School Heads' Perceptions About Their Leadership Styles

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Abstract

This study explored school heads' perceptions regarding their school leadership styles. The study adopted a qualitative research design. The sample of the study consisted of 10 male and 10 female head teachers from Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews. Findings revealed that school heads adopted a number of leadership styles. The main leadership styles included instructional leadership, transformational leadership and moral leadership. These different leadership styles were adopted keeping in view the needs of different situations that heads found themselves working in. The study has important implications for school management, schoolteachers, researchers and policy makers.

Keywords: instructional leadership, moral leadership, school leadership, transformation leadership

Introduction

To carve a name for the institution, an all-round growth and progression its members and the role of a leader is indispensable; therefore, leadership in general and at school level in particular, is considered as one of the important areas of research. Leadership at the school level is required to perform multi-dimensional

roles and a leader must be equipped with such abilities and skills so as to achieve the set targets (Lopez & Ensari, 2014). According to Sentocnik and Rupar (2009), a school leader has to organize, supervise, plan, make decisions, perform managerial and financial tasks and above all has to be an effective instructional leader. The leadership style has also been found to influence a teachers' motivational level and job satisfaction, creating a learning enviroment in school, to manage human resources and to create a change process in school (Waheed, Hussin, & Daud, 2018).

Arguably, the most recognized leadership styles in school contexts are instructional, transformational and moral (Hussin & Waheed, 2016); however, all of these leadership styles have some pros and cons. The transformational leadership style has been criticized because of its tendency to consider the leader as a hero, lacking some important leadership factors, having vague concepts and focus on certain transactional practices (Leithwood, & Sun, 2012; Yukl, 1999). The instructional leadership style has been criticized for assigning exceptionally high status to the leader, besides being task-focused and authoritative in nature (Marks, & Printy, 2003). Contrastingly, researchers often appreciate and advocate more adaptive and multiple oriented leadership styles (Mulford, 2008).

The purpose of this study is to discuss the different sets of leadership styles exhibited by the school heads in their leading roles in the district of Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan. In the context of this study, the authors found limited qualitative studies on leadership styles in general Pakistani context (Bahadur, Amir, Waheed, & Abdul Nasir, 2017), and in KP in particular. Most of the studies were mixed method or quantitative in nature (Khan, Ahmad, & Iqbal, 2014; Khan & Iqbal, 2013; Khan & Anjum, 2013); therefore, Niazi (2012); Begum, Jan, and Khan (2013) recommended a more indepth exploration of the school leadership phenomenon in the provinces of Pakistan.

Integrated Leadership Styles

Leadership has been considered as one of the most important factors affecting school success and excellence (Crum, Sherman, & Myran, 2009; Urick, 2016). Almost all school factors, whether directly or indirectly, are depended on it (Mulford, 2008). The review of literature on school leadership shows that there are many studies on single leadership styles. For example, on transformational leadership (Vermeulen, Van Acker, Kreijns, & van Buuren, 2015), instructional

leadership (Hallinger, 2003; 2007), ethical or moral leadership (Kanokorn, Wallapha, & Keow, 2013; Yıldırım & Baştuğ, 2010), and distributed leadership (Harris, 2004). However, a greater interest is seen among recent researchers on multiple-leadership styles in school settings (Bahadur, Amir, Waheed & Abdul Nasir, 2017; Hallinger, 2007). The purpose behind this interest is due to the demand on flexible and adaptive leadership styles. For example, Mulford (2008) while comparing instructional, transformational, distributed and sustainable leadership styles argued that each of these leadership styles have their own merits and demerits; however, a flexible leadership style having elements of each would be most appropriated and applicable.

Similarly, Hallinger (2003) claimed that the effectiveness of transformational and instructional leadership depends on school factors; however, if both were integrated, the contribution would be far greater. Recently, Bahadur, Amir, Waheed and Nasir (2017) found that the best practices found in selected transformed Malaysian schools were multiple and adaptive leadership styles. The leaders not only focused on task and managerial practices, but they were found to give importance to ethics, change and relations. Thus, the review shows that integrated leadership styles (transformation, instructional and moral or ethical) would contribute more in school success rather than using a single and rigid leadership style.

Conceptual Framework

The literature in the above section shows that transformational, instructional and moral leadership styles have more relevance in education settings. A leader as an instructional leader, gives more emphasis to the teaching-learning process and the curriculum which is not limited to develop and support quality teaching learning. This approach also reflects upon the context, understanding the subjectivities and responds to the demands of the context (Yemini, Addi-Raccah, & Katarivas, 2015). The basic features of an instructional leadership style includes evolving a favorable environment for teaching-learning process, having a mission in mind and achieving set objectives (Miller & Martin, 2015). Geraki (2014) concluded that the school heads in selected Greek schools mainly focus on monitoring, facilitating and supporting teachers and students in achieving their academic objectives. In the context of Pakistan, Branson, Baig, and Begum (2015) found that the most contributing factor in the students' academic accomplishment is the instructional leadership style of school heads.

Transformational leadership is aimed at bringing about a radical change in a school's existing state of affairs (Watson & Rivera-McCutchen, 2016). Transformational leadership inspires and motivates the followers (Bass, 1985). Transformational leadership consists of four main components namely:

1. Individual consideration involves leaders' ability to understand other's needs, helping, developing and supporting others.

2. Idealized influence includes building trust, respect, acceptance and ethical standards in schools.

3. Intellectual stimulation includes leaders' practices which inculcate creativity and innovativeness among school members and in teaching and learning process; and challenging the status quo.

4. Inspirational motivation involves setting directions, developing a vision for change, making the vision achievable, and motivating followers for change.

Moral leadership is a more collaborative and distributed type of leadership where importance is given to team work; however, cooperation and decision are made on consensus (Akbulut, Nevra Seggie, & Börkan, 2015). This includes moral or spiritual practices and behaviors. According to Adair (1989), a moral leader shows strong commitment to his or her profession and has knowledge of human nature and tries to meet their needs. Studies have also been conducted on school heads roles and indicate that school heads as leaders place a premium on serving their communities and showing commitment in doing so (Smith & Amushigamo, 2015; Yemini, Addi Raccah & Katarivas, 2015).

Hence, the most common leadership styles practiced by school leaders are instructional, transformational and moral leadership styles. Keeping in view the above background, the current study that is based on the PhD thesis of the first author (Rehman, 2018), revolved around the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of school leaders in Peshawar, KP about their leadership styles?

2. What leadership styles are adopted by the school heads in Peshawar, KP?

Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the different sets of leadership styles exhibited by the school heads in their leading roles in the district of Peshawar, KP. This study adopted a case study method (Yin, 2009) where the district of Peshawar was selected as the site of the study. For data collection, 10 male and 10 female school heads aged 40 to 55 with a wide-range of educational and career paths were selected as participants of the study. The school heads were well-known for their effective leadership in the district and all had more than five years working experience as heads of the school. Purposive sampling technique was used in order to get more in-depth and relevant data (Bryman, 2008). Semi-structured interviews were used as a research tool to explore the participants' experiences. Each interview of 30 to 40 minutes was conducted in the offices of the school heads. Before the actual data collection, a preliminary study was conducted to refine the interview protocol and develop clearer questions.

The confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents were maintained. Thomas's (2006) general inductive approach was used for data analysis where all the codes from the data were identified, then arranged on the basis of their resemblance and ultimately themes were developed for interpretation. ATLAS.ti 7 was used as a software to facilitate data analysis.

Findings

The three most important types of leadership styles namely transformational, instructional and moral leadership were clearly evident in the data. These themes are illuminated in the following sections:

Instructional Leadership

One of the main themes that emerged from the data analysis was the instructional leadership styles of the school heads. The main instructional practice was monitoring and evaluating the teaching-learning process. All heads mentioned in their interviews that they devoted a bulk of their time in their schools for monitoring and evaluating the teaching-learning process. They used different methods for evaluating the teaching-learning process. The methods used included taking rounds, observing classrooms, using reflective diaries and taking feedback from students and their parents. A participant mentioned that she takes rounds in

the school after two or three periods to check the presence of the teachers in their classrooms. Another school head shared:

> " I regularly take rounds and observe teachers teaching in classrooms. I have introduced assessment register i.e. daily report book. A designated student of a classroom is given the duty to record all the weak points, the deficiencies of any teacher in the classroom and whether a teacher attends the class or not. I utilize electronic cameras through which I have a close eye on the students' activities."

The excerpt from the interview shows that the heads gave importance to the students' feedback and input as well. This finding was further supported by another head who claimed:

> "I personally visit to classes and inquire from the students about the teaching-learning process."

In addition to monitoring, the heads as instructional leaders in their leading roles were fully involved in the teaching-learning process. The head of one school considered it as the most important thing to be properly managed in schools. She stated:

> "My focus in on teaching-learning process, that how this process is going on."

Another head added:

> "The main job of a school head is [to make sure] how quality teaching-learning process is going on in the school. Therefore, I personally focus on the teaching-learning."

They not only focused on teaching-learning process, but also kept themselves fully involved in this process. For example, one of the heads stated that she had enough understanding of all the subjects that were being taught at school level. That helped her to know the academic level of the students and to carry out effective

monitoring, evaluation and teaching-learning processes. She also taught the classes in order to be in touch with the students in order to address their problems and grievances. The leaders encouraged the teachers to be more focused on lesson plans and diaries. The head mentioned:

> *"I have given lesson diaries to all teachers, where they write the daily lesson they deliver in their classes, and at the end of the day, I check what has been done in the classrooms."*

Moreover, the leaders as instructional leaders tried their level best to provide favorable teaching-learning environments in their respective schools. One of the female heads mentioned that she divided the students in different sections based on their mental level and abilities so every child could be among students of their own level and teachers could teach and plan according to students' needs. A head stated that she ensures the existence of a high quality teaching-learning in her school where the focus is on quality learning rather than marks and grades. One of the school heads expressed his feelings of happiness about the importance he earmarks to the teaching-learning process. He said:

> *"It is of personal satisfaction to me when the parents come to my office and appreciate and praise the efforts of school and teachers for their [students] good academic results."*

The above excerpts of the participants indicate that school heads demonstrated various practices as instructional leaders in their respective schools. The practices which were considered as instructional leadership styles, included monitoring the teaching-learning process, recording the teaching-learning of classrooms in class diaries, considering students' evaluations and opinions as important tools for teachers' evaluation.

Transformational Leadership

The interviews conducted with the participants showed that the school heads along with being instructional leaders, also demonstrated multiple practices that could make them transformational leaders. Firstly, the school heads showed

a commitment and vision for change. They wanted to transform their schools into excellent and high-performing schools. Some of the heads during their interviews translated leadership as change. They had set a vision for change and were thriving to achieve that vision. As one of the heads mentioned that as a transformational leader he does not rely on the District Education Office, but rather tries to get things in his school on his own. Furthermore, a head claimed:

> *"Change is my mission. I try to bring change for the betterment of the students and for the betterment of all the stakeholders. A sense of satisfaction comes to me from [achieving the mission] change."*

The same was mentioned by another head who felt happy and satisfied due to the change that she brought in her school for the betterment of the students. Moreover, a head identified change as an enjoyable phenomenon and said that positive change in the school settings bring in a sense of happiness and satisfaction.

Furthermore, the heads as transformational leaders used innovative and creative ideas in their schools to make their schools successful and excellent. A head shared that she has implemented a new model classroom in her school. She shared about this model as:

> *"I have initiated a new model classroom in 6th class. There are total 4 lessons each day for English, mathematics, Urdu and general sciences. Every subject has 2 classes. And occasionally we add Pakistan studies, Islamic studies, and drawing. The students of this model classroom are showing excellent result in quality education. I wish this model would become fully successful to provide talented individuals to the society."*

Another transformational practice evident in the data was minimizing resistance for change by using different techniques. As a head stated that, when he was posted in his school, he faced many problems and resistance from teachers to change their usual practice of not being punctual. But with the passage of time he made all of them regular and punctual in the school, which effectively improved the teaching-learning process.

The quotations from the interviews show that leaders in these schools, along with being pedagogical leaders, possessed good transformational leadership styles. The main transformational practices were having a strong vision and commitment for change, being innovative and creative while minimizing resistance to change.

Moral Leadership

The third leadership style that came from interviews was moral leadership. Some of the school head's leadership styles reflected moral leadership traits. As one of the respondents stated:

> *"The students of my school are from lower and poor segments of the society. I put my personal zeal and efforts to motivate the students and the teachers to get good grades and to give sound and good citizens to the society. When my students get good grades that gives me real happiness, a sense of personal satisfaction as I am serving the poor students."*

This desire to serve the poor students and contribute in the improvement of the society was evident in many interviews. For example, a leader mentioned:

> *"I wish this model would become fully successful to provide talented individuals to the society."*

Another added:

> *"The area and community from which my students come are poor people. I motivate them for study and to become successful individuals for society…. So I enjoy this role to work for my poor student."*

Thus, the heads as moral leaders demonstrated a desire to serve the society through imparting quality education to poor masses of the society. Moreover, the heads as moral leaders demonstrated kind feelings for their students and tried to remain close to them in order to solve their problems and facilitate their learning process. They demonstrated sympathetic feelings for their students. For instance, a head shared his desire for his students as:

"I wish that all school going children be enrolled in schools. Peace must be brought through education ... [because] the change through education is sustainable. This is my mission."

The quotation clearly indicates that the heads as moral leaders had value based missions for the students and society. A female head noted that her school has a complaint box where students and teachers can put their concerns anonymously. The box she said, is opened with regular intervals and complaints checked. Actions follow if concerns and complaints are found reasonable. Similarly, another head argued that regular visits are paid to keep in touch with students and their issues.

Besides, the heads demonstrated good intentions and desires for their students present and future as well. A female head shared her well wishes for her students as:

"The area where my school is situation is poor. The girls come to school having a lot of problems at home and in school. I get excited and happy when these poor girls get good education and get married in good families."

Similarly another head said:

"I am delighted when my students get good marks. I often come across my students in different offices where they work. They give me respect and I personally feel very happy seeing them in good positions."

Another school head stated that he gets personal happiness when parents from low socio-economic background come to him and appreciate the contribution of the school in their children's lives. An experienced school head shared that the provision of good quality education and later on professional success of students is a source of happiness, pride and excitement to him.

Serving the students of their poor community was the main focus of the school heads. The best service, which those school heads thought was to give better education to the children of the poor people of the community. Moreover, the heads

as moral leaders, had emotional attachment with their school members, especially with students. They wanted to contribute towards the betterment of the society and students.

Discussion

The school heads play an important role in the success of schools and students. The findings indicated that leaders in high-performing and excellent schools perform multiple leadership styles. In other words, leaders in such schools adapt their leadership styles according to specific needs and situations (Hussin & Waheed, 2016; Lazaridou & Beka, 2014; Mulford, 2008). However, the main leadership styles evident in the data were instructional leadership, transformational leadership and moral leadership. Thus, the findings are in line with Hussin and Waheed (2016) and Michel, Lyons and Cho (2010) who state that leaders along with being change focused, relation focused and task focused also need to be moral or ethical focused. These findings also show that the integrated leadership styles such as studied by Marks and Printy (2003) are incomplete and integrated leadership styles should add moral leadership as one of the most important leadership styles for effective leaders.

The school heads, as instructional leaders used different strategies in order to monitor and evaluate the teaching-learning process in their schools. These strategies included rounds in school corridors, developing coordination and student feedback. Wildy, Siguroardottir and Faulkner (2014) argue that school heads monitor teaching learning through observations of classroom teaching and getting student. Beside, Khaki and Safdar (2013) and Bahadur, Amir, Waheed, and Abdul Nasir (2017) found that the school heads used syllabus completion forms and took rounds to monitoring teaching learning processes in school in Pakistan.

The current study indicated that most school heads believed in a cooperative and democratic environment in their schools. These beliefs and practices of the heads seem in line with the suggestions of Wildy, Siguroardottir and Faulkner (2014), and Smith and Amushigamo (2015) who argue that good school leaders often put in place democratic and cooperative structures in their schools for successful school management.

Some of school heads in this study had introduced changes in their schools through transformational leadership for the betterment of the school members. Their

focus was not only on improving the teaching-learning process but to transform each and every aspect of school as an organization (Smith & Amushigamo, 2015). They felt a sense of satisfaction and pride after transforming their schools as an act of welfare for their students and for the community as a whole (Yemini, Addi-Raccah, & Katarivas, 2015).

Besides, the heads also demonstrated moral leadership styles in their school as heads. They tried to remain close to the students in order to get in touch with them and resolve their problems. This study also revealed that heads, as moral leaders were fully committed towards their profession and school. Moral leaders often focus on serving the community (Yates, 2014). This study indicated that the heads had a desire to serve the community by providing quality education in their schools. Similar are the findings of Ismail and Abdul Ghani (2012).

Niazi (2012) found that in Pakistan, the school heads who had a vision for the future of their schools, showed greater cooperation with the school teaching staff in order to make positive contributions in the academic achievement of their students.

Conclusion and Recommendations

To sum up, this study points out that the successful school heads' leadership styles main focus is on the academic achievements of the students. Although the study has important implications, the findings may not be generalized out of context. As this was an exploratory qualitative research which is often less prone to generalization, further leadership related research on a broader level may be conducted to explore that the issues in greater detail. Most of the school heads employed transformation leadership style in order to bring changes in the school set-ups. Being committed as a moral and ethical leader acts positively and influences school performance. Leaders in high-performing schools focus on the social, ethical and emotional wellbeing of the students and remain in close proximity to the students. For some school heads bringing a good change in the school is often a stressful and challenging task also, the school heads are often faced with stressful issues in situations where there is resistance to changes that they want to bring in their schools. School success and students' academic achievements are interrelated; therefore, the head has the responsibility to be an instructional leader which is important for school heads to create an environment of cooperation in the school.

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