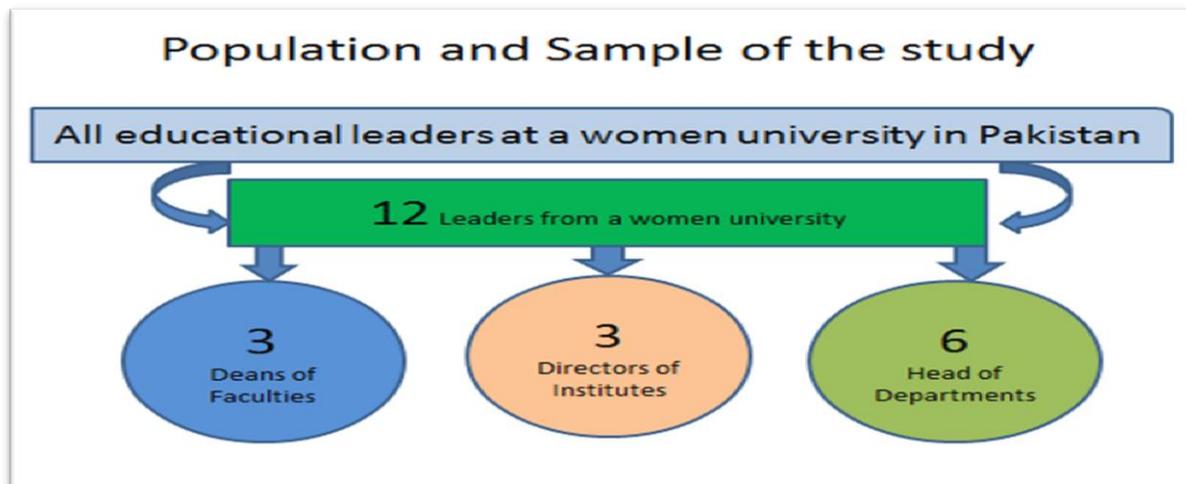


Figure 1: Population and sampling of the study

Tool of Investigation

An unstructured interview schedule, seeking open ended answers, was constructed for the study. The interview schedule was pilot tested on two respondents out of the sample for making necessary changes. The interview questions were reduced from eight to six after getting feedback from the respondents with some language changes.

Data Analysis and Presentation of Results

The researcher transcribed all the 12 interviews and conducted inductive analysis. Themes and patterns were derived from responses of major research questions and probes through open coding. The voices of educational leaders were presented and discussed under each research question. The data was analyzed manually.

Results:

For maintaining the anonymity of respondents, the interviews were given codes as R1, R2 for respondent one and respondent two respectively. The responses and the interpretation is given below:

Q- 1: What are the perceptions of educational leaders about moral leadership?

The thematic analysis of responses for the first question revealed that educational leaders had great value for moral leadership, R1 said, *‘If there is no morality, the whole system of education is meaningless’*. R3 exclaimed, *‘How can we imagine a leader without moral values? She has to influence other people, set examples, lead and guide people so if she is not abiding by moral principles, she will not be able to persuade others to do right things’*. A respondent dean (R6) said, *‘we are accountable to everybody, to community at first, to the faculty and to the students. How can we take a wrong step? How can we influence people if our own image is wrong? We cannot compromise rules’*. R11 explained characteristics of moral leaders as, *‘S/he should be authentic, just, caring and flexible’* while R5 added, *‘moral leader is a right person; she has herself a good character and has fair practices but it is a complex phenomenon...some leaders may be fair in dealing with financial matters but they are rude with people and vice versa’*. R12 commented in a different way and said, *‘If you are good with people but incompetent, then you cannot be moral because morality means justice and if you do not deserve your leadership then you cannot be moral’*. R8 explained comprehensively that, *‘a moral leader is well aware of cultural, religious and social norms and concerned for human rights and strives for upholding rules’*. R4, R7, R8, R9 and R10 claimed that they think that they are moral leaders and they keep in mind consequences of

their decisions for the world and the hereafter. They think that they are accountable for their position and they always prefer right action. They are straight forward and caring towards their staff and students.



Figure 2: Concept of moral leadership

Q-2: What are the extra challenges for educational leaders in the 21st century?

For the answer of second question, almost all of the respondents were in consensus that the 21st century has brought manifold challenges. Where rapid technology has changed scenario of every sphere of life, demands for education and specially university education, which is highly specialized and skill oriented, have undergone a sudden and substantial change. National standards have been extended to global standards and universities are now being watched for global ranking. R1, R 4, R5, R6 and R8 were of the opinion that the biggest challenge is the time constraint because they are given close deadlines to meet. Universities are forcing their faculty to fight multiple battles. They have to teach, write articles, attend workshops, conduct seminars, supervise students’ research and be engaged in professional development in addition to other administrative jobs. They complained for extensive inter and intra universities competitions for increased and diverse programs, courses, linkages, projects, products, patents and community contributions (outreach programs). R1 said, ‘*Oh! Teachers are really under stress. They have to prepare a lot for their classes because students are now more aware and they ask questions*’. R2 and 3 exclaimed, ‘*We are also teaching and we know how vigilant we have to be, because our students are also connected with global knowledge*’. The three Deans unanimously complained that university ranking and quality assurance was a ‘never ending’ battle for all of them. They have to show their performance through foreign linkages, technological and research projects, increased number of products and patents, national and international conferences, global memberships and

quality assurance within their classrooms where they have to use instructional technologies and research based strategies. R8 commented, *‘Though we have entered in the 21st Century but we are still struggling for funds and resources. We are asked to be more efficient and show more performance with fewer resources. I have only five faculty members and we are running three programs. We have demanded more people but process of recruitment is so complex that it takes months to be completed’*. R6, R9, R10 and R12, who were heading their departments and were teaching also, said that they work around for 18 hours a day because they have to supervise their research students, write their own articles and sort out plagiarism and copy right problems of the students’ work. They have to prepare a lot for their classes because they have to concentrate upon higher order thinking skills of their students. R2, R7 and R4 were of the opinion that managing technologies, budget planning, purchase and maintenance of technological resources is a tough job for them. R6 said, *‘The present era is of rapid communication. If technology is there to help us...it is also painful for us because we are always on call and we have to prepare complex reports within hours...you see once I got a Proforma at 11:00 am and I was asked to give it back at 11:30 and do you believe I was trembling with stress how could I provide that information within that specified time’*. R10 and R12 pointed out that there were several implications of these challenges which resulted into micro politics on the part of staff, increased conflicts and increased workloads for teachers and leaders. R4 said that, *‘cultural invasion that we face today, we have never faced it before due to hyper globalization’*.



Figure 3: 21st Century challenges for leaders

Q-3: How modern technology and globalization have influenced the process of administration?

Almost all of the educational leaders were well aware of the importance, nature and uses of technology. R2, R3, R6 & R12 explained that the present era, being technological, compelled

them to use technology in their classrooms while having rapid communications. The hyper globalization had changed their routines. All of the leaders were using mobile phones, laptops, input and output devices. They explained that it was indispensable to use modern instructional technologies in the classrooms because their students were more aware and they demanded high skills from their instructors also. They said that students were digital natives and used smart phones and communicational devices for their personal and educational purposes. As the women university had uploaded many of the courses online with face to face classes and was using a learning management system, the participants were aware of its implications. R1 and R2 told that technology had brought a revolution in the field of information and knowledge and had also added manifold responsibilities for the faculty. R6, R7 and R9 told that technology had brought many problems with it also. It was difficult and time consuming for them to maintain and update their sites, keeping phones and laptops in working condition, managing printers and scanners. R3, R4, R5 and R10 told that technology had made the work of instructors more hectic because their students were using it for the preparation and submission of their assignments and projects. The teachers had to check them for plagiarism or violations of copy rights. The leaders said that there were twofold demands of face to face and online availability of courses so teachers had to work day and night. Furthermore, R8, R9 and R11 said that technology influenced not only the ways of teaching and learning but had also invaded faculty's privacy by demanding 24/7 availability for the organization. Leaders said that organization demanded them to reply mails when they were at homes, and they had to engage their faculty also. R6, R10 and R12, spoke loudly against challenges of technology and commented that the faculty had to prepare extra material for teaching to keep up with international standards. Educational leaders said that they had to fight against cultural invasion, technological distractions of students, i.e. their excessive use of social sites, threats to privacy and hacking etc. R4 said, *'I have to spend several sleepless nights just to cope up with technological demands of my courses... laptop is on my bed, in my kitchen and in my lounge'*.

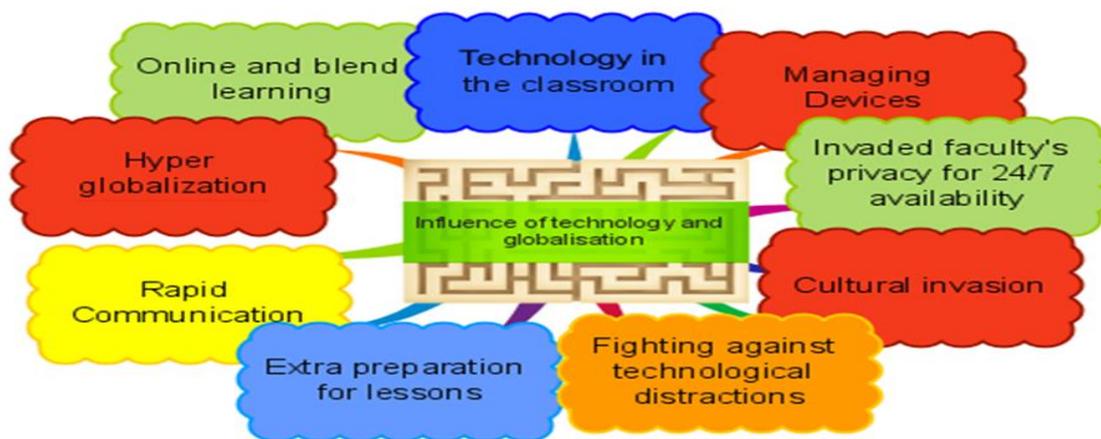


Figure 4: Influence of technology and globalization

Q-4: What are the conflicts/dilemmas between the task done and the ethical consideration of human rights for moral leaders?

The responses for the fourth question revealed that the 21st century challenges discussed before have many implications and consequences for educational leaders. Other than facing rapid changes and coping up with global challenges, they also have to make difficult decisions about the task fulfillment. R4, explained that, *‘as we have discussed ...we have time constraints, we are overburdened because we are given unnatural deadlines to meet. Consequently we ourselves, and our faculty have to compromise over our health’*. R3, 6 and R7 commented that, *‘over burden has made it difficult to resolve frequent conflicts about work distribution’*. R11 and R12 said that, *‘there is sometimes irrational downsizing for meeting financial constraints at the university level and we have to face challenges of scarcity of human resources. We have to hire underpaid faculty (visiting faculty). We have to fight against unequal distribution of resources’*. R4, R5, R7 and R10 confessed that they have to reduce flexibility, assure strict rules and regulations and overlook faculty’s personal constraints and this has resulted in weak social bonds among faculty. They further said, *‘When the work load is unbearable, we have to show less empathy to our faculty because we have no time for listening to their problems’*. When the researchers asked for the implications, most of the respondents replied that *‘yes all these stresses could cause problems for the faculty including low morale, bad health or guilt at having ignored their families including children or elders etc.’* R8 said that if they hire visiting staff, they have to exploit needy teachers because such faculty has to work for very low packages. R2 confessed that, she has to make harsh decisions and put her faculty under stress for compelling them to work for long hours. She knows that it is wrong but she herself is given deadlines. R9 told that,

‘We cannot concentrate upon individual problems... because we have to be quick. Most of the participants complained that some governmental and organizational policies, i.e. about recruitment, wages, leaves etc. are unnatural and the leaders feel it difficult and painful to impose upon their faculty or staff’.

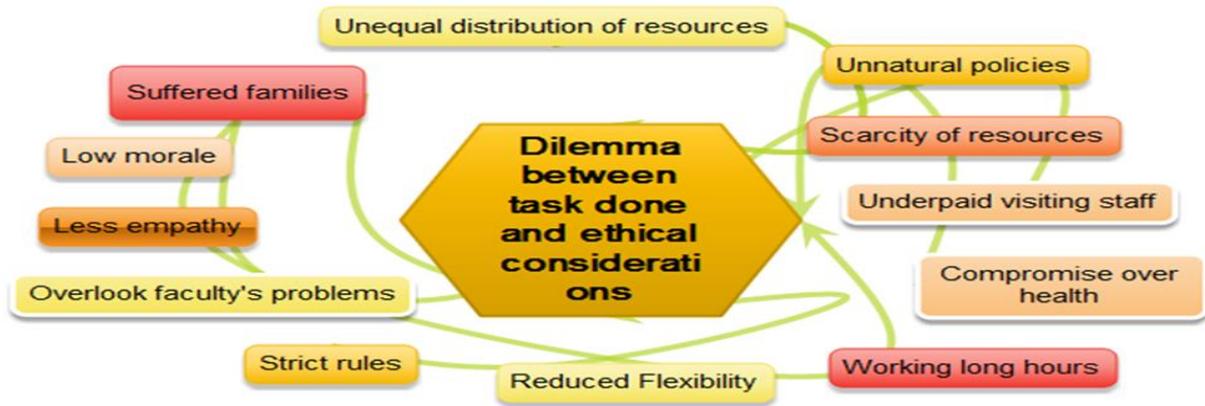


Figure 5: Dilemmas between task done and ethical considerations

Q-5: What are the core values which are least considered/ ignored while coping up with the competitive targets of modern world at university level?

While responding to the fifth question, respondents mentioned that the present wave of competition, long hours of working at institutions and homes have caused destruction of ‘social interaction and relationships’ and ‘faculty’s personal interests’. R5 said that, *‘not only teachers but leaders also compromise over their health and family relations’*. R8 explained that modern technology has invaded over their privacy; they have to be on call 24/7 and remain engaged with phones, laptops and Skype for day and night. Family time has been reduced to minimal. R10 and R12 said that sometimes people have to commit wrong actions like plagiarism and violations of copy rights to follow the race of career. R1, R2, R5 and R6 were of the opinion that semester system has reduced student teacher interaction which was perceived as the key to build students’ character in the past. Almost all of the participants confessed that universities spare less time to concentrate upon character building of their students because the number of disciplines to be covered has increased and there is no time for teachers to build character through preaching or guiding in the classrooms.

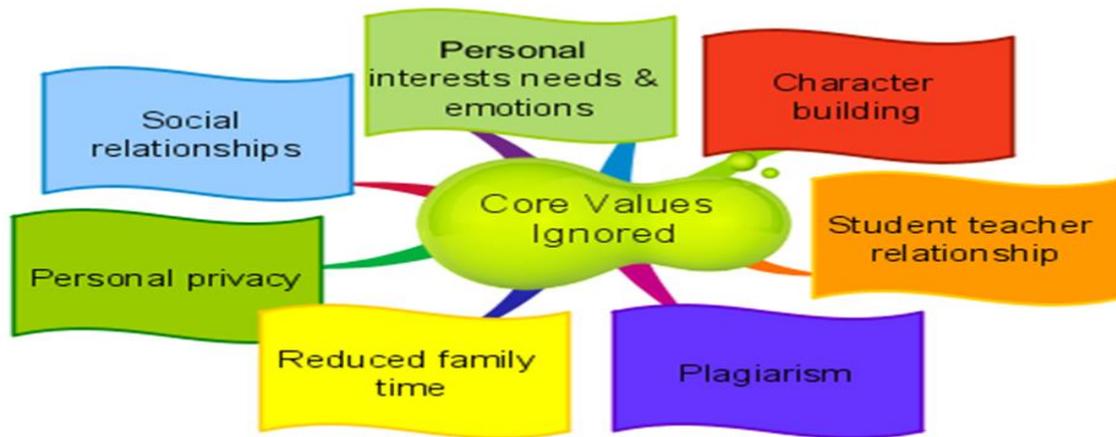


Figure 6: Core values ignored by educational leaders

Q-6: How can educational leaders contribute to the moral grooming of their staff and students?

For the answer of the last question, educational leaders were excited to tell that they try to present moral examples for their faculty and students through showing mannerism, doing good deeds like exhibiting cleanliness, serving the disabled, caring for the needy, raising campaigns for community problems, fighting for human rights, keeping soft tone for their staff and students, respecting diversity, exhibiting justice and abiding by rules. R7, R11 and R12 explained that they show flexibility to minor errors and try to uphold democracy. Almost all the participants affirmed that leaders could contribute to the moral grooming of teachers which could be helpful for the moral upbringing of students. They emphasized the need for maintaining a balance in the work done and moral values. They insisted that one should take stand over right decisions. All the educational leaders unanimously declared that working beyond personal interests and convincing the faculty and students by right arguments could make anybody a moral leader. Some of the respondents like R1, R4 and R7 pointed out that moral leaders should have awareness about norms, culture and religion and should take into consideration the situation of the staff and that of students. Most of the respondents indicated that provision of human and material resources can help educational leaders to be moral.

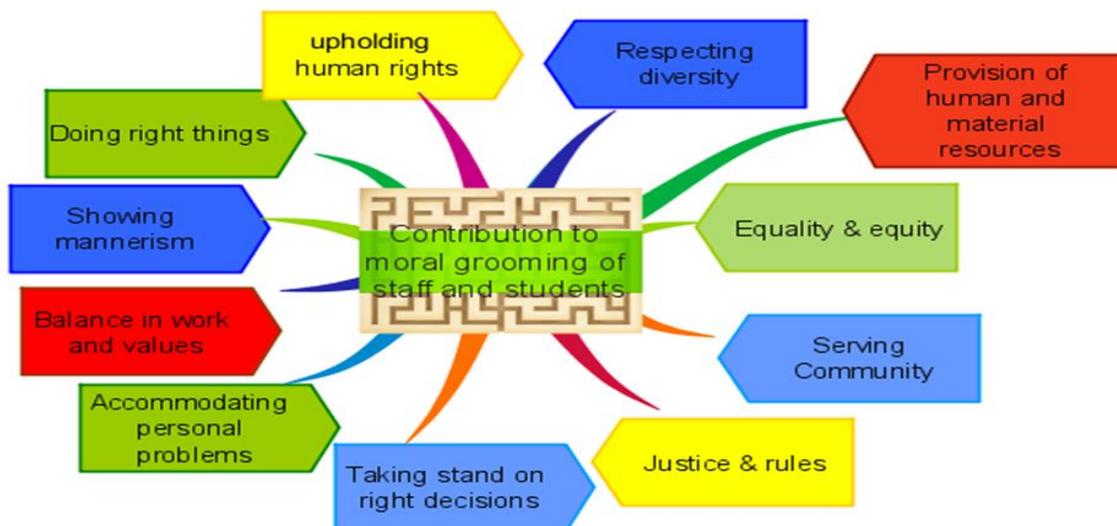


Figure 7: Moral contribution by educational leaders

Discussion

The present study has added substantial points (though in a local context) to previous leadership studies and has not only highlighted challenges for the 21st Century educational leaders but has also exposed the conflicts they usually face for practicing moral values. Multiple challenges regarding technological demands highlighted by the study were supporting Bryant (2012) and Jules’ (2008) findings that identified problems of post- colonial nations. As the researcher did not find comprehensive work about dealing with moral conflicts in the 21st century with the special context of higher education, the present study has explored concerns of the leaders about upholding ethical and moral values in the society’s most important institutions. The study has also brought to light some faults within the system as pointed out by previous researches of Quick (2015) and Ciulla (2003), which need to be removed and considered as availability of resources and better communicational strategies among institutions, monitoring and quality assurance agencies. The study has highlighted the need of formulating rules and regulations for using informational technologies to avoid unethical ways. The study supports previous researchers like Adeel, et. al, (2012) about the challenges faced by the educational leaders of the 21st century. The study holds strong implications towards supporting educational leaders to maintain and uphold moral values through availability of resources as proposed by Daft (2011), Miller (2009), Donaldson (1982) previously as ‘serving leadership’. The study also demands a paradigm shift from theory to practice for moral leadership and it indicates the need to devise workable strategies to make it possible to achieve ‘should’ targets into action. Finally the study puts some suggestions as food for thought for educational stakeholders.

Conclusion

The findings of the study cumulatively reveal that educational leaders face a number of challenges in practicing moral values. Manifold national and international standards have exerted unbearable pressures on leaders. Though they claim to extend moral values like justice, democracy, equality and consideration to their staff yet close deadlines, immediate reports, ruthless evaluations, which are meant for penalizing and not for improving the system, add ethical problems for educational leaders. There are global standards to meet which may not be possible with local resources. Faculty is also at risk for moral conflicts for being overburdened. Educational leaders have confessed that they have to ignore faculty's personal problems, to do the job at hand because they themselves are accountable to their higher authorities. They said that technology was really a boon for dissemination of knowledge but it had also put pressures for teachers and leaders. They had to maintain and update their technological tools and likewise check for its right use in their students. There were also financial and time constraints for leaders to decide morally. They had to compel visiting staff to do more work with low packages and bound their faculty to complete the task within specified time. They were threatened by complex reports and filling up unnecessary Proforma. The leaders claimed that they tried to practice moral values for the training of their staff and students but excessive use of the internet and social sites had caused cultural invasions and distraction on the part of students who could not be controlled. The participants were in consensus that human and material resources could be helpful to maintain moral values in the institutions.

The way forward

An unbiased analysis of educational leaders' voices has declared that they are well aware of the principles of moral leadership. They are ready to practice it and try to contribute to the moral training of their staff and students but several constraints compel them to deviate from the right action. The study indicates dire need for:

- Well organized communicational strategies among organizations and educational leaders; simplifying the information patterns, well in time dispatch of forms and mail, rational time frames and less but precise information to be demanded.
- Well-equipped classrooms and offices with availability of technological staff for regular maintenance.

- Realistic workloads to be maintained and administrative and research workload should be included substantially. Faculty may be provided time for concentrating on their research.
- Recruitment process may be made transparent, rapid and well planned.
- Ethical norms may be formulated to engage faculty in communication after work hours.
- Sufficient staff with clear TORs may be hired for each program.
- Monitoring agencies may first plan to provide facilities and then evaluate the performance of institutions.
- Students committees may be framed for controlling unnecessary use of social sites and undesirable sites should be banned in the university labs.
- Community and social hours for students, teachers and administrators should be incorporated substantially for healthy moral and social nurturing.
- Educational leaders may be listened to for their problems and constraints that they face during administration.
- Organization may be decentralized and small units should be made for better management.
- Rules and policies for faculty facilitation may be complied in letter and spirit.

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