



RESEARCH PAPER

Principals' Perspectives on Relevance of Professional Training to Characterize their Role and Capabilities within Secondary Schools in Punjab, Pakistan

Dr. Abida Nasreen¹ Dr. Anjum Naz² Dr. Zunaira Fatima³

1. Assistant Professor, Institute of Education and Research, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Assistant Professor, Department of Education, University of the Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan
3. Lecturer, Department of Education, University of Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan

PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: February 08, 2018	The school heads are the key agent of school development and their training is a significant element which enables them to perform well and transform the schools and consequently the fate of nation. This paper is an intellectual effort to search out the relevance in between the training programs provided and the actual needs of the principals to perform in the schools. The results of the study revealed that school principals are acting as the facilitators and trying hard to create a conducive learning environment within the schools. This study confirms that school principals want to change the existing practices to bring positive change in the schools. Their training programs are equipping them to use modern technology at the workplace to be efficient. The professional development program should have been planned after a thorough need analysis to enhance the validity of the training
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Corresponding Author: nasreen.ier@pu.edu.pk	

Introduction

This paper begun, by engaging critically, with the assumption i.e. underpinning contemporary policies implemented to enhance the effectiveness of school education by professionally trained principals. Drawing upon a growing body of research from the United States, Australia, England etc, it was argued that there is a little or no evidence to support the researches related to the need and importance of professional training and development of school administrators/principals in Pakistan. The school principals were generally provided training along with the other teachers at Directorate of Staff Development (DSD) and these

trainings were mandatory for their promotions to the next grade. The people called for such trainings were generally grouped according to their grades/ pay scales. This require to continuously develop the school principals and the other school staff to manage school operations

School and school education is a foundation stone of the academic journey of a nation, while a school leader is a person who could provide a colossal force to this journey in elsewhere direction, desirable one; attainment of a national goals of education while the undesirable one; malfunction and collapse of not only a school but a generations (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010).

Mathibe (2007). states that educational reformers and researchers such as, Edmonds, 1979; Clark, Lotto, and Astuto, 1984; Smith and Purkey, 1983; Adams, 1987; Gamage, 1990 & 1996c; Barth, 1991; Sergiovanni, 1991; Thomson, 1993; Caldwell, 1994; and Cranston, 1996, in Western countries have discussed the position of the school principal as the key decision-maker, catalyst, problem-solver, and the agent of change at the school (Postholm, 2019). Though, most of research is conducted on the establishment of teaching and learning practices for teachers. There is no sufficient data is available about the precise training requirements of the school principals to meet the challenges of drastically changing schools (Lieberman & Grolnick, 1996).

School performance is the outcome of principal competence and school performance depends on the management practices. It is a necessary evil that as a leader they should be following the "Look before You Leap" vision (Daresh, 1986). Each year nearly 11000 head teachers are being inducted in the schools as head teacher and this number is increasing day by day (Pharis and Zakariya (1979), as cited by Legotlo (1992) stated that school principals at the start of their job are facing a anxiety more than the excitement of joining a school as a leader. According to Legotlo (1992), new principals could not cope with the challenges of their job without well designed training and professional development program. Lenyai (2000:3) states correctly: the school leader/principal is the key person whose competence could guarantee the success of the school and could improve the teaching learning standards of education system. Dean, (1991) argued that even the quality of the teaching of teachers is also an outcome of the competence of the principal as principal acts as a instructional supervisor and provide a conducive environment to the teachers along with the opportunities to gain and improve necessary skills and knowledge. Sandberg , Anstett and Wahlgren (2007) assertively argued that there are sufficient reasons that directs us to expose all principals to professional development program in order to make sure that schools are run by appropriately qualified and skilled managers i.e. principal who not only perform rather than be able to recognize the potential of their teachers to utilize the same for the betterment of schools (Schechter & Qadach, 2012). The up to date principals are the only hope who can satisfy the quest of quality education (Pernel & Firestone, 1996). While the effective professional development programs is an

important element which could enable principal to act as school manager, human resource manager and instructional supervisor at the same time.

Schwartz and Harvey, (1991) stated that school organizations are investing their money and time in training school heads. Daresh and Playko (1989) had identified the difference between internship and practical training i.e. internship is a field based learning while the training is simulated experience highlighting the theoretical aspect. In USA the training of principal is an extensive plan which consists significant areas such as budgeting, law enforcement, scheduling activities, computer networking and management strategies. Some other areas are communication, professional interaction, effective decision making, and school supervision. Reitzug (2002:3) has described a range of forms of professional development e.g. networking, in service training, mentoring etc.

Principals' acts as a human resource manager therefore they need to learn the mechanisms for cultivation and recognition of teachers' potential in order to improve school performance (Price, 2012). Madge, (2003) described that a good school based professional development program has following characteristics:

- Integration to educational goals
- Having a coherent plan
- A continuous program which provides consistent follow up
- Evaluated on the basis of impact on school improvement.

Reitzug (2002) states that the training includes direct instruction, skill demonstration and involves workshops and presentations, while (Grobleret al., 2002) added that the training involves instruction by an expert. Sandberg, Anstett & Wahlgren (2007) summarized the spirit of training that it is about the use that people make of their knowledge and skills. Further they added the elements of values, attitudes and intentions too. Training is a premeditated endeavor to provide an exposure of relevant knowledge, inculcation of skills and development of desirable standard professional values among trainees which could enable them to perform their duties efficiently (Cronje et al., 2004:207). Hodgkinson (1996:8) suggested that the schools should employ intelligent people to managerial offices. Greenfield & Higgs (1994) argued that revolutionary steps are needed to improve the training system of principals as the current system is not appropriate and has a missing link between the theory and practice, thinking and doing and praxis from the practical.

Mabale, (2004), states that both pre- service and in service trainings are significant while according to Smith (2001), in service training contributes to enhance the standards of education system as it could improve the compatibility of the principal.. It would result in transformation of both principal and the school simultaneously. In service training is a joint effort that necessitates shared accountability for tasks such as instruction, curriculum development, evaluation as

well as it could enhance mutual cooperation among teachers and school managers (Mathibe, 2007).

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the current practices of secondary school principals' to enhance their professional capability?
2. How do they describe their role as principal?
3. What is the best professional development experience as a principal? What was valuable in it?

Material and Methods

Over the last decade, there has been increasing interest in, and recognition and support of, "qualitative" methods in the social sciences broadly and in the discipline of education, in particular. Therefore, this research study preferred qualitative research design to describe in detail the principals' experiences regarding their professional development because it allowed gathering in-depth information about their behavior, emotions, feelings, and daily life experiences. The methods of Grounded theory research (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1987) lead the researcher through collecting and analyzing information qualitatively resulting from researcher's guiding research based questions. The study is informed by the interpretive paradigm. An interpretive approach assumes that the reality is constructed with other people in social life and the researcher becomes the medium by which truth is exposed (Walsham, 1995). Interpretive research is distinctive in its approach to research design, concept formation, data analysis, and standards of assessment (Bevir and Kedar 2008). This research paradigm helps to understand the social world from the experiences and subjective meaning that people attach to it. Since human views and experiences are subjective, social reality may also change its nature and form (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey 2011). Thus, researchers working from this paradigm value experience and perspectives as important sources of knowledge (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

Within the interpretive paradigm, the researcher chose a descriptive research design. Thick descriptions based on school principals' experiences led the researcher through collecting and analyzing information descriptively resulting from researcher's guiding research based questions. Semi-structured individual interviews consistent with the interpretive paradigm were conducted in a relaxed atmosphere. The shared experiences and knowledge by the school principals developed a deep insight into the phenomenon.

Nine school principals from nine districts of the province of Punjab were the sample of the study. Given the numbers involved and the fact that they were based in nine different districts, the interview protocol was considered the most suitable tool to collect in-depth information about the phenomena of the study.

The responses of the interviews were collated and analysed through extracting repeated themes. Thematic Analysis is a flexible data analysis plan to generate themes from interview data. The process involves the identification of themes through cautious reading and rereading of data. This process follows several steps. These steps are easy to follow but rigorous enough to generate meaningful findings from the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2013), there are six phases of thematic Analysis. These include familiarization, generating the initial codes, create the initial themes, review the initial themes, name and define the themes, and write up the final report.

Table 1
A thematic presentation of Secondary school principals' experiences and views about professional development

Main themes	Extended themes	Description
Current practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Quality of Training program ii. Content taught in training program iii. Continuous learning to bring change at school 	Current practices at school and out of school, formal and informal ways of learning for effective functioning of school.
Role of principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Facilitator in teaching and learning ii. multiple task handler iii. deals with multiple stakeholders 	The role of a school principal (at office, committees, classroom, etc.) as it relates to school management. She/he facilitates the teaching learning environment, perform multiple functions and also collaborate with stakeholders
Greatest professional development experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Pre service training ii. In service training iii. Academic activities e.g. workshops, seminars and conferences 	Pre-service training is a qualification needed to be an eligible candidate for the post of principal. In-Service training is the professional training provided by the QAED or other professional bodies after recruitment. Academic activities are the opportunities available for the principals to attend academic events

Current practices regarding professional development

Key findings concerning respondents' participation in and the relative importance of a range of formal professional development programs provided by the education department provide some useful insights into principals' professional development. Their current practices were divided into three sub-themes:

1. Quality of training program
2. Content of training program
3. Continuous learning to bring change at school

Following are their perspectives on the above given themes:

Quality of Training program was generally described as moderately good with few complaints and problems highlighted by the school principals. Currently, principals' preparation and training, by and large, does not develop such personal and professional skills in them to transform theory into practice. One of the principal expressed his views on the professional training of head teachers/principals:

"The training programs are mostly designed for teachers. They should separately design programs for school principals...." (P9)

"I have already told that as a principal we don't receive any training at other school campuses.....but as a teacher we have received the trainings and other training courses but these are poorly managed and there was nothing about principalship and how to manage schools effectively....." (P3).

As far as content taught in training program was concerned most of the school principals were using the internet to access needed information, and almost universally condemned "presentations by the trainers" as being of little use. They identified those modes of professional development which have been recognized as having been most effective in informing their professional practice.

The following examples typify the divergent replies:

" Mostly contents related to methodology and computers were offered. some of the management related courses were also offered" (P6)

"We were given tasks in the training programs to complete. It was interesting to see that they were concerned about our computer based knowledge..... But we really need some courses on financial management, and human resource management in these training courses...." (P1)

Continuous learning to bring change at school was another sub-theme emerged through data. The school principals were of the view that their knowledge contribute in the better management of their school. They thought that they are change agents and they can make schools' environment efficient and effective in terms of relevance of the school program, curriculum, pedagogy, and linkages with outside community.

"As a principal, I want to bring a change and initiate new methods and plans of teaching and learning at school..... Generally I discuss school plan with staff and motivate them to work enthusiastically. I learned from my training to allocate work to the right person and I always try to select right person for right job" (P5).

Another principal said:

"To bring a change there is to need to prepare the environment and this is very difficult task . I am belonging to science field . I want to say that enzymes in biology and catalyst in chemistry . these are two components. enzymes speed up the metabolic reactions . and catalysts play an important role in chemical reactions they don't change the product.so to bring a change we need such a system . co-enzymes are along with enzymes it means that a single principal cannot bring a change . he needs team workers to bring a change".(P7)

Role of Principal

All the principals interviewed, both experienced and beginning, were adamant that they had directed their own professional learning throughout their career. Following sub-themes were developed:

1. Facilitator in teaching and learning
2. Multiple task handlers
3. Deals with multiple stakeholders

They took opportunities to take on new roles and sought professional development activities which they thought might be worthwhile. All the school principals give emphasis to the challenge of trying to maintain professional learning and managing an increasingly complex role in their schools. Many were using the internet to access information when needed. Almost all said something like the following:

"We generally collect needed information by using our own ways and means....This is something from within oneself to accept the challenges and decide about every type of situation. In our system we generally learn through trials and errors". (P4)

"I have 3000 students and 19 staff members and 46 classrooms .My role is very important at school. If I won't give good environment then learning could not be possible and if I would not facilitate teachers then they could not work properly and when I facilitate both teachers and students then I feel very relaxed" (P4)

Principals handle many tasks and deal with variety of affairs at school. School principal number 6 expressed his thoughts in these words:

"The role of a principal is multi-dimensional..... we have to do such things which is not our responsibility. Sometimes we do the duty of a clerk too. If any required information is not sent to the office the office makes the head responsible for it so we have to be very vigilant and careful about it and if there is some mistake then the principal will be answerable and accountable for this".(P6)

Interaction with multiple stakeholders is the crucial responsibility of the principal. Their views demonstrate their dutiful response to the multiple stakeholders:

It is such type of post in which there are many stakeholders and we have a working relationship with them .We contact with parents through school counselor. We have a council in our school which deals with budgeting of the whole year and we make need based action plan..... I take feedback from students and I arrange the seminar weekly. There are some community members who are very helpful to function effectively. (P7)

Another school principal stated her multiple task handling in these words:

"As a teacher I teach biology as a subject and as a principal I also handle many school affairs like legal matters, school board related issues and security related problems. Students are our client and I also handle student affairs. Public dealing is the issue in which we should be very careful. It is difficult to handle their emotions. Sometimes, they go happily and sometimes due to busy schedule we can't give active response to them and they get frustrated and then I try to pay attention to them and listen them patiently. Generally, when parents of any student come into my office then I serve them properly and they go happily and tell to other people about us and our school management". (P9)

Greatest professional development experience as principal

The Principals' overall experience on their professional development activities included the following sub-themes:

1. In-service training
2. Pre-service Training
3. Academic activities e.g. workshops, seminars and conferences

All the principals got In-service and pre-service teachers' training from different universities. They have diverse views their trainings. Some reflections are given below:

"There were two training programs I attended during my whole service till now. I try to share everything with school teachers. The good thing about them was that they introduced us with all the rules and regulation of school side along with other information on school related affairs. Our school is a cluster center of that area. They also brief us on rules and other details of a cluster center. That was really helpful."(P3)

One of the principal was very positive on the training that was provided to him. He expressed his views in the words given below:

".....The most valuable activity is my present training at Quaid-e-Azam academy for educational development Punjab because all the activities covered in it are related to our job". (P4)

Another principal opined that she always try to learn from every type of opportunity i.e. workshop, training program, seminar etc. She accentuated as follows:

"I am a knowledge seeker and I continuously improve my qualification through academic activities. I think this is my strength that I know what is on going in the world..... I keep on studying latest articles that can be beneficial for my students and teachers..... I keep on improving myself....." (P2)

The Principals were generally of the opinion that there training should include contents related to school management and leadership. They emphasized that school principals should get a separate training according to their role and responsibilities.

Conclusion

The challenges of working as a principal of school have been increasing day by day due to the quickly changing social scenario and professional demands of economic sectors. Highly qualified and trained principals are required to create effective academic environment and to train, motivate and monitor the educators (Mitchell, & Sackney, 2006). The findings of this study confirms that the training programs designed for the principals are keeping in view the demands of the role such as quality of learning and continuous learning to bring change. However, still a lot more need to be done and separate trainings of educational leadership should be conducted. This finding of this study are in agreement with the studies conducted by Reitzug in 1994, 1997 & 2002 i.e. the principals are dealing with a range of challenges and all stake holders. Principals are acting as the facilitators and trying hard to create a conducive learning environment within the schools.

A body of literature also suggests that positive teacher learning culture is important to improve learning and successful change in schools. (E.g. Price, 2012; Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu & Easton, 2010 ; Raelin, 2000). A rich body of research attests that school leaders influence the conditions needed to create a positive learning culture (Day and Leithwood, 2007; Day at all., 2010). To bring change in school learning environment continuous learning of school principal is also crucial. Mabale (2004) notes that change is not an event, but rather it is a process which unfolds as individuals and organizations grow in knowledge and experience. Change management cannot be done in isolation and experts who understand change processes should be invited to assist the school to deal with change (Mathibe, 2005). This study confirms that school principals want to change the existing practices to bring positive change in the schools. Their training programs are equipping them to use modern technology at the workplace to be efficient

There are three kinds of professional training i.e. pre-service, in-service and occasional academic learning opportunities e.g. workshops, seminars and conferences (Higgs & Higgs, 1994). All kinds of training opportunities are available in Pakistan, pre-service and in-service training is compulsory while participation in academic activities is not mandatory most of the time. Moreover the opportunities of participation in academic activities are occasional because the same are not being organized on regular basis. The content taught in the professional training program is relevant but lacks practical aspects and not advanced.

It is recommended that the training of principal should be planned keeping in view the state of the art requirements and the practical aspect of the training should be enhanced as the training of the principal falls within the dominion of career path. School management and mentoring are the basic roles of the principals only a professionalized training could be relevant to his/her roles. The adequately trained principal would be able to know the capacities and competencies of the educators which later be utilized to make school more productive in terms of teaching and learning. A principal can act as a catalyst to enhance the teaching learning opportunities. A principal should have a skill to identify the competencies of the educators and can enable them to perform well. The professional development program should have been planned after need analysis to enhance the validity of the training. There are many studies which confirmed the authenticity of the role of principals as instructional leaders in their schools. But there is a huge gap in the training and actual practice principals are taught with theoretical knowledge of instructional supervision but the implication of the same is rare. All principals participated in the study were aware about the role but they confessed that they do not know how to associate the same with their regular tasks because they have not observed it anywhere. Instructional leadership role is not an easy task and being neglected in the professional training course.

Recommendations

1. The research recommended that the principals' training programs should be designed and planed separately from the teachers.
2. The training content should include material on school management and leadership.
3. Many research studies confirmed the authenticity of the role of principals as instructional leaders in their schools but still the gap exist in the theory and practice. It is recommended that the principals should have been provided a range of opportunities to practice the instructional leadership during professional training courses by utilizing various means and resources.

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