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Role and Responsibilities of Public-School Principals of Karachi: Perceptions & Hurdles Faced

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Abstract: *The research study aimed to explore the perception of public school principals about their role and responsibilities for school improvement and to highlight the hurdles that hinder the implementation of the principals' decisions. For this purpose, related literature was reviewed, a qualitative approach phenomenological research design was adopted, and five (05) secondary school principals were interviewed. Later, the steps proposed by Creswell (2013) were employed to analyze, interpret and draw conclusions. It is concluded from the study that principals intend to bring change in the system, but bylaws always hinder their way.*

Key Words: School Principals, Perception, Roles, Responsibilities, Hurdles

Introduction

Principals are the backbone of the school as they inculcate values, shape culture and enhance the skills of teachers and students (Tribune News Service, 2019). Effective principals are those who live the experiences of their workplace. They monitor day to day activities of the school and involve in all aspects of the school from budgeting to evaluation (*Duties and Responsibilities of School Principals*, 2018). A successful principalship is dependent on good communication, leadership, management and decision-making skills because these skills are the characteristics of a strong principal who is ready to meet expectations and face challenges. While performing the roles and responsibilities the principal faces a lot of challenges related to students, teachers, and parents. At school, the

principals face challenges related to paperwork which takes a lot of time to compile and maintain records and ultimately ends up in frustration. Additionally, taking critical decisions for the progress of the school and learners is a critical and complicated task. Accommodating the students' and teachers' schedules in case of requests and emergencies. Finding skilled and potential teachers to fulfil the needs of the school is another challenging task the principals encounter. Teachers' evaluation demands to manage and satisfy each individual considering their individual differences. Designing and implementing a comprehensive curriculum which integrates all the aspects according to societal demands is another frustrating and challenging task (Acharyya, 2023).

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Literature Review

Principal Leadership

Principal leadership is the set of efforts employed by the principal to improve the output and environment of the school by guiding, monitoring, developing, mentoring and directing the teachers, students, parents and other stakeholders in order to achieve the prescribed goals of the organization (Pardosi & Utari, [2022](#)).

Roles and Responsibilities of the School Principal

A survey conducted by Wallace Foundation reported that for any school-level reform, there is a dire need to focus on the school leadership. Improving school leadership is the most pressing matter to improve the public education system. There are seventy reports which were published on the same topic and the findings showed that there is a strong bond between a principal's leadership and students' achievement (The Wallace Foundation, [2013](#)). These reports also suggested five key responsibilities of the principals, which are as follows: high standard envisioning of students academic success, creating harmonized, safe and cooperative environment which is welcoming to education, developing the culture of shared leadership so that all the stakeholders take ownership of the school and its vision, improving the teaching and learning environment for better teachers' and students' productivity and manage all the resources for the improvement of the school.

The school principal has a challenging role because of the diversity in the nature of work, students' age groups and multicultural backgrounds of all the stakeholders to be catered and taken care of. To bring improvement in the school, the first thing the effective principal takes up is academic leadership. The principal observes, mentors, evaluates and hires teachers by taking classroom observations. The principal makes sure that the curriculum followed in the school is sound, for the said purpose the principal review and evaluate the curricular activities

with that of national and international standards. The principal is responsible for providing learning opportunities for raising the bar of the school. Secondly, the principals are responsible for strategic planning which includes budgeting, planning academic and non-academic activities, reviewing and amending past plans, hiring for the right human resource, infrastructure requirements and maintenance. All the strategic plans are in accordance with federal and provincial policies and laws. Thirdly, the principals are required to build communities. For that, they need to be active members of society and become a productive member of school associations for getting their voices heard. They also keep the parents abreast with the current issues and involve them in the decision-making of the school's main plans. Next, they should support students by ensuring holistic development for doing so they need to provide opportunities for enhancing various skills of the students, empower students' bodies by involving them in student-level activities, and make the school the place where the students enjoy learning and attending. Finally, the principals take care of financial stewardship by controlling the expenses within the approved budget. They also choose the best resources at the best prices to benefit the school (Pardosi & Utari, [2022](#)).

The three themes were discovered by Sharif et al. ([2020](#)) during the comprehensive literature review. The first theme demonstrates that a principal's primary responsibility is to oversee instruction in order to ensure the academic achievement of pupils. Though, a principal is unable to complete this work by themselves as they are not knowledgeable in all subject areas covered in a school. Consequently, the principal shouldn't act as the sole pedagogical leader. The second theme demonstrates how the principal is required to appoint individuals to the academic team of leaders for each subject matter covered in the classroom. Based on their knowledge of the subjects, the administrative assistants should be selected strategically by the principal. Thirdly, she/he hires pedagogical experts to monitor and enhance the teaching-learning process at school.

Roadblocks Faced by the School Principals

An article posted at the Education Forum enlisted the frustration and challenges of school principals. It enlisted mandate without money as the first challenge because the laws are spun to be implemented by the state but the financial requirements of implementing such laws are not paid attention to for example the law of "No Child Left Behind". Another factor which frustrates the principals are the parents who instead of being the source of motivation for their children become the bottleneck to support their academic progress. Lastly, the students who have potential but don't have the motivation to study, the students whom the teachers spend their whole energy on but do not show any progress, and the students who do not take any of the school's effort seriously (Education World, 2012).

A survey administered by Wise (2015) among ten thousand public school principals in the United States of America enlisted the challenges faced by them. He found that principals are facing challenges related to poverty due to financial problems at home, and the students being pressurized by parents at home for achieving results more than their capacities. All these factors become the foundation of other issues which consequently affect the school outcome.

According to the research conducted on seven categories of principal leadership by Chan (2019) among six countries concluded that the principals have different roles and responsibilities in all the six countries based on their context. The seven categories of leadership studied included student matters, character, style of administration, administrative roles and responsibilities, professional knowledge, professional skills and management of people. Instead of having a significant variance in the roles and responsibilities of those principals faced common challenges in building relationships with the community and low budget which causes financial issues.

Education policies and improvements in schools are carried out by head teachers. It is a massive task for local educational administrators as well as head teachers to make schools effective. Through their innovative leadership, strong decision-making abilities, and direction of the educational process and school administration committees, principals can maximize the impact of a school. Since they lack official education and experience in headship, as well as possibilities for professional growth, principals at government schools face a wide range of difficulties. The post of principal must be filled since it is crucial to the achievement and enhancement of the school. Educational and professional assistance should be given to school principals (Mughal, 2020).

A study conducted in South African Schools, Dongo and Mahlangu (2022) discovered the following challenges faced by the research participants. One of the challenges is the late reporting of the students to a school which disturbs the classroom instructions and the environment. The principals also face the issue of teacher absenteeism which results in suffering at students' end. The unannounced visits by the officials are an additional challenge due to which the curricular and co-curricular activities are impeded.

Research Questions

The study had the following research questions:

- a. What are the views of school principals regarding their role as school leaders?
- b. What are the challenges behind the principal's crown?

Method

Research Strategy

The study adopted a phenomenological design to comprehend the lived experiences of the study participants. The phenomenological design explores the depth of knowledge which the participants possess and had experienced. This design is ideal to learn about participants'

points of view, feelings, thoughts and first-hand experiences (H, 2022).

Population and Sampling

Five principals of public schools were selected through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is one of the types of non-probability sampling in which the researcher chooses the participants on the basis of the research population requirement (Jordan, 2021).

Data Collection and Analysis

The data was collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews. These interviews allowed the researcher to observe the facial expressions and also allowed to ask connecting questions to collect rich data.

The researcher analyzed the data by using the data analysis method proposed by Creswell (2013). In the first step, the data was arranged and transcribed. The data was then thoroughly read and understood by the researcher to draw meanings from the information provided by the participants. In the third phase, the data was coded by dividing it into categories and labelling it. Later, the themes were carefully derived from the categories labelled in the previous step. In the end, the data was interpreted by the researcher.

Research Findings

The major finding of the study is as follows:

Roles and Responsibilities of the Principal

Inculcating Self Discipline

The principals were asked to share the priorities they would like to promote in their schools. Most of the principals aspire to promote self-discipline in order to have a better learning environment.

A principal shared,

"I want to promote Ethical Values, norms and values among students and teachers... I want students to learn to walk, talk, stand and sit. They should know how to greet elders, and

respect teachers not only to portray but to internalize it in their character."

Another principal opined,

"According to me, the school leader must be punctual and disciplined. This should be the first and last priority of the principal."

One more principal said,

"According to me, the main thing is discipline. The principal should be the best organizer... First of all, maintain discipline, and organize all the classes in a disciplined way, there should be symmetry ... relevance, and coordination so you can get the best outcome."

The leaders of the new era are not only focusing on the conventional methods of implanting discipline but also trying different tactics for inculcating moral values through a naturalistic approach as a regular regime in teachers hence ultimately followed by the students.

Aligning Curriculum with the Moral and Social Values of the Society

The principals strongly believe in preparing the children to become productive members of the society. For the said purpose they use curriculum as a tool for social change.

One of the principals commented,

"The main responsibility is to link up and relate our school with the society. We groom our staff and students in such a way that they serve society as an important part. The main theme is based on the said agenda, the curriculum and other things are planned accordingly."

A principal shared,

"Coordination between the society, parents and students and bring them on the same platform. The main task is to share the theme... you need to develop a framework or a plan and involve the three pillars i.e., students, teachers and parents."

One more principal mentioned,

"I decided to have a curriculum-based exhibition, arranging sports gala, Youm e Urdu,

spellathon etc. These all are co-curricular activities required by the students for today's world."

Another principal opined,

"We communicate with society, through parents and students. If the government is not providing you with financial support, then also I focus on achieving the curriculum objectives by monitoring and planning activities, especially focusing on activity-based learning..."

The vital responsibility of the school leader is to design the activities of the curriculum with the ultimate aim of achieving social and moral values. In this way, the schools will be successful in fulfilling the needs of the society.

Challenges and Frustrations

External and Internal Politics

The principals face glitches from the end of the government representatives as well as their staff when it comes to working according to their plan or intentions.

A principal while sharing the internal challenges quoted,

"Peoples personal matters are always interfering. If we focus on those then the administration is compromised. Whether it be students', teachers' or non-teaching staff matters. These mostly create interference in our actual role."

Another principal shared internal challenges,

"Leg pulling by your staff doesn't let you achieve the objectives. If they are not cooperative the interference starts from there. A good leader is not only democratic, your style should be a mixture of democratic and autocratic. Lots of bits of advice make your decision worse."

One principal mentioned internal and external politics as challenges,

"Political interference is the root cause of all challenges. Like you cannot take merit-based admissions...Your hands and legs are tied in this regard... There is interference of

senior staff, political parties even NGOs which are not controllable."

A principal perceived external challenges as a hindrance in performing their roles:

"Recently a small construction was planned in our school and the surrounding community was resisting... Suddenly I was forced to step back. It was a threat, the government should support the willing heads who want to do something for school they should be supported."

The principals face internal as well as external challenges to perform their duties. Sometimes the staff is too politicized that they hinder and impact the fulfilment of responsibilities. It has become a major issue now at schools as the individuals who manipulate their working relationships consume time and resources ultimately affecting the school in a negative way which leads to tension, dissatisfaction, and low morale. In this type of scenario, a few leaders are able to be positively affected and hence end up showing improved performance and motivation. But the majority are negatively affected which leads to the low performance of the individual as well as a team. The external challenges created by the government cannot be controlled in any way as this may result in a deviation from bylaws.

The Infrastructure and Financial Snags

The principals of the public schools face problems related to building, material and financial resources.

A few principals shared financial challenges,

"There are financial challenges. A principal has to provide resources to all the staff and students. They have to take care of the resources... Every person thinks that the governments property is their property."

"To keep my students in the school because they compromise their studies due to their financial and socio-economic matters."

"I am trying my best to ensure implementation of activities but due to lack of resources, I find it challenging. It is difficult to provide them with basic needs and even the

resources to enhance their learning. I find it challenging to work effectively without basic resources.”

A principal discussed problems related to infrastructure,

“When I joined the school at that time there was no proper wall, improper main gate, there was no washroom, there was no water for drinking. In fact, the basic requirements were not there.”

The infrastructure is the major component of any educational institute to perform various activities in a safe and sound manner. If the school is unable to provide even the basic necessities then attracting the students is not possible. Secondly, the lack of financial resources stands responsible for the poor quality of education because the activities cannot be implemented as they should be. The principals of this era firmly believe that the poor infrastructure and the ineffective financial management led towards the lack of basic facilities, and a poor learning environment hence, therefore, resulting in poor performance by the students and the faculty.

Conclusion

The result of the findings shows that the principals are aware of their roles and

responsibilities. They also try to do their best but there are no set standards or criteria provided to them by the government. Being the employees of the same body, they are not heading in the same direction according to pre-determined objectives or key performance indicators. All the principals are doing their best from their own perspective but there is no barometer to measure their efficiency or effectiveness.

The second part of the study highlighted to major challenges the principals face in performing their roles and responsibilities. These challenges are internal politics of the workplace and external threats from the government. To them, neutralizing the internal threats is a glitch which can be overcome by team building, discussions and other strategies. On the other hand, the external challenges imposed by the government are a setback because it impacts the progress of the schools and against which the principals feel helpless. It is recommended that proper policies should be devised and implemented to overcome the aforementioned bottlenecks. The principals should be authorized to take a stand and ensure the stability of their workplace by the government.

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