SECONDARY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP'S GOVERNANCE ISSUES: CHALLENGES TO CREATING STUDENT-CENTERED ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the challenges and issues the public sector school heads faced regarding to their authority to create learner-centered environment in their schools. The sample of the study consisted of 10 male school heads from District Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data from the research participants. The findings revealed a number challenges and issues the school heads faced to their authority. The school heads identified lack of professionalism among the school teaching and non-teaching staff, over-burdened by the office work to carry out effective monitoring of teaching-learning process, and lack of decision-making powers to take immediate decisions in the best interests of the students. The study has important implication for the management of schools by school heads, researchers and policy makers.

INTRODUCTION

The nature of leadership is based on the influence it has in a specific setting (Mello, 2003; Northouse, 2010), and to build and work with a team for the desired goals (Yukl, 2006). It is also an ability to stimulate and motivate the followers for set targets (Armandi, Oppedisano, & Sherman, 2003). As pointed out by Maringe and Moletsane (2015) leadership is a mean to the achievement of set targets, therefore, it is supposed to lead with efficiency in the working setting. It can be argued that leading context plays crucial role in the growth, and realization of an institution. In all the social institutions, educational institutions are considered the important ones, becouse of their importance in the transfer of techincal and social skill and providing valuabel human resource

to the society. Effective and competant educational leadership is the need of the current society. Therefore, school leadership and its various functions are at the centre of educational leadership research scholarship all over the world. The role of school head is of vital significance (Stewart, 2006), since he or she multi-dimensional roles (Lopez & Ensari, 2014). School head way of leading, his or her abilities to a great extend has influence on the motivation of teachers, students and parents to provide quality education to all stakeholders (Djibo, Desidero, & Price, 2010).

The role of school head has multi-dimensional (Geraki, 2014), and he or she has to work with different stakeholders, for this he or she must lead on the following principles as identifed by Stringer and Hourani (2015) which mainly include, leading with purpose, making and working with team, understanding school community, creating learner-centred environement, democratic way of consultation. These principles provide a proper guidelines for the school heads in Pakistan, especially where leading is constrained contextual realities.

As claimed by Wildy, Siguroardottir, and Faulkner (2014) leading a school is not an easy task; it repleat with challenges and issues depending on the context in which a school leader leads. Some of the main challenges in this regard are dealing with the clerical staff of school, facing hurdles from non-professional teaching staff, non-cooperation from education offices. According to Hallinger and Heck (2010) social and economic setting, geographical location are the main constrains within which a school head has to lead. Therefore, it is important for the school head to adopt leading strategies accordingly.

Keeping this background in mind, the current study is aimed to explore the perceptions and experiences of school heads in District Swat in regard to the challenges they faced to their authority in order to create learner-centered environment in schools. It is said that one of the most important issues which a school head encounters is the issues of socialization in a new school (Spillance & Lee, 2006; Collay, 2006). The issues of socialization often leads to conflict and challenges with the school teaching and non-teaching staff and in some cases lack of coordination with education offices. The school heads in this study pointed out the challenges and issues with they termed as challenges to creating learner-centered environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Leading schools in the places where the issues of poverty, and lack of attention to education are in abundance (Moletsane, Juan, Prinsloo, & Reddy, 2015) becomes challenging in nature. Such kind of situations have negative affect on the role of school heads. In most cases it leads to challenges to their authority, where they become helpless and ineffective in the system. This brings also negative impacts on their emotional balance (Lenarduzzi, 2015; Faulkner, 2015). In the context of this study, the public sector schooling system presents different challenges and issues to the role of school heads, especially in the far-flung district of Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The most common challenges among them are the government stress on the enrollment of maximum number of children in school that consequently resulted in the over-crowded classroom phenomenon, lack of qualified teaching force and the lack

of physical facilities in order to create conducive teaching-learning process (Aikman & Rao, 2012). Since the role of school head is key in the academic success of the students and creating conducive teaching-learning environment focusing on the students' holistic development; the leadership scholarship has pointed out that there is still lack of research regarding school based empirical studies in the non-white communities (Engels, Hotto, Devos, Bouckenhooghe, & Alterman, 2008). Since the job and role of school head is multi-faceted and contextualized therefore, the present study is aimed to fill that gap by investigating the role and the challenges the school heads come across while leading their school and making them conducive for the students' academic and holistic personality development.

The role of a leader is replete with a number of functions and activities which mostly include to plan, to supervise, to organize, to manage the staff, to tackle financial responsibilities, and to perform pedagogical functions (Sentocnik & Rupar, 2009). It can be said that the role and the style of leadership and his or her commitment to his or her role has direct influence over the motivational level of his subordinates, and ultimately leading to conducive teaching-learning environment. This study is aimed to address the question, posed in the school leadership research of, what are the challenges and issues that hinder the role of school heads to perform their role effectively and creating student-centered environment (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). Many of the studies on school leadership has found that in traditional societies like the one in the present study, school leaders face a lot of local issues and challenges that have negative impacts on their role.

In a study in the context of South Africa by Lumby (2015) interviewed fifty school heads about the challenges and issues they encounter in their leading role. The findings of her study showed that the school heads shared multiple challenges which included lack of physical facilities, over-crowded classrooms, lack of teaching staff; all these led to obstruct the school heads to create conducive teaching-learning environment in their schools. In a similar study conducted in Pakistan, Peru, Malawi and Cambodia, Aikman and Rao (2012) found that over-crowded classrooms, shortage of well qualified teaching force badly affect the role of school heads in terms of creating learner-centered environment in their schools.

In another study researchers Moletsane, Juan, Prinsloo, and Reddy (2015) concluded that the school heads had to face challenges to their authority while creating learner-centered environement in their schools. They argued that leading in poverty striken communities far away from the urban places often result shortage of teachers; in such kind of situation creating learner-centered environement becomes difficult. Research by Lenarduzzi (2015) on school leadership in Canada, British Columbia, identified the challenges that the school heads shared. He found that the main challenges that the school heads encountered included that the school heads felt helpless while taking important school related decisions, which negatively affected their self-perceptions. This constrain on the school heads created hurdles in their ways to create learner-centered environment in schools. Zikhali and Perumal (2016) researching school leading roles in Zimbabwe, found that the school heads lack of decision

making powers, and lack of physcial facilites, at schools, frustrated them and negatively affected their main role: creating student-centered environement.

As above studies showed that school heads face different kinds of challenges to their role e.g. lack of cooperation from the school staff, parents and school communities which negatively affect their role. The current study explored the main aim of the study that what are the perceptions and experiences of the school head in district Swat, Khyber Pakhthunkhwa, Pakistan regarding their role and what challenges they face in their leading role in their leading context.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative inquiry was to explore the perceptions and experiences of male school heads leading their schools in District Swat, Khyber Pakhthun Khawa, Pakistan. The study used a case study research method (Yin, 2009) where the District of Swat was selected as the geographical limit of the study. In order to collect data for this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 male school heads aged between 30 to 55 in the district Swat (See table 1). Purposive sampling process was adopted in this study (Bryman, 2008). In order to access the school heads care was taken to select those school heads who had wide-range of educational leadership experience and were well-known in the public sector schools as professional and competent leaders.

Audio-recorded semi-structured interviews were used as a data collection tool to explore the school heads experiences. The duration of each interview was between 30 to 45 minutes. All the interviews were conducted in the school offices of the research participants. In this study ethical issues were given due attention. The most important ones were the research participants 'confidentiality and anonymity (Shamim & Qureshi, 2010) which were maintained at all the stages of research process.

The qualitative data analysis was conducted on the guidelines of Thomas's (2006). In this process codes were given to the data, then these codes were arranged in categories and groups on the basis of their resemblance which ultimately led to the emergence of overarching themes for further interpretation.

Table 1.1: Demographic information of research participants

S.No	Pseudonym	Age	Headship experience (years)
1	Asad	40	6
2	Javed	35	5
3	Wajid	43	4
4	Ali	45	6
5	Hameed	47	8
6	Raheem	37	5
7	Naveed	55	17
8	Khan	38	9
9	Noor	42	7
10	Rasheed	37	7

FINDINGS

During the data analysis process, five overarching themes emerged. The themes were selected on the basis of the governance issues that the school head encountered in their leading role in order to create conducive teaching-leaning environment. These themes are presented in the following headings and sub-headings:

Leading Teaching Staff

Non-professional attitude among the school teachers

The research participants pointed to the non-existence of professional attitude among the schools teachers. In this regard the school heads showed their lack of satisfaction. The quotes of them explained the issue:

In my experience, there are school teachers who are not professional in their role. They created problems for school heads, and do not teach honestly. They just come to schools for killing time. They are the main headache for any school head. How can you created discipline in the school staff? (Ali, age 45)

Similarly, another school heads shared his views:

The main task of a school head is to create a condusive teaching-learning environment in the school. But when you have a teaching staff that create problems for you and do not cooperative, how is it possible to do that. When I take any kind of action against them, the use other pressures so in most cases we school heads cannot do anything. Simiarly, school teachers unions are play negative role and support teachers against school heads. (Asad, age 40)

This showed that one of the challenges that school heads faced, were related to the non-professional and non-cooperative role of school teaching staff with the school heads.

Lack Of Teaching Staff at Schools

Most of the school leaders showed their concerns over the lack of teaching staff in their schools, which negatively affected the teaching-learning process. They shared their views:

I lead a school in a village, the important issue for me is that there is no sufficicent teaching staff at schools. Most of the teachers get their transfer to cities. This leads to having negative impacts on the quality of teaching. (Javed, age 35)

Monitoring Teaching-Learning Process

The school heads mentioned various ways of monitoring the teaching-learning process in their schools, but most of them said that they faced a lot of issues and challenges while carrying out these activities.

Over-Crowded Classrooms

The school heads mentioned that one of the most important issues while carrying out effective teaching-learning was the phenomenon of over-crowded classrooms. As one of the school heads told:

There are almost 80 to 100 students in each classroom, in such huge classroom how a school head can monitor the teaching-learning process effectively. For most of the school heads it is impossible task to carry out. (Wajid, age 43)

Another school head said:

We have classrooms in which the ratio of students is three or four times of the teachers. It becomes difficult to teach and evaluate the teaching-leanring process. The main goal of every teacher is to control the students: to make them keep silence. Along this the government is bent upon enrolling more and more students without giving them basic facilities. (Hameed, age 47)

Over-Burden School Heads

The school heads pointed out to another issue of governance was the over-burdened nature of their job. They said:

We are mostly busy in office work, and related issues. For this reason we get little time to effectively monitor the classrooms teaching-learning. Though it should not be excuse, but it is fact that school heads have to allocate more time to office. (Wajid, age 43)

My school is located in the busy location of the city. I remain busy in my office work mostly. So I spare little time for monitoring the teaching-learning tasks of the school. (Raheem, age 37)

Leading Non-Teaching Staff

Aggressive Attitude of Non-Teaching Staff

The school heads in this study pointed out to the challenge that comes from the school non-teaching staff. In this regard, they shared their views:

In our locality, most of the schools are constructed on the land which is given to the schools, but on the condition that non-teaching staff must be of the man who gives the land. Such kind of employees often create problems for the school heads especially showing aggressive behavior when they are said to obey school heads directions. (Rasheed, aged 49)

Another school heads narrated similar kind of story. He told:

It is a tragedy that in some localities the school heads are helpless against the school' non-teaching staff. In one instance, one of the non-teaching staffs, opened fire on a school heads for disciplining him. So sometimes the situation become difficult for a school head. (Naveed, aged 55)

Dealing with the Education Department

The school heads in this study identified another challenges to their authority and leading role was the dealing with the education offices of the education department. Their concerns are in the following sub-themes:

The Absence of Coordination with The Education Offices

Most of the school heads in this study showed their concerns over the role of the education office to their authority and governing the schools effectively. One of the school heads said:

Though education office sometimes become good, but in most of the cases it creates issues for the school heads. When we take certain actions in school, the education office interferes and make problems for us. In most cases, there is political interferences, which trickle down to the school and challenges the authority of the schools heads. (Khan, aged 38)

In most cases education office takes decisions without involving the school heads in it, and then these decisions are implemented in schools. It shows lack of coordination and cooperation. Which negatively impact the role of school heads and created issues of governance for them. (Noor, aged 42)

Centralization Of Decision-Making Powers in Education Offices

Another important issues and challenges to the authority of the school heads was the power centralization in the education offices. As one of the school heads told:

The education office has full control over the decision-making powers relating to the schools. When they exercise these powers, they often do not pay attention to the ground realties of the particular schools. The concentration of the power also has led to corruption in the office, which ultimately affect the school learning environment and school head remain useless. (Naveed, age 55)
To substantiate the above quoted views of a school head another school heads said:

The decision-making powers which are in the control of the education office in most cases has led to devaluation of the role of the school heads. Even for granting leaves school heads have to report the education office. There are a lot other issues in which school heads are powerless. (Hameed, aged 47)

The findings of this study showed that in order to create teaching-learning environment the school heads in the context of this study pointed out to the challenges they faced to their authority. The most important ones were challenges that come from the school teaching and non-teaching staff, over-burdened by office work which hampered them to carry out effective teaching-learning evaluation, dealing with education offices.

DISCUSSION

The current study was aimed to explore the perceptions and experiences of school heads in District Swat in regard to the challenges they faced to their authority in order to create learner-centered environment in schools. It was also found to lead in such challenging situations pose serious threat to their authority. The findings of this study are in accord with the previous studies of Theodosiou and Karagiorgi (2015), Szalipski and Lenarduzzi (2015). All these studies found that school heads often face challenges to their authority from the non-compliance from teaching staff, and non-teaching staff.

As mentioned in the finding section that when school heads tried to control or to take disciplinary action against non-cooperative teachers, they had to face the negative role of school teachers unions in the form of pressuring them by various means. These findings are similar with the study conducted by Mbokazi (2015) in South African context where lack of teachers' cooperation and the negative role of school teacher unions badly afffected their role to create learner-centered environment in the far-flung areas. The findings showed that most of the school heads reported lack of cooperation from the education office, which mainly included pay no heed to school heads problems and challenges. Which has resulted in the lack of coordination and mistrust among them. These findings are substaintiated by the study of Brown and Conrad (2007), who reported that the school heads often showed their lack of coordination with the education office and paying no heed to their problems and the political influence in education offices.

The negative perceptions of the school heads towards their non-teaching staff showed that they are in constant leading challenges. In some cases there emereged conflict and tussel with the non-teaching staff. This finding is in harmoney with the study of Germeten (2011) which reported the non-cooperation of non-teaching staff with their school heads.

The study has some important practical implication for the school leading role in in the Swat District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The study recommended pre-appointment training for the newly inducted school heads, delegation of decision making powers at school level from the education offices in order to control the school teaching and non-teaching staff effectively in order to make the school a place of teaching-learning for the students.

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