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Exploring Leadership Practices in the Lens of School Leaders at Primary Level

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Abstract

Leadership is a critical aspect of any organization, and educational institutions are no exception. School leaders play a vital role in shaping the vision and direction of a school, creating a positive school culture, and providing effective leadership to teachers and staff. Effective school leadership has been linked to improved student achievement, teacher satisfaction, and a positive school climate. However, leadership in the context of educational institutions is complex and multifaceted, and there is still much to be understood about the role of school leaders and their impact on school success. This research paper aims to explore the concept of leadership in the context of school leaders, including their roles, qualities, and challenges. This study used a qualitative research methodology, interviews were conducted with a total of four school leaders (head teachers) from different schools in the same town. Data was analyzed through systematically (organizing, transcribing, coding, categorizing) and using thematic analysis. The results of this study show that effective school leaders possess a combination of skills, qualities, and knowledge that enable them to manage the complexities of the education system, build relationships, and inspire others. This investigation yielded five school leadership practices: development of school plans, handling teammate suggestions, presence adds value, criticism handling, and task delegation. It is recommended that the administration and all stakeholders recognize the importance of motivating school leadership/headmasters/headmistresses and providing them with a smooth environment and the necessary resources to implement innovative approaches in their schools that improve quality teaching/learning. Furthermore, additional mixed method research on this issue is proposed in order to reach in-depth insights and aspirations.

Keywords: Head Teachers as a School Leaders, Positive School Culture, School Improvement

Introduction

The complexity of the role of principal has led policymakers, educators, and researchers to acknowledge the importance of preparing prospective school leaders. Several scholars, however, have argued for a deeper investigation into the impact that school leadership education has on principals' development and daily work (Jerdborg, 2022). This realization, according to Forde (2011), is the result of the increased complexity of school leadership and the recognition that leadership plays a significant role in the performance of schools. There is a great deal of literature on the topic of the types of classrooms, curricula, and policies that must be in place for teaching to be carried out successfully. In spite of the significance of this change, very little is known about the specific procedures that are followed by school administrators in order to put these adjustments into effect. As we are seeking knowledge about school leadership, we cannot neglect leadership practice. Rather than focusing on school structures, programs, and designs as the primary or only emphases of our attention, we should consider leadership practice as the primary focus of our attention. In order to provide an explanation of how school leadership works, it is necessary to carry out a comprehensive investigation of the actual practices that school leaders engage in. To have a complete understanding of leadership, it is necessary to have a firm grasp on not only what leaders do but also how and why they carry out their responsibilities. It is not enough to just witness effective school leadership in action and produce thorough reports of that practice in order to accomplish this objective. Because leadership is not solely a function of what people in authoritative positions like principals know and are able to do, the prevalent paradigm of self - determination is, in our opinion, insufficient.

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Leadership is a function of more than just what people in authoritative positions like principals know and are able to do. As a result, the purpose of this study is to develop a generalized view on leadership practice so that we may use it as a structure to examine the thoughts and actions of leaders (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001).

Leadership is an essential component of any organization's success, and educational institutions are no exception. School leaders play a crucial role in creating a vision, setting goals, and providing direction to ensure that students receive a quality education. Effective school leaders possess a combination of skills, qualities, and knowledge that enable them to manage the complexities of the education system, build relationships, and inspire others. The head teacher's role as a leader is vital in resolving many issues pertaining to schools, the development of teachers' capacities, school improvement, and the creation of a healthy learning environment (Ahmad, Ali, & Sewani, 2021). Teachers' instructional strategies are influenced by competent supervision offered by school administrators in order to develop teaching abilities (Ahmad, sewani, & Ali, 2021). Bellibaş, Gümüş, & Kılınç, (2020), confirmed that principals' leadership practices with specific emphasis on teaching and learning were important for enhancing a school culture in which teachers' participation in decisions and their enthusiasm for undertaking leadership practices are supported. According to Sharar and Nawab (2020), the concept of educational leadership is gaining traction among academics and practitioners since it is recognized that leadership is more than just a vocation. Nevertheless, we have no idea how this well-defined notion is executed in Pakistan. Ali (2014) as an alternative notion for school change, teacher leadership has gained an increasing recognition in developed context. In developing context especially Pakistan, there is scarcity of research on teacher leadership and consequently, we lack knowledge of how this concept unfolds in this context. To get a better grasp on leadership as a phenomena, it's not enough to simply examine the activities associated with it; we also need to investigate the means by which they're carried out. How school leaders plan, deliver, and evaluate these initiatives, as well as their interactions with others, is a crucial component of leadership practice that needs to be explored. When carrying out their regular objectives, school administrators are tasked with making a wide range of judgments and performing a wide range of actions (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). This research is quite pertinent, and it makes an important contribution to the expanding body of work that aims to identify the traits that distinguish effective school leaders.

Literature Review:

The literature on leadership in education has identified several leadership practices and behaviors that contribute to the success of school leaders. A review of relevant literature shows that effective school leaders are those who are committed to the school's vision and mission, possess strong communication skills, and have the ability to motivate and inspire others. They also demonstrate a strong commitment to student learning, have a deep understanding of the curriculum and instruction, and use data to inform their decision-making processes. Moreover, the literature suggests that effective school leaders possess certain qualities that enable them to build strong relationships with students, teachers, and parents. These qualities include integrity, empathy, and a strong work ethic. Effective school leaders are also committed to continuous learning and professional development and foster a culture of collaboration and teamwork among their staff. However, school leaders face several challenges in their roles, including managing the competing demands of different stakeholders, dealing with limited resources, and navigating the complexities of the education system. Moreover, they must also balance the needs of different student populations, including those with diverse learning needs and backgrounds.

Effective leadership in schools has been linked to higher levels of student achievement, improved school climate, and increased teacher satisfaction. According to research, there are several key leadership practices and behaviors that contribute to successful school leadership. These practices include creating a shared vision, setting high expectations for student learning, building relationships with teachers and staff, creating a positive school culture, and using data to inform decision-making (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). In addition to these practices, effective school leaders possess several key qualities. These include being visionary, adaptable, collaborative, and communicative (Turan, & Bektas, 2013). Effective school leaders are also able to build trust, empower teachers and staff, and create a sense of ownership and accountability for student learning (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Despite the importance of effective leadership in schools,

school leaders face many challenges in their roles. These challenges include managing competing demands, addressing complex issues such as student behavior and school safety, and meeting the needs of diverse student populations (Grogan & Andrews, 2002). School leaders also face the challenge of balancing their roles as instructional leaders, administrators, and managers (Harris & Chapman, 2002).

Empirical Studies Related to School Leadership

The style of leadership is determined by the level of authority that the leaders exercise. The skills, wisdom, maturity, attitude, behavior, personality, communication, overall strategy, and many other qualities of a leader affect how they use or misuse their position of power (Jenica, 2016).According to the research conducted by Rehman, Rahman, Zahid, and Asif (2018), neither an autocratic nor a democratic style of leadership has a significant beneficial association with the efficiency of employees. Similarly, studies have shown that organizational culture is not a reliable factor in predicting the level of productivity exhibited by workers. Nonetheless, the data demonstrate that transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire leadership styles have a substantial beneficial association with the productivity of employees. The findings indicate, on the whole, that the type of leadership that is exercised plays a significant part in determining the level of productivity achieved by employees. According to research undertaken by Abonyi and Sofo (2021), there is a dearth of collaborative efforts to enhance classroom learning. It appears that instructional leadership was linked to manager-centric, behaviorist approaches to education. A leadership culture based on centralized regulations and high expectations had been firmly established by school principals. Direct and indirect benefits of principal instructional leadership on teacher professional development were found to be significant by Shengnan & Hallinger (2021). Teacher self-efficacy and professional development were shown to be moderated by each teacher's unique power distance orientation when the model was tested further. So, it is clear that the leadership of a school is crucial to the success of both its staff and students. Leaders, according to Andreoli, Klar, Huggins, and Buskey (2020), changed their mindsets about school development and how they interacted with others to foster a culture of collaboration and shared responsibility.

Methodology:

This research made use of a qualitative research technique (Creswell, 2014), which included conducting interviews with school administrators in the Korangi town area of Karachi as well as a review of the pertinent previous literature. The goal of the research was to determine both the key leadership practices and behaviors that contribute to the success of school leaders and the problems that they confront in their responsibilities as school leaders. In addition to that, the purpose of the study was to investigate the influence that leadership has on the culture of schools, the growth of schools, and the contentment of teachers. In light of this, the researchers decided to carry out an exploratory study of successful primary school principals in order to gain a better understanding of the methods by which these leaders encourage and include their staff members in the process of bringing about positive changes at their schools. Specifically, the researchers were interested in gaining a better understanding of the ways in which these principals encourage and include their staff members in the process of improving their schools. When principals were given the opportunity to discuss about the various leadership styles they deploy in greater depth, the framework for the study was formed. The study was designed to investigate. Participants in the research project were chosen using a technique called "purposive sampling," with an emphasis placed on school administrators who had held their current position for at least five years. A total of four school principals from various schools located within the same town participated in the interviews that were performed. The interviews were organized, and participants were given open-ended questions to answer, which allowed for a more in-depth discussion of their experiences in leadership roles and practices.

Thematic Analysis and Results

Data analysis procedure was systematically (organizing, transcribing, coding, categorizing) done using thematic analysis. The transcripts were reviewed multiple times to identify recurring themes related to school leadership practices, qualities, and challenges. The themes were then organized into categories and analyzed for patterns and relationships.

Theme 1
Development of School Plans
Developing a plan is unquestionably one of the most important aspects of school leadership. Because action of any kind is impossible in the absence of a plan. According to the respondent, there will be anarchy and ineffective administration if they do not provide a schedule and a plan. The teachers won't be aware of which class the student will be taking when they see him or her. They won't be able to conduct background checks on the instructors either. The development of one's vision is essential. The primary objective is to be of assistance to every student. If they work without a clear vision, they won't be able to concentrate on helping everyone. "You can't decide where you want to go if you don't have a vision," stated the majority of those who participated in the survey. Where do you plan to go when you're done here? What exactly is your job going to be? What do you intend to accomplish? You don't put much thought into how you're going to accomplish your objectives. It is important that you have clear vision for this. Imagine that during this semester you construct a plan for what you will do during the following semester. Or, when the class is over, what kind of performance can we expect from the students? What kind of professional development will be provided for teachers? Instead, would you rather talk about the school's standing in the community as a whole? How are we going to get around my inadequacies and shortcomings? You will be able to carry out your objectives and activities if you have clear vision. In a similar vein, you can create goals for the following week, month, or six months, and then work toward accomplishing them. It touches on a wide variety of subjects, such as finances, the education of teachers, the advancement of professionals, and the performance of students. Because of this, having plans and a vision for the improvement of schools is essential.

Theme 2
Handle Teammate Suggestions
The answers were unanimous in their assertion that "It depends on the opinions and considerations. For instance, if one of our teachers comes to us with a recommendation that seems sensible, we will undoubtedly concur with them. As a consequence of this, we will be able to devise brand-new strategies for advancing our educational system. These ideas have the potential to provide productive results if the colleague's suggestion is a good one and we give it the attention it deserves. One of the people who participated in the survey shared their perspective, saying, "If one teacher approaches me and recommends that she conduct a program, and her ideas inspire me, I will give her my complete support." Certainly, I will act in accordance with the recommendations, but if they are destructive to children or our policies, I will decline to implement them. An additional respondent stated, "I'm a very flexible headmaster. Before beginning the assignment, it is first reviewed in meetings with every member of the staff, irrespective of gender. The subsequent stage is the actual implementation. In my opinion, instructional leadership, which is based on the person who is in charge of providing instructions while a school is in operation, has a responsibility to clarify the instructions if they are not given in a clear manner. Without precise instructions, a task simply cannot be finished. In addition to this, he went on to elaborate that "we can get ideas and discuss the plans with staff for the betterment of teaching learning as well as overall school improvement."

Theme 3
Presence Adds Worth
The presence of the administrator is quite important to the school in order to ensure that everything runs smoothly. The vast majority of respondents responded that the presence of school leaders has a significant impact on school discipline and, more generally, on all activities that take place at schools. This is due to the fact that the head of an institution has its own importance. If the principal is not present at school, there is a good likelihood that the students will not follow the rules. Yet, the employees at the school can have trouble functioning correctly if he or she isn't there. As a result, the presence of the head at school has a value all its own. One further comment made by a respondent was that "this is very vital to organizing all school events and running smooth manner." Schools that do not have a designated headmaster, principal, in-charge headmaster, or gazetted officer will have a vastly different leadership influence than schools that do have one of these positions. Furthermore, if there is not an authority present in the school, then not every action and activity will be carried out in accordance with the letter of the law. It is possible that the absence of the administrators will cause problems with planning and management. Because leaders are responsible for the proper operation of

the organizations they oversee, their physical presence is extremely important. The statement was made by one of the heads that "it is a typical occurrence at our schools; for instance, if I take a day off from school, many complaints will be submitted, and you can assume that in my absence, there will be multiple issues, and no work will be in order."

Theme 4

Criticism Handling

When the researchers asked the school principals and head teachers about their responses to the criticism, one of the respondents said, "I'll give you a nice smile as I go." There is constructive criticism and there is destructive criticism. Both are forms of criticism. Any kind of abnormality in the classroom will be something that parents will not like to see, and for this reason, any criticism that I receive from them will undoubtedly be helpful. The term "criticism" refers to the process of pointing out anything. In other words, if the criticism is intended to help us improve, I will take it into consideration. On the other hand, if criticism only serves to criticize, I will make an effort to improve the situation so that the criticism is replaced by appreciation. It means that the head teachers are required to view constructive criticism in a positive light and strive to improve both the school and society. An additional school administrator elaborated by saying, "As I have already stated, I am a leader who is flexible. The most valuable thing is feedback in the form of constructive criticism that can be used to make improvements. However, if we respond to criticism with additional criticism, this won't be productive at all. If people have criticisms about our job, assignment, target, school improvement, or performance, we ought to make an effort to rectify the situation and fill in the gaps. During parent-teacher conferences, it has been observed that parents criticize our policies, school schedules, rules and regulations, and even how they are put into practice. This criticism can even extend to the manner in which the policies are implemented. Even the leadership of educational institutions can come under fire. In my opinion, if a leader is not adaptable, he will not make adjustments to improve his shortcomings. Critique that is intended to be constructive enables leaders to make improvements.

Theme 5

Tasks Delegation

When researchers asked about the duty assignments, almost all of the heads gave the same response: they assigned duties according to the capacity of the teachers. Some teachers are well trained and complete their assigned task very smoothly and on time, while other staff members are unable to do the job perfectly. One of the most important targets is to delegate tasks to teams. It is said that the right job should be given to the right person. As a consequence of this, the vast majority of the school's heads came to the conclusion that the proverb "the right job for the right person" is absolutely accurate. As a result, they delegated responsibilities to staff members according to the capacities and skills that they possessed. According to what was stated by one of the Head Mistresses, "The talents of the teacher will eventually determine this. If there is a need for us to develop a science project, I shall delegate this responsibility to the science instructor that I have. For example, we devised a project revolving around the solar system and presented it to the PST science teacher in charge of our class. Due to the fact that one of our instructors is really talented at drawing, all of the art job was delegated to her. Since she has such refined taste in Urdu poetry, I always select one of my instructors to evaluate and moderate the proceedings of a variety of events. Because of how well he teaches arithmetic, I've decided to present it to one of the instructors at our school. I always try to assign projects that are suited to the abilities, subject areas in which a teacher specializes, and hobbies of the individual teachers. An additional headmaster emphasized further by saying, "Another thing is that how many human resources you have? Do we require twelve instructors for a total of twelve classes split over six classrooms? Do we have students who are compelled to work as peons, watchmen, or cleaners? Because they can both educate and perform, we require teachers. We have an ECE class, but none of our teachers are trained in ECE, so we are unable to complete the work. But, both our material and our human resources are limited. We will delegate responsibilities on a class-, topic-, and absence-specific basis. Is there anyone who can teach? The majority of headmasters of primary schools both teach and administer tests. Our leaders are responsible for everything, including tasks that are not related to teaching. His primary responsibility is overseeing the management of their organization. Evaluations are given to our faculty and staff. Because we have faith in the instructor, we delegate a lot of work to him. Yet, a significant number of educators are unable to complete their

designated topic. He is unable to instruct or evaluate copies. He is unable to make any changes to his work once others have finished. The distribution of responsibilities is determined by ability.

Major findings and conclusion

The findings of this study shed light on the critical practices of effective primary school leaders, whose efforts have resulted in significant school development and dispelled the myth that achievement is impossible in a high-pressure setting. From in-depth interviews with school leaders, we were able to identify recurring leadership elements that, when implemented across institutions, have led to positive changes in primary schools. According to the outcomes of the study, there are a number of essential leadership practices and behaviors that contribute to the success of school leaders. These include having high expectations for the academic performance of students, establishing a positive school culture, and encouraging staff members to collaborate and work together as a team. The research also indicated that great school leaders have particular attributes that allow them to create close relationships with students, teachers, and parents. This was found to be the case in effective school leadership. Integrity, empathy, and a strong work ethic are some examples of these attributes. The study also found that school leaders face a number of challenges in their roles. These challenges include navigating the complexities of the education system, dealing with limited resources, and managing the competing demands of various stakeholders. These findings are consistent with preceding studies on leadership (Ahmad, Sewani, & Ali, 2021; Ahmad, Ali, & Sewani, 2021; Ahmad, & Hamid, 2021). In addition to these strategies, the research highlighted a number of essential characteristics that are possessed by successful school leaders. These characteristics include the ability to see the big picture, to be flexible, to work well with others, and to communicate effectively. Additionally, successful school leaders were able to cultivate an atmosphere of trust, give faculty and staff members more autonomy in their work, and instill a sense of ownership in and accountability for student learning. This research paper has examined the notion of leadership in the context of school leaders, including their roles, qualities, and challenges. In conclusion, this research paper has looked at the concept of leadership. According to the findings of the study, successful school leaders have a specific set of competencies, traits, and levels of knowledge that give them the ability to navigate the complexities of the education system, cultivate relationships, and motivate others. The research found that there are a number of essential leadership practices and behaviors that contribute to the success of school leaders. This investigation yielded five school leadership practices: development of school plans, handling teammate suggestions, presence adds value, criticism handling, and task delegation. It also found that school leaders face a number of challenges in their respective roles. The findings of this study provide insights into how school leaders can improve their leadership practices to better serve their students and staff, as well as improve their schools. In the final section of the paper, recommendations are given to school leaders regarding how they can improve their leadership skills and develop a positive school culture that encourages the achievement of students.

Recommendations

According to the findings of this research, successful school leaders are endowed with a set of talents, qualities, and knowledge that enables them to negotiate the complexities of the educational system, create connections with others, and inspire others. It is recommended that the administration and all stakeholders recognize the importance of motivating school leadership, which includes headmasters and headmistresses, and provide them with a smooth environment and the necessary resources to implement innovative approaches in their schools that improve the quality of teaching and learning. In addition, it is recommended that the administration and all stakeholders acknowledge the need to recognize the importance of motivating school leadership. Also, it is recommended to school leaders that they lead as a team leader and establish a smooth teaching learning atmosphere for instructors and students so that they can nourish themselves more effectively. Because regularity and punctuality also make a difference in the improvement of the school, the leaders of the school make it a point to ensure that they are present on time and schedule all of the activities of the school properly. They need to understand how important it is for them to collaborate with the teaching staff at the school and carry out the tasks that have been delegated to them according to the level of responsibility they can handle. It is also vital for the head of the school to establish plans and put those plans into action in order to bring improvements to the school. They have a responsibility to take into account the ideas and feedback offered by their employees, as well as to do so in order to ensure the continued success of

the institution and its pupils. In order to put the proposal into action, it is required to first acknowledge the significance of the matter. In addition, it has been recommended that additional research on this subject be carried out making use of a variety of research approaches in order to reach more in-depth insights and objectives.

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