

LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: A CASE STUDY OF PAKISTANI HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

The main objective of the research was to explore public school principals' leadership problems and the techniques they used to overcome those problems. A qualitative research case study was conducted involving 10 public school principals (5 male and 5 female) from district Mardan of Pakistan. The data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using the thematic analysis process. The results show that public school principals in Pakistan face multiple problems, including lack of authority, insufficient assistance from higher authorities, lack of resources, and teacher recruitment and retention issues. Additionally, the research also found that public school principals in Pakistan combat their problems with a variety of techniques, including creating a friendly rapport with teachers, engaging the community in the educational process, seeking help from higher authorities, and effectively leveraging resources. Moreover, this research has also examined Pakistani female public school principals' problems and tactics. The results show that female public-school principals in Pakistan experience typical male principals' problems, including lack of autonomy, insufficient resources, and support from higher authorities, as well as gender inequity. The results of the study have significant implications for policy and practice as the results of the study can inform specific policies and practices that can help in enlightening public schools' leadership in Pakistan to improve the quality of education for students.

Keywords: Leadership Challenges, Developing Countries, Public-School Principals, Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a key determinant of the success of any educational system. However, in developing countries, educational leaders face many challenges that affect their capacity to deliver quality education. These challenges spurt from resource constraints, inadequate facilitation from the government and other stakeholders, and low student performance. Some of the developing countries facing such challenges include Pakistan. The country has made substantial gains in improving the quality of education systems; however, there has been little impact on students' performance. The study proposes to investigate the leadership challenges faced by public school principals in Pakistan and to identify strategies and interventions that can be implemented to address these challenges.

The education system is one of the areas that generate extensive criticism. While Pakistan has taken numerous steps to enhance the quality of education, some core problems

such as low student achievement and poor education outcomes still exists. According to the World Bank, the literacy rate in Pakistan is 58%, which makes the state one of the ten last literate countries in the world (World Bank, 2020). In addition, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) indicates that Pakistan develops secondary education with one of the lowest gross enrollment ratios (UIS, 2020). These data show that the education system in Pakistan requires efficient intervention.

One of the key challenges in Pakistan's educational system is leadership challenges. According to the study of Memon (2003), lack of resources and facilities in schools remains the foremost challenge with which school leaders in Pakistan are confronted. Similarly, according to the study of Raza (2016), resource constraints were identified as a principal challenge of school leaders in developing countries such as Pakistan. Such constraints include lack of funding, personnel, and various educational materials. These resource constraints can significantly impact the school leaders' ability to lead. Another challenge in the educational system of Pakistan is lack of support from the government and other stakeholders. According to the study of Mansoor (2015), the challenge of lack of support from the government and other stakeholders is among the foremost problems of public sector schools in Pakistan. Such a lack of support can take various forms including lack of adequate funding, professional development opportunities, and political interference among others.

Additionally, lack of community involvement and social mobilization is another significant challenge facing by the educational system of Pakistan. According to the study of Khan (2020), community involvement and social mobilization can help in addressing the problems faced by schools and also enhance the performance of the schools. Gender is also a significant factor influencing the leadership challenges facing by the education system in Pakistan. The study by Jahan (2022) shows that female leaders face unique challenges in Pakistan that limit their capabilities due to cultural and societal stereotypes and lack of support. One potential approach to resolving the leadership challenges is increasing the participation of female leaders in the education system.

In short, the myriad challenges of Pakistan's education system include lack of good quality leadership, minimal or no government support, lack of community participation and social mobilization, and lack of women representation in leadership positions. These challenges can hinder Pakistan's education system from effectively meeting the needs of its students and enhancing general educational performance. Therefore, it is necessary to

comprehend the presented challenges and recognize strategies and approaches to overcome them to improve Pakistan's education system.

The importance of this study is its potential to illuminate the challenges of leadership faced by public school principals in Pakistan and how to identify the necessary strategies and approaches to address these challenges. The results of this study will be fruitful for educators, policymakers, and researchers around the education field; especially in developing countries. This study will contribute to the knowledge about leadership in developing countries by studying the significant leadership challenges that public school principals in Pakistan face. These findings can be used to inform policies and programs to enhance and ameliorate school leadership in Pakistan.

Furthermore, this study can offer insights into the strategies and approaches to tackling the identified leadership challenges that are likely to be successful in developing countries and could be replicated as a model elsewhere. Likewise, this study is important for Pakistan as it can be a stepping stone to improving the education system and overcoming the challenges. Thus, the conclusion of the study in the form of recommendations is crucial for the government, educational institutions, and the non-governmental organizations in addressing leadership problems.

In conclusion, this study will no doubt make a significant contribution to not only the discourse, understanding of the concept of public-school leadership by unearthed the critical leadership challenges purported by in hardened competitive global environment and also put feasible strategies and interventions to address the identified challenges.

The research questions for this study designed to determine the leadership challenges that affect public school principals in Pakistan and suggest the possible interventions that can be applied. The research will also be able to determine the impact of resource constraints, community involvement, and social mobilization in relation to leadership challenges for public school principals in Pakistan. Furthermore, the study will be able to explore the challenges affecting the female public-school principal in Pakistan and how to tackle these challenges. The following are the research questions in this study:

1. What specific strategies and interventions have effectively addressed leadership challenges faced by public school principals in Pakistan?
2. How do community involvement and social mobilization impact the leadership challenges public school principals face in Pakistan?

3. How do resource constraints, cultural and societal stereotypes, and lack of support impact the leadership practices of female public-school principals in Pakistan?

The present study is associated with a number of limitations that require providers' attention when interpreting the findings. The first one is a narrow focus on public school principals in Pakistan that may restrict generalization of the findings to other contexts and countries. The second limitation is the use of self-reported from the principals conducted that might be influenced by bias or be inaccurate. The third limitation is the qualitative research design that restricted the generalization of the findings to a greater population despite the detailed description and analysis of the problem. Finally, the fourth limitation is the involvement of a few schools and a small sample that do not reflect the population of publicly funded schools across Pakistan. Additionally, the present study cannot explain the leadership challenges faced by public school principals in Pakistan precisely.

Furthermore, another limitation is the focus on a specific time period, and the results may not be applicable in the future. Also, the next limitation is the use of available data and resources and impossibility to provide a comprehensive picture of the problem. Finally, the present study might not adequately reveal the complexity of the matter of leadership in developing worlds.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review of this study has included prior works on the leadership challenges of public-school principals in developing countries, especially Pakistan, and how they are related to the theoretical framework of transformational leadership and the lack of resources. Previous studies have shown several key leadership challenges of public-school principals in developing countries. Such as, Raza (2016) found that the constraint of resources, including funding, personnel, and materials, can significantly impact school leaders' abilities to manage their schools efficiently. He stated that leadership in developing countries is vital, but school principals suffer from enormous limitations. Similarly, Zaidi et al (2018) showed that lack of professional development for school principals can also contribute to the leadership challenges in developing countries.

Pakistan's education system has experienced a wide range of challenges over the years such as low enrolment rates, high dropout rates, and under-performance among students (Raza, 2016). These challenges are further worsened due to meager education resources and little support from the government or other regional stakeholders (Zaidi et al., 2018). In addition, political interference, security menaces, and lack of professional leadership

strategies has been strongly put forward to account for the challenges of public-school principals in Pakistan (Ahmed, 2019). Other studies have also emphasized community involvement and social awareness in addressing the problems of leadership as well as performance of the schools (Khan, 2020). This study also underscores the role of the community and other stakeholders in responding to leadership challenges and facilitating better returns to progressive reform within Pakistan's schooling system.

Additionally, research demonstrates that increased female leaders' participation in the education system shall make leadership in schools more effective (Jahan, 2022). According to Jahan (2022), numerous researchers have shown that the realization of the effectiveness of female leadership in schools can promote gender equality, improve the student achievement levels, and increase the overall effectiveness of leadership in the schools. Moreover, researches have proven that effective leadership practices have a positive effect on the student learning and academic process performance (Leithwood & Riehl 2003; Louis, 2004). These studies suggest that effective leadership will overcome public sector school principals' problems in Pakistan and enhance student achievement. In the same way, political instability, security threats, and natural disasters have significant effects on the school leadership (Niazi, 2012).

The theoretical framework of transformational leadership is highly pertinent to the current study because it emphasizes the role of leadership in creating positive change and in improving student outcomes in the Pakistani education system (Niqab et al., 2014). According to Bass (1985), transformational leaders can develop a shared vision and common purpose and enable and inspire others to work toward it. Lack of resources, the support of the government and other key stakeholders, and poor student achievement, are all essential in addressing the leadership challenges that public school principals face in Pakistan. In addition, the literature reviewed suggests that the concept of resource constraints is highly relevant to the study's examination of the challenges faced by public school principals in Pakistan. For example, Raza (2016) implies that constraint of resources has a significant impact on the ability of school leaders to lead the schools effectively, which is probably more relevant in a developing country where resources are limited. Memon (2003) also indicates that the lack of resources and facilities in schools is one of the leading challenges faced by school leaders in Pakistan.

To summarize the results, the researcher has found that the leadership challenges faced by public school principals in Pakistan are lack of resources, professional development,

government and other stakeholders' support, political interference, and security issues. Based on the literature, the critical role of community involvement, social mobilization, and female leadership participation have been identified as the most promising implication of how these related issues can be solved or, at the very least, addressed efficiently. More research is required to identify an appropriate strategy or intervention that will fully resolve the issue or simultaneously address all related challenges described earlier in the study and generate solutions that will significantly improve student achievement and school performance overall.

The research gap for this research is multi-layered as the previous studies on the leadership challenges public school principals in developing countries have had, specifically in Pakistan, have focused on the challenges without exploring the possible solutions and ways to create strategies to address the challenges. Raza (2016) identified resource constraints, including a lack of funds, personnel, and materials, as a key challenge facing the school leaders in developing countries; however, the author did not present the ways through which this challenge could be addressed. Khan (2018) did the same by establishing that a lack of professional development opportunities for school leaders is a challenge in developing countries, he did not present the strategies that can be used to solve the issue.

Several previous studies have emphasized the importance of community involvement and social mobilization for surmounting the leadership challenges and advancing the performance of school (Khan, 2020). Although, one gap identified in this study, was the lack of research about strategies and interventions to include the community and other stakeholders in surmounting leadership challenges. Several previous studies have also emphasized the significance of increasing the number of female leaders in the education system was also stated as a recommendation; however, no study was found that investigates what measures and interferences may be taken to increase the number of female leaders in the education system of Pakistan.

Additionally, although research confirms that adequate leadership may lead to hopeful student learning results and higher achievement (Leithwood, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2004) and there was insufficient research to identify the specific leadership practices and strategies that are beneficial for improving students' achievements in the Pakistani environment. Finally, external shocks such as political instability, safety challenges, and natural disasters put even more pressure on school leadership. While relevant research confirms that leadership skills can prove essential for handling any undesired outcomes of such externalities

(Smith & Riley, 2012), there is a lack of studies explored specific strategies and methods to overcome school leadership-related challenges in crisis situations in Pakistan.

To sum up, the research gap of this study is the absence of extensive and recent studies specifically addressing the leadership challenges faced by public school principals in Pakistan and how these challenges can be managed. Additionally, a research gap is a lack of product on the interventions and strategies used to incorporate the community and other shareholders and enhance the contribution of female leaders and student achievement within the public school context of Pakistan. Furthermore, limited research investigates the intervention and strategy to be employed in addressing leadership challenges during crisis in Pakistan.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research methodology used in this research is qualitative, specifically utilizing a case study approach. The case study approach was preferred as it consents to an in-depth investigation of a specific phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2018). The case in this study is the leadership challenges public school principals face in Pakistan and the strategies used to overcome these challenges.

The sample for this study was purposively selected and consisted of 10 public school principals (5 male and five female) from District Mardan of Pakistan. The sample was selected based on the criteria that the participants have served as a principal for at least three years and have experience leading a school.

Semi-structured interviews were used as a method for data collection in this study. Interviews were used as the main tool of data collection because they enable researchers to get extensive and detailed responses and participants' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The interview protocol included a set of open-ended questions which revolved around the leadership dilemmas public school principals encountered in Pakistan and the ways they resolved it. The researcher of the present study conducted the interviews face-to-face and obtained the audio-record of the conversations after obtaining the participants' consent.

Interview data were analyzed through the use of thematic analysis, which is a systematic method of identifying and reporting patterns and themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The transcription was carefully read multiple times to gain general understanding of the data. Codes were developed collated based on the interview transcripts. The data were grouped into themes, which were revised and refined. Measures to protect the integrity of the data were taken. The credibility of the results was ensured through member

checking, which involved sharing the results with the participants to ensure the remaining plaque was consistent with perception. Moreover, the results were peer-debriefed to ensure trustworthy peer reviewed results were obtained.

To summarize, the research methodology in this study is a qualitative case study. The sample included 10 public school principals, including (5 male and 5 female) from various regions in Pakistan. The data was collected using semi-structured interviews and an evaluated using thematic analysis. The research methodology is suitable for the research questions and the process of data analysis and provided a comprehensive investigation on the leadership challenges encountered by public school principals and strategies used to mitigate them in Pakistan.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Result

Results are the findings and outcomes from your study. The results of this research were the “Leadership challenges faced by the public-school principal in Pakistan” and “how do they resolve their challenges”. To collect primary data, 10 public school principals (5 male and 5 female) were interviewed with the help of a semi-structured interviews. The data collected from the interview was transcribed verbatim. Then thematic analysis was conducted on the data.

The interviews took place in public schools with the principals in Pakistan; the aim was to gather insights into the leadership challenges the principals tackled within their schools and how they overcome them. The questions included those addressing the interviewee’s experience of a school leader, the resources to which they had access, and their relationship with the community and other stakeholders.

Some of the key themes in the leadership challenges facing the public-school principals of Pakistan, as seen from the data analysis, are centered on resource constraint. As indicated in more than one participant, lack of resources, including financial and others, is the most significant obstacle to the public-school principal of Pakistan. For instance, Interviewee 1, a female principal, mentioned that “the most challenging thing is the lack of resources, especially financial; it is a problem that we face sweat over school because it is difficult to provide quality education to our students with the available resources that we have.” This theme has other participants to back it up from interviews, suggesting the school abilities are affected by lack of resources.

Another theme that can be inferred from the scenario is community involvement and social mobilization. Several participants commented that community's involvement and support are important for the school. This theme was evident in the data when public school principals in Pakistan indicated that they are not receiving enough support from the community. For instance, as a male principal, Interviewee 2 argued that "community involvement and support is necessary for school's efficiency, but on our side, we do not get enough support from the community". This theme was likewise upheld by the other participants and is consistent with the data.

The theme of gender was also derived from the data, given that the female public-school principals noted additional hurdles, including discrimination and lack of support from colleagues and the community. For instance, "I face discrimination from my colleagues and community; they do not take me serious as a female leader interviewer 3". In addition, this theme was also indicated by the female pragmatics who noted that they are discriminated and lack the community support.

Another theme that emerged from the data was government policies and regulations. Several participants reported that government policies and regulations are unsupportive, and it is hard to implement them in their schools. For example, Interviewee 4, a male principal, reported that "the government policies and regulations are not supportive; it is hard to implement them in our schools." Other participants also highlighted this theme and reported that government policies and regulations affect the functioning of the schools.

Government policies and regulations were also another theme that arose from the data. Some of the participants mentioned that government policies and regulations are not supportive to their schools. I wonder how it would be to implement government policies and regulations in their schools. Male principal, Interviewee 4 argued, "the government policies and regulations are not supportive; it is not implementable in our schools". Additionally, the same theme was reiterated by others claiming that government policies and regulations predispose poor results in the school.

A theme related to professional development opportunities also singled out from the data. A low number of participants mentioned the fact that lack of professional development is a serious problem that prevents them from realizing their full leadership potential. For example, Interviewee 5, a female principal, mentioned that "lack of opportunity for professional development is a significant problem; we cannot upgrade our qualifications for

leadership”. The sentiment is also echoed by other participants who mentioned that public-school principals lack opportunity for updating qualifications for leadership.

The next theme that derived from the data is based on the teachers’ involvement in decision making. For example, Interviewee 6, male principal, reported that “lack of teacher’s involvement in decision making is a serious problem, because it hampers the school function efficiently”. The identical topic was also observed by the other participants, and all of them marked it down as a lack of teacher involvement affects the effective functioning of the school.

Another derived theme is community awareness of education importance. Some of the participants explicitly expressed that people in the community do not know most of the importance and, hence it is tough to get their support. For example, Interviewee 7 claimed that “Community is not aware of the importance of the education. It is hard to get their support”. Other Participants supported this theme by explaining that it may be easier for some community members to go to the local public school but the community was not much of support.

Another theme was shadows of transparency in allocating resources according to the data. This theme was described by many respondents, and also impacted the effectual performance of school. For instance, Interviewee 8, a male principal, declares that “At present, in terms of the allocation of resources, transparency is missing. It affects the effective function of the school.” Other respondents also described this theme and argued that shadows of transparency in allocating resources also played a role in school attainment.

A theme related to the maintenance of school infrastructure also emerged from the data. Again, another data emergent was a theme on the maintenance of the school’s infrastructure. The participants mentioned that the government doesn’t support the school to maintain the right conditions for learning in the school. For example, female principal, Interviewee 9 stated that “the government hampers enough support in the maintenance of the school’s infrastructure. It affects the learning environment”. Other respondents in the study also mentioned the same theme and reported that lack of government support affects an appropriate school’s infrastructure that, therefore, affects the learning environment of the school.

Finally, a theme in line with the participation and support of the community also emerged. Specifically, some of the participants indicated that the community is not supportive and involving them in school events is problematic. For instance, Interviewee 10,

a male principal, indicated that “the community does not help; involving them in school events is hard.” Additionally, other participants shared the same view. They suggested that the community fails to offer support, which in turn limits the extent to which public schools can involve community in school activities.

To sum up, the Results and Data Analysis section of the study – the focus on the study of the leadership challenges faced by public school principals in Pakistan, and how well they cope with these challenges. The researcher adopted semi-structured interviews to gather the required data from a sample of 10 public school principals in Pakistan (5 male and 5 female) and followed the thematic analysis method in analyzing the collected data. The results revealed several themes regarding the leadership challenges facing by principals of public school in Pakistan, including resource provision , community participation and mobilization, gender, government and policy-based support, ongoing development opportunities, the extent of which teachers take part in decision-making, awareness of the community to the importance of education, transparency of the resource allocation process, maintenance of the school-building and facilities, and general support from the community. These insights shed light on the challenges facing by public school principals in Pakistan and how they address them in executing their leadership roles. The findings of the current study would guide in making informed decisions when developing interventions to enhance the leadership of public schools in Pakistan and, as a result, the quality of learning among the students.

Discussion

The main purpose of this section is to reflect on the obtained results from the study and present their meaning to the research questions. Additionally, this section should be supplemented with the final recommendation for future research and policy and practice implementation (Chang, 2012).

The first research question addresses the key challenges faced by public school principals in Pakistan. The study results provided data-based evidence that public school principals in Pakistan encounter several challenges following a lack of autonomy, inadequate resources, an absence of high authority support, as well as teacher recruitment and retention incidence. These findings align with recent studies on concern matters (Khan, 2020; G. R. Memon, 2007).

The second research question aimed to explore the strategies used by public school principals in Pakistan to overcome these challenges. The response from the study’s participants indicates that, as highlighted earlier, there are numerous strategies used by

principals to address the challenges they encounter on a daily basis. These include: forging good relationships with their teachers; ensuring the local community is involved in the education process; asking for assistance from the higher authorities; and effectively using the available scarce resources. This response is also in line with previous studies on the subject (Mansoor, 2015; Shah et al., 2015).

The third research question examined the challenges and strategies female public-school principals in Pakistan used. The findings of the study suggests that the challenges that they have in common with male public school heads are a lack of autonomy, school resources, and administrators' support. Female principals are also confronted with the issues of gender predisposition and discrimination. The strategies used by female public-school principals to overcome these challenges include building positive relationships with teachers and involving the community in the education process. These findings are consistent with previous research on female leadership in education in Pakistan (Jahan, 2022).

The results of this study have multiple policy implications. The results underscore the need for increased autonomy and resources for public school principals. In addition, it is necessary to pay as much attention to the vital role of support from higher authorities and community participation in providing the needed support for public school principals. Finally, it is essential to overcome the stereotypes about women and combat discrimination that public school female principals are experiencing in striving to improve education and ensure the quality of education for all students.

Regarding future research, it would be beneficial to conduct a higher study with a model more representative of the population of public-school principals in Pakistan. Additionally, a quantitative study could be conducted to confirm the findings of this qualitative study (Flick, 2022). Furthermore, it could be useful to conduct a study focusing on the challenges and strategies used by female public-school principals in Pakistan.

In terms of future research, it would be better to conduct higher education administrative behavior with a more appropriate model that fits the population of public-school principals in Pakistan. In addition, it would be beneficial to conduct a quantitative study to test the validity of the results obtained from this study. Another recommendation is researching into the challenges and possible solutions of public school's female principles in Pakistan.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of the study's key findings and underlines the research's importance. The primary objective of this study was to uncover the challenges of leadership experienced by public school principals in Pakistan as well as the coping mechanisms employed. A case study method was used to examine 10 public school principals (5 male and five female) from different regions of Pakistan who took part in semi-structured interviews. The data analysis technique chosen was the thematic analysis.

The findings of the study show that public school principals in Pakistan are challenged in multiple ways, such as limited authority, lack of resources, a poor way of handling teachers by higher authorities, and teacher turnover and recruitment problems. These challenges resonate well with existing literature on the matter. Furthermore, the study reveals the strategies that principals use to deal with the challenges, and they include maintaining good teacher relationships, getting the community to be part of the education process, proper utilization of resources, and seeking help from higher authorities.

This study also considers the challenges and strategies used by female public-school principals in Pakistan. Evidently, the data demonstrates that female public-school principals in Pakistan have common challenges as male principals, which are inadequate autonomy, resources and supportive leadership from above. However, the former encounter additional challenges of gender un-equilibrium and discrimination.

The results of this study also have various policy and practice implications. The findings suggest the need to allow more independence and increase the resources provided to public school principals in Pakistan. Moreover, overbearing support from superiors and the community's active role in educating children can reduce the barriers experienced by public school principals. Finally, eliminating the gender biases and prejudice against women public school principals is necessary to develop their leadership skills and enhance students' education.

In short, this study contributes to the literature on leadership challenges public school principals face in Pakistan and the strategies used to overcome these challenges. The study highlights the need for more autonomy, resources, and support from higher authorities for public school principals and the importance of addressing the gender stereotypes and discrimination that female public school principals face. The findings of this study can inform policies and practices aimed at improving the leadership of public schools in Pakistan, in turn improving the quality of education for students.

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