



RESEARCH PAPER

Perceptions of Government Primary School Head Teachers about Challenges and Issues in Making Schools Effective in District Sukkur

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to share the findings of a research study that aims to find out the perceptions of head teachers (HTs) about challenges and issues they face in making their schools effective. Participants of the study include government primary school head teachers working in district Sukkur's two subdivisions (tehsils) i.e. new Sukkur and Sukkur City. The focus group discussion protocol has been used as a data collection strategy. Major findings of the study indicate that head teachers face different challenges in making their schools effective. Due to shortage of teaching resources in schools, HTs unable to facilitate teachers in implementing curriculum in the classroom. The level of professional support is not desirable and irrelevant for HTs. The school management committees (SMCs) are not effective because of lack of funds. Head teachers face difficulty in performing their role as an instructional leader because of their low level of understanding about school improvement and effectiveness. The study suggests to provide professional, academic and financial support to primary schools in district Sukkur.

Introduction

The idea of school effectiveness (SE) floated in the arena of education during 1950's. Effective schools are those schools whose ultimate purpose is to bring change in the school system and to enhance students' learning and achievement. To define effectiveness is a gigantic task because a large number of aspects impact effectiveness. SE is gaining acceptance day by day because of its importance in school improvement (Zamir, 2020). School effectiveness (SE) is dynamic term. SE has different dimensions (SIE). School effectiveness comprised of conducive learning

environment, mission and vision to achieve the objectives of school or organization. It also emphasizes association between teachers and head teachers and other staff. SI also insist on monitoring and evaluation of teaching and non-teaching activities, values and ethos of school and future planning (Iyer , 2008).

The key focus of SE is on students. It focuses on students' knowledge, skills, understanding, behaviour, attitude, academic attainments, interactions, learning environment and participation. SE is all about to promote cognitive, affective, social, emotional, aesthetic and moral development among students (Abdullah et. al, 2016, Cited in Zamir, 2020).

According to Farhat (2010) effective schools are role models. These schools exhibit certain feature in terms of students learning and have implications for other schools.

Reynolds et al. (1994) has described effectiveness in terms of equity and quality. Quality means students achievement in terms of grades and scores. Equity means to establish a relationship between schools initiatives (inputs) and final outcome (output).

Farhat (2010) further elaborated that the main purpose of school effectiveness is to give autonomy and power the head teachers/ principals regarding decision making. It also includes continuous professional development of teachers and head teachers. Effectiveness also ensures mobilizing human and material resources such as community members and stakeholders (parents, local landlord, priests, and pressure groups). SE guarantee the improvement of physical facilities including infrastructure development. SE makes all stakeholders responsible and accountable.

Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2019) consider the role of school leadership significant in school improvement. School leadership influence quality of instruction, students' learning outcomes, mobilizing SMCs, monitoring and evaluations of teachers and students progress. School heads are responsible for overall school improvement. Without proper role of head teachers' schools cannot become effective.

Research studies indicate that the role of head teacher is important in applying educational policies and reforms at school level (Derek, 2009). In order to perform duties in schools, in a Pakistani context, head teachers face a number of issues and challenges in government sector while performing their duties. These challenges are relating to lack of physical facilities, attendance and enrolment issues. Head teachers have pressures from teachers' unions and political activist to adjust their teachers in the school. Parents less involvement in the school affairs is also a big challenge for head teachers (Mansoor& Akhtar, 2015). Since the inception of Pakistan in 1947, a large number of initiatives have been carried out to improve existing educational management practices. In all reforms, the important of educational heads have been recognized. In most of the cases, head teachers are prepared to

make cosmetic changes in the schools system. Very few efforts have been taken to improve the management skills of head teachers that turn schools into effective schools (Sheikh & Zainab, 2006).

Schools in the province of Sindh operate under the administrative control of School Education and Literacy Department, Government of Sindh. There are seven administrative regions in the province of Sindh i.e. Karachi, Hyderabad, Larkana, Shaheed Benazir Abad, Bhambor, Mirpur Khas and Sukkur. Each division or region has districts. Sukkur Division has three districts i.e. Khairpur, Ghotki and Sukkur. In Sukkur District there are five subdivisions i.e. Sukkur city, New Sukkur, Rohri, Saleh Pat and Pano Aqil. Schools in each division are managed by a Director and district education officers in different domains. One of the objectives of School Education and Literacy Department, Government of Sindh is to "Strengthen governance and service delivery by improving the performance capacity at all levels." At school level, head teachers are responsible for overall improvement of the schools. Head teachers in government primary schools supposed to perform different tasks for example, management of teaching and non-teaching staff. This includes maintaining their attendance, punctuality, regularity, monitoring of performance, drawing and disbursing officer. Management of academic activities such as ensure students attendance, reduce drop out and ensure proper delivery of curricular and co-curricular activities. Head teachers are also responsible for the smooth running of SMCs in their schools and accountable to education officers for their performance. These plethora of tasks, sometimes, create hurdles for head teachers to perform their duties properly. They face challenges such a lack of professional, academic and monitory support from different stakeholders.

The present study intends to find out challenges that head teachers face in achieving the objectives of school improvement. The study attempted to seek the response of following research question:

What are the perceptions of government primary school head teachers about challenges and issues they face in making schools effective in district Sukkur?

Material and Methods

The study has been designed in qualitative paradigm. Barnard (2004) elaborates that the qualitative method aims to reveal the perceptions and experiences of the educators which appear as a result of professional career. Within qualitative paradigm, focus groups (FG) discussions were used as data collection strategy. Ochieng , Wilson, Derrick , Mukherjee (2017) argue that focus group discussion is often used as a qualitative method to get a thorough understanding of social issues. The purpose of FG to get data from a purposely selected group of individuals rather than from a statistically representative sample of a wider population. Within Qualitative paradigm, focus groups discussions were used as data collection strategy.

The participants of the study included all head teachers working in government primary schools of two subdivisions of Sukkur district. These subdivisions consist of Sukkur City and New Sukkur. The total number of FG discussions were four that arranged for head teachers.

Table 01
Focus Group Discussion Strategy

Schools/ Subdivisions	School Medium of Instruction/gender	Number of Head teachers in FG	Time spend for FG
Sukkur City	Sindhi male	6	65 minutes
Sukkur City	Sindhi female	5	40 minutes
New Sukkur	Urdu male	5	70 minutes
New Sukkur	Urdu female	7	85minutes

To ensure the construct and content validity of FG questions, the questions were shared with subject expert and language expert. The questions were asked in English and the responses were given in Sindhi and Urdu languages.

Results and Discussion

Data Analysis

The participants of the study were selected purposefully. Focus group discussions were arranged for head teachers. For analysis of the responses emerged from FG, a constant comparative approach was used while coding the data. A codebook was used to ensure consistency among the patterns extracted from the data (Saldaña, 2013,)

Analysis of Head Teachers' Focus Group (FG) Discussion

This purpose of FG was to seek the views of head teachers (HTs) regarding state of physical facilities in school, effectiveness of existing teachers professional development programs, priority as a HT, role in SMC, role as an instructional leader, nature of help from SPEs, issues which they perceive and their suggestions for primary school improvement. The questions and responses of head teachers have been shared as under:

What is your educational background?

The responses of HTs indicate that majority of HTs do not have any qualification in educational leadership and management.

What is the condition of Physical Facilities in your school?

Regarding the state of physical Facilities HTs responses were mixed. Some responses showed a mediocre level of satisfaction with existing physical facilities such a condition of school building. Within school building, the school boundary

wall, availability of electricity, drinking water, fans in classroom, furniture, lavatory, play area, library etc. However, researcher's personal observation and HTs views about the level of physical facilities in primary depicted an unsatisfactory picture. The buildings of some schools were found in a pitiable condition. These schools lacked basic facilities such as electricity and drinking water. In one of primary school, researcher observed that school building was in a dangerous condition. The plaster of roof was ripped down. School was working without electricity and boundary wall and it was a girls school. The similar situation was regarding wash rooms. The HT of the school told researcher that every year girls have been leaving school due to this condition. HT further revealed that

"I am continuously writing SPE and ADOE about the condition of school. The officials from building department visit the school take out some pictures of schools but never come back. I am very happy with this situation. The school has SMC but SMC unable to resolve this issue." (Excerpt taken from Interview, December, 10, 2012).

The personal observation revealed that there was dearth of furniture in schools. The students' benches were old and broken. The situation of washrooms was unhygienic in girls' schools. Regarding the situation a head teacher commented in this way:

"I have been working in this primary school since 1988. The furniture has never been replaced by authorities. One arm of 3 chairs is broken. It has never been replaced. We need more benches because the enrolment in my school is increasing. Students are not ready to sit on floor. The electricity is available but fans are not working properly." (Excerpt taken from Interview, December, 15, 2012).

When researcher visited newly constructed buildings of primary school, the situation was different with reference to physical facilities. No doubt schools were constructed properly, enough rooms were available but the enrolment of schools was not sufficient. The buildings were constructed in such a way that during rainy season water accumulate on roofs. There is no arrangement of water discharge; as a result school building is deteriorating day by day.

Data regarding the availability of free textbook indicated that all students have been receiving free textbooks since last many years.

To what extent existing teachers' professional development (PD) programs are useful and how do you support teachers in implementing their training in classroom?

Regarding the effectiveness PD programs, HTs data suggested that existing PD programs helped teachers in improving the subject matter knowledge and teaching skills of teachers. HTs agreed that there was clear difference in trained and

untrained teachers. One HT commented on the effectiveness of PD program as under:

“In my school there are 12 teachers. All teachers are qualified and having PTC, CT and B.Ed degrees. When they were appointed they were using chalk and talk method, although they were pre-service qualified. The existing PTC and CT courses are not good in preparing teachers. When my teachers attended in-service (PD), they become acquainted to new methods of teaching. These teachers are more beneficial.” (Excerpt taken from Interview, December, 11, 2012).

HTs data revealed that some teachers do not implement new methods of teaching in the classroom even though they have attended many PD programs. HTs showed their dissatisfaction on the nomination process. One of HT said that their teachers were nominated in training program without taking them into confidence. Teachers' nomination is done by SPEs and ADOEs office. One of HT responded in interview that PTA's (Primary teachers Union) office-bearers were appointed again and again in the training. These office-bearers were interested only in getting TA/DAs. Regarding support to teachers, who are interested in using new methods of teaching HTs' defended their role. HTs were of the view that they morally support teachers. However, there were some issues of availability of teaching material. During interview it was found that HTs were willing to support teachers but limited school budget do not allow them to provide enough resources to teachers.

What is the status of SMC in your school?

Head teachers responded differently about this question. Majority of HTs indicated that SMCs have been working in their schools for last many years. In the constitution of SMC, the role of HT was very important. In most cases HTs were Chairman/ Chairpersons of the SMCs. Majority of HTs indicated that SMCs meetings were not conducted regularly in their schools. Majority of HTs also indicated that SMC meetings arranged twice in a year. Some of HTs conducted meetings once in a month. Some HT told that till they were in a position to constitute SMC in their school. HTs take Initiative to call upon SMC meeting. Regarding the focus of meeting, HTs gave responses. These responses includes from discussion of teachers problems, Students low enrolment, Quality of Teaching and learning. The majority of HTs mentioned that proper utilization of SMC fund was the focus area of SMC meeting. Majority of HTs were of the view that SMCs were not fully empowered to take decisions. One of the HTs shared that “It is very difficult to run SMCs when you have shortage of funds. We have to visit SPE and ADOE office for release of funds. This wastes our time and energy. We request authorities to make SMCs payment process easy” (Excerpt taken from Interview, December, 10, 2012).

HTs further pointed out that community was not taking interest in the education of their children. Majority of parents are not aware of the importance of girls' education. When HTs called parents to visit school, parents did not come school.

Q: What is your priority as a head teacher? What initiatives you have taken as a HT for the improvement of quality of education in your school?

Regarding this question, HTs shared different points. Majority of head teachers were of the view that their main priority as a head teacher was to improve the quality of education in the primary school. When researcher further probed the questions the following responses were emerged:

- To reduce students drop out
- To increase students enrolment
- To involve community in school improvement

During interview, one of the head teachers responded that “I always remain busy in different kinds of assignments. I have to carry out the orders of ADOE office, inform other HTs about any development made in ADOE office and visit Accounts Office regularly. I am also office-bearer of Primary Teachers Association. I have to attend different meetings.”(Excerpt taken from Interview, December, 22, 2012).

The analysis further showed that only a few HTs showed their willingness to improve students’ learning as a priority area.

How head teachers justify their time in school?

The position of HT is very important in schools. In order to solve issues regarding school improvement, HTs has to manage time equitably. In the government schools, HTs suppose to perform different tasks. These tasks include supervision of teaching to arrangement of salary for teaching and non teaching staff. Sometimes HTs it becomes difficult for HTs to justify the time. When researcher asked HTs about the justification of time, HTs gave different responses. Majority of HTs were of utilize their time in visiting SPE and ADOE office and accounts office (to address salary, accounts and promotion matters). One of HT opined that,

“My school is situated in taluka headquarter of the town. Most people visit this school for different purposes. Primary Teachers Association central office is also situated in my school. I am also the office bearer of teachers’ union. A major portion of my time is also devoted to teachers’ union activities”. (Excerpt taken from Interview, December, 02, 2012).

Other HTs utilize their time differently. However, a small portion of time is devoted to academic activities.

What is the situation of academics in your school?

This question provides an overview of academic activities, implementation of course outline in the classroom, monitoring of teaching- learning situation and assurance of learning in the school. Data indicated that government primary schools did not have the copies of National Curriculum of Pakistan. All primary schools in District Sukkur develop time table every year and they also share time table with SPEs. With reference to question of curriculum implementation, majority of HTs confirmed the implementation of curriculum by verbally asking from teachers about the topics they teach. One of HT told researcher that:

“I am very conscious about completion of course in my school. I emphasize teachers to share their teaching ideas with me before teaching. I usually visit classroom and gives feedback to teachers. I also check fair copies of children and put my signature on it. ”. (Excerpt taken from Interview, November, 11, 2012).

Data further revealed that majority of HTs did not use any check list during monitoring lessons they depend of verbal report of teachers about the progress of curriculum. HTs usually visit classrooms. The frequency of visit is different from school to school. Some HTs of government primary schools visit classroom once in a day, once in a week. It was interesting to note that some HTs occasionally visit classrooms because of their other assignment. Regarding the focus of visit HTs responses were different. According to majority of HTs’ the purpose of visit was to check the availability of teacher in the classroom. Others termed it a routine visit. Some HTs purpose was to check students’ attendance.

Data further indicated that HTs adopt different approaches to ensure students learning in the classroom. Majority of HTs rely on depend on results which teacher share with them. If results are satisfactory HTs presume that learning is taking place. Some HTs ask content specific questions from selected students of the classroom. The assessment of students’ performance is the prime area. The focus of majority of HTs about assessment was to prepare students for annual examination and the completion of the course in time. One of the HT spoke out about the assessment as:

“We assess students at the end of academic year in the month of March. The purpose of assessment is to check what we taught to students. In the examination we try to ensure high percentage of students pass the examination.” (Excerpt taken from Interview, January, 14, 2013).

In primary schools parents hardly come to schools to discuss the progress of their students. HTs data confirmed that parents occasionally visit schools to discuss the academic problems of their sons/daughters.

Support of SPEs and SDEO help HTs in performing academic tasks

Majority of head teachers’ responses pointed out that SPEs and ADEO help schools in performing academic tasks while veryfew HT’s did not agree the idea.

However, the nature of support was different from context to context. One of HT shared his/her experience in this way. "Whenever, SPE visit my school, I always request SPE to visit classroom and observe lessons and SPE accepts invitation. After the lesson is over, SPE gives many instructions to improve teaching. I try to insert SPE's feedback whenever teachers teach a new lesson" (Excerpt taken from Interview, December, 19, 2012).

It can be inferred from HTs conversation that SPEs encouraged them but hardly any SPE help head teachers in their continuous professional development by arranging workshops, Co-planning lesson, by individual mentoring, sharing lessons and resources.

Primary schools HTs are facing numerous challenges and issues. When HTs were asked to give their opinion about the issues they face in schools several responses emerged. One of HT commented:

"I have more than 800 girls studying in my school. We have only 5-6 rooms. All rooms are overcrowded. In extreme summer, it becomes difficult to breathe in the classroom. Several students get fainted. The other issue which our school faces is shortage of female teachers. Our four teachers are getting salary from my school but they are working in other schools on deputation located in urban area" (Excerpt taken from Interview, January, 17, 2013).

HTs of government primary schools had prioritized issues as under:

- Lack of interest among community members about children education was the second issue
- Poor quality of building
- Students low enrolment
- Deputation of teachers to urban areas

Head Teachers suggestions for School Improvement

- The standard of in-service training may be improved
- Provide Funds for SMCs
- Improve the level of physical facilities in school
- Head teachers may be given opportunities for professional development
- Teaching resources and books be provided to schools
- Head teachers may be authorized to use SMC fund

- Teachers unions may be abolished from schools

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to share issues and challenges that head teachers of government primary schools face while making their schools effective. During focus group discussion, it was revealed that head teachers were not directly appointed but promoted on the basis of seniority. None of the head masters/mistress had proper qualification such as degree/diploma/certificate in headship or educational leadership. Memon (2010) rightly pointed out that majority of primary schools in Sindh are managed by those heads that do not have proper certification in educational leadership. Head teachers are facing difficulties in reducing students drop out rate, increasing students' enrolment and involving community in school affairs. School effectiveness is a quite new phenomenon for government primary school head teachers in Sukkur Sindh Pakistan. In order to aware of head teachers about different aspects and dimensions of school heads, the continuous professional development (CPD) be the only solution. The CPD programs for head teachers/principals should be in line with their professional needs. The existing CPD programs are based on assumptions. Nasreen & Odhiambo (2018) argue that head teachers' training main focus in Pakistan seems about the knowledge of educational management theories rather than curriculum implementation, monitoring practices and assessment. The role of head teacher as an instructional leader is missing from CPD programs. These CPD programs hardly help HTs to improve their negotiation skills and technology insertions skills.

Another very important finding of the study is regarding the role of head teacher as an instructional leader. The findings of the study indicated that HTs were not fully conscious of their roles.

Mansoor & Akhtar (2015) mention that head teachers face challenges in doing their academic tasks. They face shortage of budget. They found parents less interested in their children's education. In government schools, teachers unions put their pressure on head teachers to fulfill demands.

Conclusion

Head teachers are the implementers of education polices and reforms in schools. Making schools effective is a gigantic task not for head teachers but also for district school management. HTs can harness affectedness of a school by his/her visionary leadership, high power of decision -making, by leading teaching-learning process and school management committees. HTs in government schools have myriads challenges because of lack of formal qualification and training in headship, low level of professional support and professional development opportunities. There is need to take the position of head teachers, a very important position for school improvement and effectiveness. Primary schools should be given academic and professional support.

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