Exploring the Diverse Aspects of Positive Leadership Practices Exhibited by School Heads in Fostering Educational Excellence in Pakistan

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Abstract
For many decades, the education system in Pakistan has been a significant source of challenges. The government is making efforts to provide quality education. In this case teachers and head teachers whether in private or government schools are committed in upliftment of Education in entire country. The effectiveness of these schools depends on the administration and performance of their head teachers. This research aims to highlight positive contributions of schoolteachers and school heads of public as well as the private schools for the upliftment and fostering quality Education. The study was based on case study and employs qualitative research methods by conducting interviews with school head teachers to gain insights into the challenges faced by head teachers and how they can be addressed to improve the quality of education in schools. Thematic analysis identified three themes from qualitative data which were: Educational Challenges, Educational Visioning and Mentorship & Educational Achievements which highlights that head teachers` roles are eminent and despite the challenges, they are striving to bring a transformative change in the school culture.

Key Words: Head Teacher, Education, Training, Leadership, Fostering Education, Challenges

1. Introduction
Ensuring every child has an equitable right to a high-quality education, regardless of their gender or socioeconomic background, is a basic and fundamental right of every person (Boulton, 2010; Wei et al., 2018). The slow progress of Pakistan in making towards attaining the education goals established in Vision 2030 and the failure to meet the SDG targets for education underscore the necessity to examine the country's educational system. The performance of education-related measures has hardly changed or demonstrated marginal improvements during the last five years (Sajjad et al., 2022).
Pakistan currently is grappling with Education Crisis characterized by critical state across all education levels specifically primary level being particularly impacted (Bizenjo, 2020). ASER - Pakistan, 2022 statistics revealed that out of the total population, 17% rural and 6% urban are not

attending the schools that comprise a total of around 23 million children which is a significant number. As declared in United Nations Development Programs, Pakistan's Literacy rate is ranked to be 152 out of 189 countries which is lowest as compared to countries having the same socio-economic status as in Pakistan. Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2021) declared, the literacy rate of Pakistan as 60%, where Punjab has the highest literacy rate (64%) which is followed by Sindh (57%), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (55%), and Balochistan (40%). One of the underlying causes of low literacy rate is spending less money on Education. Pakistan is spending only 2.3% of its GDP which is lowest among other South Asian Countries like India, Afghanistan, Iran who are spending 3.8%, 5.9% and 2.93% (Sajjad et al., 2022: IPRI,2015). Though years have passed with countries making efforts in Education but still quality and access to education has still remained a major challenge (Bizenjo, 2020).

School Leaders are regarded as an important factor in enhancing the quality of education given in schools where Leadership includes passionate direction, motivation and facilitation to teachers in pursuit of upgrading Learning Standards (Crow et al., 2017; Leithwood and Louis, 2012; Robinson et al., 2008). The research suggests that linear, uni- directional and static leadership styles in the context, that involve mainly maintaining power status and Managerial Roles, are one of the major factors that contribute to resist change (Daniels et al., 2019; Grice, 2019; Kurland, 2019). Many studies have focused on Transformational Leadership Style and its relationship with student achievement. It is found that in Pakistani context school heads are using the managerial approach of leadership for the sake of maintaining authority (Niqab, et al.2014). It should be important for the school heads to differentiate between a designation of a Manager and a Leader. (Gunter, 2008). A quantitative study conducted by Ullah et al. (2018) found that head teachers' transformational leadership styles significantly correlated with the academic performance of students; however, the statistical data does not provide detailed descriptions on the results gained. Researchers have found numerous challenges faced by head teachers (Bush, 2022). But didn't throw many highlights on their powerful role in uplifting education. This paper discusses the positive role of school heads in uplifting quality education despite many challenges in their path.

1.1 Research Objectives:
The objectives of the current study are:
- to illuminate the pivotal role of head teachers in facilitating and elevating the educational system in government and private schools of Pakistan.
- investigates the challenges head teachers encounter and explores their perspectives on the future of their educational institutions.

This research involves the study of public and private schools, for which purposive sampling was done, one of the types of non-probability sampling so generalizability can be the issue. Nonetheless, the insights gained from the present study can be applied to schools who have similar contextual elements. It is north worthy that for current study head teachers were well qualified and exhibit strong willingness to bring a change in their institutions.

2. Theoretical Stance
Studies indicate that constructive and efficient leadership is demandable to the success of any organizations (Arasli et al., 2020) embracing even schools (Day et al., 2020). As far as educational context is concerned, school head teachers play a critical role in guaranteeing that students are receiving quality education (Park et al., 2018, Liebowitz and Porter, 2019; Leithwood et al., 2019). In the context of developing countries very little has been written for Head Teachers (Garret et al., 1997). It has been reported that the quality of education in government schools in Pakistan is significantly lower than that of private schools (Ali and Raza, 2015). Various studies have

analyzed the quality and styles of leadership in Pakistan and concluded that one of the profound reasons for this discrepancy is the ineffective leadership of head teachers in government schools (Parveen and Tran, 2020; Parveen, 2021). Work from Akhtar (2017), suggests that active engagement between head teachers, parents, and the community may help to address the issues of low-quality learning. The study also states that head teachers should receive frequent training, mentorship and support in order to nourish their leadership skills and make sure that they are readily prepared to address the issues (Şenol and Işıktaş, 2022). As far as Government schools are concerned, they frequently have limited funding, and Principals are bound to utilize the provided resources effectively (Parveen, 2021). One more issue addressed in the study is they must be taught, trained and empowered to prioritize their spending on necessary items such as books, stationery, and teacher training (Ali and Raza, 2015). To raise the learning standards requires teamwork and quality teaching (Poom-Valickis et al., 2022). This would also demand collaboration with teachers who are not trained enough (Azorín and Fullan, 2022). Many teachers in Government Schools are not sufficiently trained and if trained even cannot deliver well, along with lack of resources can lead to an Education Crisis in Pakistan (Fatima, 2022).

2.1 Head Teachers as Leaders:

Head Teachers also designated as Principals and Educational Leaders play a significant and key role in development of students, teacher retention, upliftment of teacher`s morale and in school improvement (Grissom and Harrington, 2010; Brion and Cordeiro, 2020). Although they perform an important part, still it is found that they are sufficiently not prepared to tackle modern needs and emerging challenges that encompasses conducive learning environments and better student outcomes. (Bush and Glover, 2016). As they are lacking in standards Head Teachers in developing countries are selected based on their years of experience and their political and tribal affiliations (Bush, 2014) with the majority having the mindset that teachers after certain years of experience can become a Head Teacher (Bush and Glover, 2016).

Past studies explicitly concluded that head teachers in Government Schools in Pakistan face numerous challenges, such as lack of resources, inadequate training, and poor infrastructure (Mansoor et al., 2015; Ashfaq et al., 2018). The study recommends that the government should provide Head teachers with proper sufficient resources and support by the competent authorities to help them improve the quality of education in their schools. (Hussain et al. 2019; Akram et al., 2022). It is also found that Head Teachers in our context lack sufficient training in Leadership as they have upgraded from teachers to heads based on years of experience (Memon and Bana, 2005). Recent Educational Reforms in both developed and developing countries have nominated a strong prominence on the development of Leadership Skills (Wallace, 2012; Lizotte, 2013). These current reforms have introduced a new role for school managers and administrators, enabling them to possess a thorough and comprehensive understanding of the Educational, Administrative, and social aspects of School Leadership (Forde et al., 2021). From the available Literature it has been deduced that School Leadership plays a critical role in upgrading and providing quality Education. Management also plays its pivotal role. It has been stated by De Grauwe (2001, pg.1). This has placed its major concern on Leadership style and has given importance to the Role of Head Teachers and then other factors like learning environment and resources. (Simkins et al., 2003)

A pivotal concern is promoting instructional development within schools. It is expected from school administrators to incorporate within them the qualities of instructional leaders by participating in various academic tasks, such as classroom observation , curriculum development, , arranging and organizing continuing professional development programs (CPD), providing feedback, construction of tests and utilizing test results to make academic and instructional decisions, monitoring and evaluating lesson planning, role modeling effective teaching practices

by themselves , and ensuring the availability of adequate instructional resources (Pansiri, 2008; McEwan, 2003) . Head teachers must work closely with the education authorities, discuss with them for recruitment of trained teachers and when trained teachers are recruited then they need to work to retain them. (Nasreen and Odhiambo, 2018). They must also ensure that their teachers receive regular training to improve their skills and knowledge. In the context of Pakistan, Educational reforms are lacking clear guidelines for development of quality leaders who prioritize instruction in schools that can serve 75 % of the population. One of the best quotes stated here from the previous National Educational Policy (Ministry of Education, 2009) dedicates only three sentences to address the significance of school administrators:

"In contrast, most individuals in management positions within Pakistan's education sector lack training in this role. Head teachers are typically selected from the pool of teachers, without substantial management experience... A management cadre for education, with specific training and qualification requirements, will be introduced" (pp. 28-29).

Study conducted by Lizotte's (2013) on the role of head teachers in school improvement, identified the evident position of School Heads but this comprises a complex and interconnected set of responsibilities.

2.2 Bright side of school heads out of Gloomy Vision

Position of heads cannot be a simplified, linear or straightforward job, it carries a complex and multitasking job description (Salfi,2011). The headteacher must direct and handle various challenges not only to survive but also thrive in the socio-cultural context of their community school (Engels et al., 2008) While they may not have complete control over the school's fate and fortune, they are trusted as a manager and trustee of the community (Bahadur Bhujel, 2021; Qutoshi and Khaki 2014). Through the above studies, the headteacher emerges as a democratic and strategic leader with a people-centered approach who wants to bring change and is ready for transformation (Sullivan, 2013). One of the studies from a community school further endorsed the positive role of School Heads that they take on various roles and fulfill their responsibilities within a complex and difficult situation facing extreme pressure (Moos, 2013), while also serving as an educational leader with a distributed leadership Style. Despite facing numerous challenges, the headteacher is determined to achieve school improvement. This finding is also supported by other studies including Memon et al. (2000, 2003), Harris (2008), Hunter (2012), Louis and Wahlstrom (2011). Study conducted in KPK identified four important areas where principal works to uplift education system which are: instructional leader and learner, creating conducive learning environment, participation on designing content of professional development and assessment of the professional development trainings (Ullah et al., 2021)

Given the theoretical stance, this paper reviews the situation through a different lens, to discuss with the head teachers the strengths and accomplishments of their role, to truly understand the appreciation points of the head teacher role, and to provide a framework for improving the current scenario in the context of government schools in Pakistan

3.Methodology

This research aims to explore and find out problems in a multitude of realities for the reason the qualitative research method is used (Stake, 1995; Mertens, 2005). The study involved interviewing headteachers of a public and private schools of medium level and low-cost level to understand the challenges faced by head teachers and how they can be addressed.

Purposive sampling was done for the selection of School Heads as Researchers have already set some characteristics for the respondents (Nikolopoulou, 2022) and inclusion criteria of sampling was:

- Head Teachers are willing to bring change
- Head Teachers mission is facilitation of Education to all students
- Head Teachers themselves are qualified and trained

The utilization of these inclusion criteria will enable the researcher to explore and ascertain the significance of the roles of school heads in fostering quality education. As discussed with theoretical framework, school heads encounter numerous challenges but despite that, we cannot neglect the work they are doing in their own capacities for training and development of their teachers and to uplift their Educational Institutions

Based on these questions that were raised to generate discussion include:

Q.1 As a head teacher, what are your roles and responsibilities to raise the quality of education in your school?

Q.2 What Challenges are you facing to implement quality education in your School?

Q.3 What are your achievements? What factors support the achievement? What are your further action plans?

Semi-structured interviews were conducted from head teachers of schools which were recorded and edited transcription was done to get a clean response from the participants (Delve, 2022). The purpose of conducting semi structured interviews was to explore and find out the sets of roles and responsibilities and achievements of school heads, therefore these interviews are best suited for it (George, 2022). Results obtained from the study were analyzed by method given by Creswell and Poth (2018, pg.264). According to this analysis, it begins with development of codes leading to formation of themes and then themes are organized into larger units of abstraction. For the present study extracted themes helped the researcher to propose the role of head teacher in developing and modeling their educational institution. Researcher was careful in conducting the interview, having taken the consent prior and with permission have recorded the interview. After conducting the interview researcher carefully transcribed the interview. Interviews were conducted in national language i.e., Urdu to eliminate language barrier and respondents can freely communicate with the researcher. In order to get comprehensive understanding of the study researcher has also taken field notes and observations to get additional insights.

4.Findings

From the data received from the interviews and observations initial codes were generated from which focus codes were developed and from focus codes were constructed that highlighted that head teachers have multiple roles and responsibilities. Three important themes are Constraints, Team Building and Collaboration, and Success. Researchers visited the school and observed the classroom. Final Examinations were going on. It was observed that students were seated in the same classroom in a well-mannered and disciplined state, no one was nodding or rotating their heads here and there. For Grade 4 and 5 Teachers have written their paper on Blackboard and researchers were amazed to see the layout and writing of the Class Teacher. Themes that were identified from the observations and Interviews are:

- Educational Challenges
- Educational Visioning and Mentorship
- Educational Achievements

4.1 Educational Challenges: They are the factors influencing the performance of school heads like lack of adequate resources, lack of available staff, proper infrastructure, proper training etc.

Figure 1
Educational Challenges
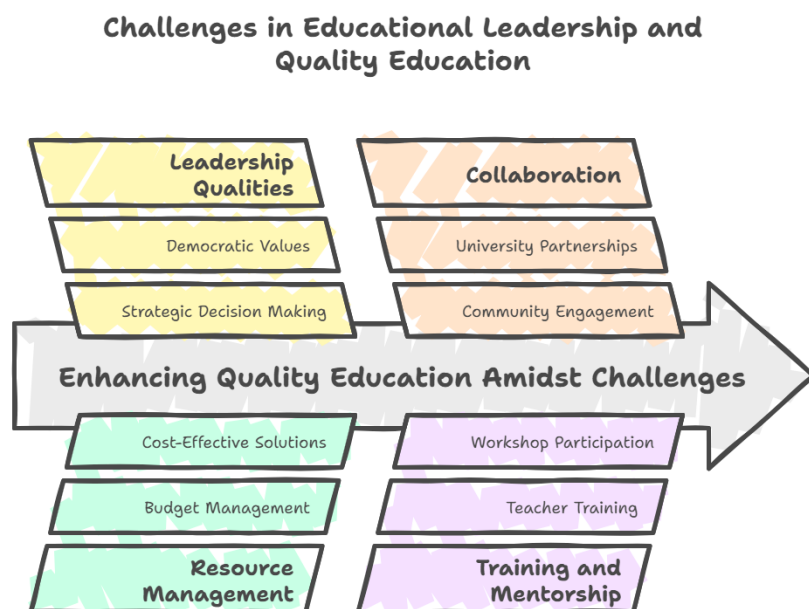
After interviewing, Challenges that were faced by the Head Teachers were of Budgeting and lack of Resources. Trained Teachers were inducted but their training and other duties don't allow them to spend much time in their school.

> *"Six new Teachers were inducted, highly trained ...but they were engaged in their Induction Training and then to other Duties so were not able to join the duties."*

They have a lack of resources, during our visit we found that the school needs to have Montessori Materials, Soft Boards, Library and Computer lab, which were missing. If this could be provided students will learn more effectively.

By talking with the head teacher at the private school, she quoted with a sad gesture that nowadays quality teachers are becoming rare. As their school costs average tuition fees so they can pay a nominal salary to teachers so with nominal salary they are unable to find Trained Teachers and they have to make them learn everything.

> *"We don't have trained Teachers as we couldn't afford them. What I am seeing that qualified and trained teachers are getting diminished, and we are left with no choices to work with untrained teachers"*

and we couldn't afford it.

> *"Trained teachers we can hire for our secondary Section but for the primary as the school budget is not enough, so we need to keep intermediate teachers even…. Then we train them and guide them to work and to deliver knowledge in a proper way".*

School heads admit that sometimes they even have to hire intermediate teachers without having any formal training. The principal of one school even claimed that By Birth Teachers are getting extinct and the scarcity of dedicated teachers has left the potential imbalance in teacher`s qualities. In terms of resources, they lack basic resources. While on visit Researcher observed some other issues like mal functioning of some fans in classrooms. Furthermore, because of shortage of teachers Multigrade Classes were observed. Despite these challenges, the study conducted in hot month of April – May noted that teachers and students were present in classrooms, actively engaged in delivering lessons and participating in all academic activities.

4.2 Educational Visioning and Mentorship:

They refer to the roles and responsibilities of a Head teacher to collaborate with their teachers and to train them. Head Teachers have a broad vision, and they are excelling in managing and planning academic as well as non-academic activities. They develop schedules with proper replacement techniques.

> *Being Head it's my responsibility to provide quality education to these students at my best. For this I planned Teachers `schedule in a way that can balance the absent teachers. I discussed and helped them to deliver appropriate teaching in Class.*

Head teacher is welcoming and open for collaboration. For him collaboration with universities and with other institutions will result in a positive outcome and students will get a chance to learn in some different way.

It has been found that head teachers conduct training and educate their teachers, sometimes they attend workshops and then deliver training to their teachers as sending them is sometimes not feasible but whenever they have a chance and have the opportunity, they send their teachers for the training.

By interviewing we came to know:

> *"This time we have introduced Books from Hodder Education, so I attended the workshop and then have guided my teachers about planning and executing the lessons of this publication".*

They identified the strengths and weaknesses of their teachers, but it was good to hear that they kept a positive note for their teachers, had high spirits and wanted them to learn. One of the private school principals said that she has the honor to train their teachers for better opportunities.

Head teachers of both public and private schools know leadership qualities, they believe in democracy, in addition they also know how to manage their organizations in very little budget. They understand the importance of collaboration and involving stake holders in decision making processes. They foster inclusive and participatory culture where perceptions of teachers and parents are valued. In public school, the head faces the challenges of working under restricted budget, seeking external funds and community collaborations. Similarly in private set up, heads work to make their institution financially sustainable while delivering quality education. They are trained in seeking cost effective solutions and exploring other ways by efficient budgeting. Overall, it can be said that heads have qualities for strategic decision making and effectively make resources thereby contributing to the development of education in their respective institutions.

4.3 Educational Achievements:
Figure 2
Educational Achievements
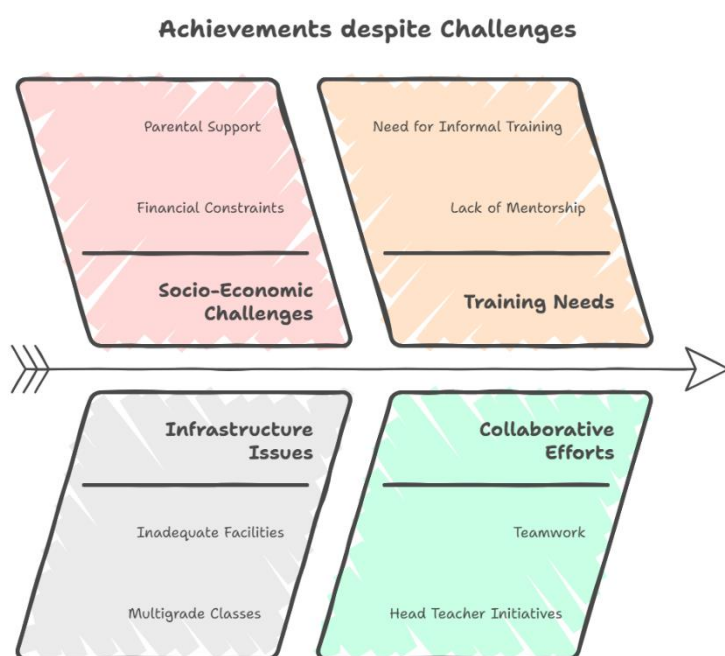
When we asked him about their roles and responsibilities to uplift Quality Education, he replied that students who were coming to them are from very low socio-economic status, but they have potential to learn and have remarkable skills.

"It is sad when we see and when we have discussions with parents, they disclose that they don't have enough money even for a haircut, in that situation I appreciate their effort for sending their children to school for learning...."

When talking about success, it is the achievements, the positive roles of head teachers. The researcher was glad to hear that the head teacher`s effort was counted as the success of that

particular school. Head teacher with the help of their teachers have arranged many facilities and have tried to attain the SDG Goals by plantation drive, developing functioning washrooms and arranging drinking water facility thereby contributing **Goal "3":**

> *Good Health and Well-being", Goal "6": Clean Water Sanitation, Goal "13": Climate Action along with it working on Goal "4" which is Quality Education*

The head teacher while discussing achievements proclaimed about the long drop out students who were coming to school after a gap of many years are also facilitated and the researcher was surprised to hear the name of the special class which was given to those students. It was named **"Shaheen".** This could be adopted by others even to facilitate students continuing their education. During classroom observation when researchers visited the class and asked a few questions from students, it was of great surprise to the researcher that students responded with confidence. Researchers found that there are diverse students in classrooms, but all have behaved well. On a visit to another school, it was also found that students were active in sports. They have dedication to learning and passion to grow.

From observation of other schools also it was noticed that during one of the Sports Events, students were very passionate about attending and participating and they did well in the activity.

> *"When we see students are learning and developing their skills it gives us immense pleasure…. we will continue with our hard working so that students can learn and can live a happy life after leaving from our Institution"*

The principals during discussion agreed that they want training and mentorship, and they are willing to participate. They have a thirst for learning. It is revealed from the past studies that School heads lack training and mentorship. This issue of lack of training is identified in the work of Warwick and Reimers (1995) in which it is stated that

"**With no clear definition of who they are and what they are supposed to do school heads are adrift in the educational system they were not trained to be the leaders, did not see themselves as leaders and did not act like leaders". (pg. 101)**.

While on visit researcher observed some other issue like improper functioning of some fans in classrooms, because of inadequate teachers and functioning classrooms multigrade classes have also been observed as the study is done in month April – May which are quite hot months but still it was observed that teachers and students were in classrooms and proper delivery of lessons and academic activities are going on.

Despite all challenges, the head teacher was very positive for his teachers, wanting to prevail a collaborative culture in his school, as for him collaboration and teamwork can foster the Institutions. To him his biggest achievement is students are learning and developing their holistic potentials. The head teacher wants to bring a change, but workload and other issues made it difficult to implement the changes. Also, he proclaimed that they also need informal training to mentor their staff and to develop their Institution.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study is significant to all Leaders that they can bring a change despite all challenges. They need to develop a positive attitude for their staff, for their students and for their parents and for the entire community to bring a change in Education. The study also highlights some positive face of the education system in Pakistan, and though facing challenges, still teachers and heads and other community members are facilitating to uplift the Education system. It is significant for the Researchers to work in a broader context to generalize this parameter and bring out some concluding evidence. Researchers through this study have identified the role of principals in promoting education overcoming and lagging behind socio economic status but gender inequality remains a significant issue in Pakistan's education system. There is a need to explore how headteachers can work at their positions to promote gender equity in education. A study conducted by Ahmad et al. (2019) identified the need for principals to play an active role in creating a gender-sensitive school environment, but more research is needed to understand how they can effectively promote gender equity in education.

From one of the previous studies three designated titles to the Head Teachers were identified like: Head Teachers as Responder, Head Teachers as Manager and Head Teachers as Initiator. (Jogezai et al., 2021). When talking about the Head Teacher as a responder they have good collaboration with their teachers. When entitling them as a manager they can deal well within their internal working premises and with concerned authorities and other stakeholders. Last Initiator means they have a long vision for their schools. From the data we gathered we even identified that school heads over here can be entitled as responder, manager and initiator as they are facilitating a collaborative culture and want upliftment in Quality Education and thereby want to facilitate all teachers and staff. The study also had its implication for head teachers as a Change Facilitator (Jogezai et al., 2021).

The role of head teachers in government schools in Pakistan is critical to ensuring that students receive quality education. However, the challenges faced by head teachers, such as lack of resources and inadequate training, often hinder their ability to effectively manage their schools. To address these challenges, the government must provide head teachers with regular training and support to improve their leadership skills. Additionally, the government should allocate adequate resources to schools to ensure that they have the necessary infrastructure and facilities to provide quality education.

In conclusion, the role of head teachers in public and private schools in Pakistan cannot be overstated. Head teachers are responsible for managing the daily activities of the school and making sure that students receive quality education. However, the challenges faced by head teachers, such as lack of resources, lack of available teachers and inadequate training, often suppress their ability to effectively manage their schools. The government and other NGO`s must provide head teachers with regular training, mentorship and support and provide them adequate resources for their schools to improve the quality of education in the public and private sector in Pakistan.

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