

LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS: THE CASE OF URBAN AND RURAL PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract: Private schools have been growing in urban and rural areas to improve the quality of education in Pakistan and have become the second largest employer after textile industry. With a little government budget on education, there is a lack of monitoring on the minimum standard of education in Pakistan. Therefore the quality of education depends primarily on the way schools are managed. The objective of this study is to explore the leadership competencies of private school principals in Pakistan urban and rural areas. Content analysis was utilized to analyze written responses from 26 private schools. This study reveals that in urban and rural areas private school principals are perceived to have strong personal characters but lack the competencies to drive results. The main finding of this study is that leadership competencies of personal characters and driving results are perceived as two independent aspects, instead of complimenting to one another. This is one of the reasons why many private schools fail to retain students to complete a full cycle of basic education.

Key words: leadership competencies, private school principals, urban and rural areas, basic education, content analysis

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Introduction

Private schools have been growing in urban and rural areas to improve the quality of education in Pakistan (Andrabi et al., 2002; Lynd, 2007). There are more than 50,000 private schools in 2015 as compared to around 160,000 public schools which provide basic education (between pre-primary and secondary schools) (Malik et al., 2014). At present, private schools have become the second largest employer after textile industry. Because of a small government budget on education, there is a lack of monitoring on the minimum standard of education in Pakistan (Simkins et al., 2003). As a result, the quality of basic education depends primarily on the way schools are managed by school principals (De Grauwe, 2000; Leithwood and Riehl, 2003; Mulford and Silins, 2003). Consequently, the roles and responsibilities of school principals comprise of creating a strategy to improve the learning process, identifying school best practices, developing leadership

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capabilities at all levels, designing information systems to monitor student improvement, and holding people accountable for results (Childress et al., 2006). To perform these roles and responsibilities, school principal should be qualified and have sufficient experiences in the educational sector; at the same time have strong characters (Khan, 2016). Having the right combination of competencies, private school principals are expected to manage and maintain student engagement (instead of student attendance), the student-teacher ratio (ideally 15 to 25 students per teacher), school dropout, and school safety.

The previous study in Pakistan states that school leadership needs personality character with educational background and teaching experiences (Simkins et al., 2003). However, there is a very limited study about leadership competencies, especially in urban and rural private schools. Prior studies only focus on school leadership analyzing both public and private schools (Simkins et al., 2003; Imran, 2010; Shamim and Anderson, 2010; Waqar and Siddiqui, n.d.). Some others examine in one particular city (Lahore) (Waqar and Siddiqui, n.d.) and private schools in rural areas (Nawab, 2011). Therefore, studies about leadership competencies in the private schools located in the urban and rural areas of Pakistan can hardly be found.

The aim of this study is to explore the leadership competencies of private school principals in Pakistan urban and rural areas. To achieve this aim, private schools in urban and rural areas are selected because there has been a rapid growth of private schools in these areas which have not been fully explored. Furthermore, private pre-primary, primary, and secondary schools are chosen because they offer the basic education for lifelong learning for the young generation. Comparison between leadership competencies of private school principals in Pakistan's urban and rural areas will also be utilized. Exploring the leadership competencies of private school principals in urban and rural areas will give a contribution to the quality of education in the country.

Literature Review

This section will discuss leadership competencies of school principals and challenges in managing private basic educational schools in Pakistan.

Leadership Competencies of School Principals

In recent years, the duties and expectations of the school principal towards changing student behaviors have expanded and become increasingly complex (ATA, 2011). As a consequence, all school principals need to acquire knowledge and develop the skills that research and experience have concluded are necessary for effective practice. School principals' roles and responsibilities are school planning, providing support for school facilities and infrastructure, designing strategies which contribute to the quality of education (Rohrmann, 2013). Moreover, school principals have the duty to initiate change, if external factors force them to, by restructuring school, influencing stakeholders to support the new

structures, and getting teachers' commitment towards the new initiatives (Simkins et al., 2003). Therefore it is necessary to understand the minimum requirements of leadership competencies for school principals. Several professional institutions have designed leadership competencies for school principals' framework which should be refined to the school authority's requirements and the conditions of the schools to reflect the local context (ATA, 2011). Some of the leadership competencies are: (1) embodying visionary leadership (creating and sustaining shared vision, mission, values, principles and goals); (2) promoting the highest standard of conduct, ethical principles, and integrity in decision making, implementing policies, actions and behaviors (ATA, 2011); (3) managing school operations and resources to ensure a safe, caring, and effective learning environment; and (4) providing instructional leadership to ensure that each student has access to quality teaching and the opportunity to engage in quality learning experiences (ATA, 2011; NYC, n.d.). These competencies are interrelated and are not presented in rank order. A review of effective school principals in several countries (such as US, Australia, England, Norwegian, Denmark) performed by Leithwood and Riehl (2003) has identified three core competencies. They are (a) setting directions; (b) developing people; and (c) developing the organization. "Managing the instructional program" is later added in their further study (Leithwood et al., 2006).

Other studies using US context have various findings on what are the competencies related to personal characters. For example, (a) integrity (Plummer, 1995), (b) fair and trustworthy (Winter and Sweeney, 1994), (c) responsible (Plummer, 1995), and (d) optimism and openness (Popper and Mayseless, 2002). While in Australian case, Gurr et al. (2005) suggest (a) principal's values and beliefs, (b) personal characteristics, and (c) understanding the context and the situation. Related to developing others in US context, some competencies are (a) giving positive feedback (Ciruli Associates, 2002), (b) open-mindedness and willingness to listen carefully to the ideas of others (Leithwood, 2005), (c) tremendous passion and enthusiasm for the education of children (Leithwood, 2005), and (d) emotional sensitivity to the needs and aspirations of their colleagues, as well as the parents and students served by their schools (Leithwood, 2005). Related to exhibiting driving result (Chapman and Burchfield, 1994 as cited by Simkins et al., 2003; KIPP, 2016), other researcher using US case finds similar results. For example, (a) administrative strength to improve the quality of teaching and learning and (b) having a clear vision, mission, and strategic goal of the school (De Grauwe, 2000). These competencies are needed to be competitive and deal with the speedy process of change at the present day where schools have to constantly update their practices to keep abreast with the rapidly changing trends (Simkins et al., 2003). However, leadership competencies of school principals of the above previous studies' findings might be different from the context in Pakistan urban and rural areas. For example, previous studies in Pakistan state that school principals need to have a strong character (Simkins et al., 2003; Khan, 2016) and self-confidence (Simkins et

al., 2003) to manage schools successfully. Leithwood (2005) claims that there are several external factors which influence the emergence of successful school leadership. These factors are (a) level of schooling (e.g. primary vs secondary); (b) school size; (c) location (e.g. urban, rural); and (d) type (public vs private). In Pakistan, national culture and other contextual factors such as school security and economic condition might have great influences on the required competencies. For example, many of the public and private schools in Pakistan are managed by untrained school principals who have been hired by teaching experience rather than management and administration experience (Simkins et al., 2003). Moreover, there was a lack of performance monitoring or clear rules and regulations to follow in order to achieve minimum requirement of school performance.

Challenges in Managing Private Basic Educational Schools in Pakistan

Pakistan is an example of a country which has a larger proportion of its youth attending private institutions than in many other countries (Lynd, 2007). For decades, the growth of private schools has spread in both urban and rural areas (Andrabi et al., 2002; I-SAPS, 2010). This condition is partly due to low government budget on education (only four percent which is similar to UNICEF recommendation) (UNICEF, 2014).

As of now, private basic education has become affordable to middle class and even to the low-income groups of Pakistani population in urban and rural areas. However, there are several challenges in managing private schools, especially which offer basic education to the age group between 4 and 15 years old. Examples of the challenges are: (1) quality of education (Andrabi et al., 2002; Malik et al., 2014; Kearney, 2015) and (2) quality of teaching and learning process in low-cost schools in both rural and urban areas (Lynd, 2007; I-SAPS, 2010; Rohrmann, 2013; Malik et al., 2014; Kearney, 2015). Low quality of education is mainly caused by lack of physical infrastructure and school facilities, such as school buildings, electricity, access to clean drinking water, latrines for students, and boundary wall to provide adequate security (AEPAM, 2009 in Rohrmann, 2013; Rohrmann, 2013; Malik et al., 2014). Low quality of teaching and learning process can be caused by high student-teacher ratios, which goes beyond the ideal ratio between 15 to 25 students to a teacher (I-SAPS, 2010), aside from little professional teacher training (Lynd, 2007; I-SAPS, 2010). Other reasons are an acute shortage of well-trained and motivated teachers and non-availability of timely learning materials such as curriculum and textbooks (Lynd, 2007; Rohrmann, 2013; Malik et al., 2014; Kearney, 2015). The curriculum currently encourages rote learning (Rohrmann, 2013). Facing with these challenges, many private schools fail to retain children to complete a full cycle of basic education, resulting in high dropout rates (Rohrmann, 2013; Kearney, 2015). Another outcome is a low student engagement in which students come to school only for the sake of attending the class with lack of feeling enthusiastic to learn (Holliday and Clark, 2010).

Research Method

Using purposive sample, data were gathered from 26 private schools in urban and rural areas of Punjab province. Punjab private schools were chosen because Punjab represents the highest number of students taking basic education in Pakistan. Furthermore, private pre-primary, primary, and secondary schools are selected because they offer the basic education for lifelong learning for the young generation. Data from Islamabad, Lahore, and Sialkot were collected in April and November 2015. Content analysis was utilized to explore the competencies of private school principals in urban and rural areas of Punjab. Written responses to two open-ended questions asking the strengths and improvements needed by school principals in leading and managing the school were collected from school teachers in 26 private schools in urban and rural areas. There were 430 strengths and 366 required improvements of the school principals for further analysis. Chi-square analysis was also applied to compare leadership competencies of private school principals in urban and rural areas.

Data collection showed that teachers came from private schools located in Islamabad (35.7 percent), Sialkot (34.3 percent), and Lahore (30 percent). They came from schools in urban areas (57 percent) and rural areas (43 percent).

The urban private school principals rated by teachers were mostly male (52.7 percent). They were married (90.1 percent) and had a bachelor degree (66.4 percent). The age group was mostly between 31 and 35 years (38.9 percent), followed by between 36 and 45 years (34.4 percent). At the same time, the rural private school principals were predominantly male (67.7 percent), married (83.8 per cent), and had a bachelor degree (84.8 percent). They were mostly between 31 and 35 years (30.3 percent), followed by between 36 and 45 years (28.3 per cent).

Results

The results of the content analysis showed that there are two leadership competencies perceived by respondents. There are personal characters and driving results. Competencies on personal characters consist of seven aspects. There are (1) interpersonal skills; (2) being honest and high moral; (3) disciplined; (4) knowledgeable; (5) hardworking; (6) committed and responsible; and (7) confident. Competencies on driving results have four aspects namely: (1) planning and execution; (2) problem solving and decision making; (3) visioning and thinking strategically; and (4) school operational management (include school facilities, school systems, and pay for performance). From Table 1, it shows private school principals in urban and rural areas are perceived to have strong personal characters but lack competencies in driving results.

To compare the leadership competencies of private school principals in urban and rural areas, chi-square analysis was performed. Four aspects of competency in personal characters and one aspect of driving result competency are found to be significantly different (see Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of leadership competencies of school principals

Drive Results (Improvements)	Urban	%	Rural	%	Value	df	Phi	Sig.
a. Planning and Execution	8	3.4	2	1.5	-	-	-	-
b. Problem Solving & Decision Making	12	5.1	-	-	-	-	-	-
c. Visioning & Thinking Strategically	4	1.7	3	2.3	-	-	-	-
d. School Operational Management:								
- School Facilities	98	41.9	26	19.7	11.75	2	.36	.003*
- School Systems	73	31.2	51	38.6	7.72	2	.29	.021*
- Pay for Performance & Benefits	39	16.7	50	37.9	8.81	2	.34	.012*
Sub-Total	234	49.8	132	40.5				
Personal Characters (Strengths)	Urban	%	Rural	%	Value	df	Phi	Sig.
a. Interpersonal Skill	60	25.4	48	24.7	12.12	2	.38	.002*
b. Honest	40	16.9	46	23.7	9.49	2	.34	.009*
c. Disciplined	29	12.3	40	20.6	10.02	2	.41	.007*
d. Knowledgeable	37	15.7	19	9.8	14.06	2	.56	.001*
e. Hardworking	33	14.0	20	10.3	4.56	2	.31	.102
f. Committed and Responsible	23	9.7	15	7.7	4.66	2	.36	.097
g. Confident	14	5.9	6	3.1	0.28	2	.12	.871
Sub-Total	236	50.2	194	59.5				
TOTAL	470		326					

*=significant at p-value ≤ 0.05

The four aspects of personal characters are interpersonal skills, knowledgeable, disciplined, and honest. It means that private school principals in urban areas are perceived to have better interpersonal skills and more knowledgeable than in rural areas. On the other hand, private school principals in rural areas are perceived to be more disciplined and behaving honestly than in urban areas.

School operational management is the only aspect in driving results which have a significant difference, in which it has three dimensions. They are school facilities, school systems, and pay for performance. It means that urban private school principals need to do improvements in the area of school system and facilities, while rural private school principals should improve in school systems and pay for performance than in urban areas.

There is no significant difference in the other aspects of driving results competencies because urban and rural private school principals have a similar level in the area of (1) planning and execution; (2) problem solving and decision making; and (3) visioning and thinking strategically. Similar to competencies in personal character, school principals in urban and rural areas have a similar level of hardworking, being committed, and confident.

To summarize, urban private school principals are perceived to have strong interpersonal skills and being knowledgeable but lack the ability to manage school systems and facilities. Rural private school principals are perceived to be honest and disciplined but lack the capability to provide and design school systems and competitive pay for performance.

Discussion

Private school principals in urban and rural areas are perceived to have strong personal characters, but lacking the competencies to drive results especially in the area of school operational management. This study reveals that respondents see the leadership competencies of personal characters and driving results as two independent aspects, instead of complimenting to one another. To some extent, respondents observe principals as being nice, well-mannered behavior, and knowledgeable in urban private schools, or maintaining disciplined and being honest in school life in rural private schools. On the other hand, respondents see principals as having weaknesses in providing clean-and-secured school building and improving students' behavior in urban private schools, or designing competitive salary increment based on performance in rural private schools.

The difference between private school principals in urban and rural areas is caused by the condition in each area. School principals in urban areas have more privileges in terms of school facilities, such as internet access, so they have a better understanding about the standard of school systems. For example, they know that rote learning is not favorable to increase the level of student engagement. Nevertheless, knowing the disadvantages of rote learning does not guarantee the schools will no longer apply it.

In the rural areas, there are many Islamic religious schools (madrassa) which apply rote learning. This kind of learning is mostly used by private rural schools because they are not familiar with the advantages of using experiential or critical learning. Lack of internet access and electricity has hindered them to broaden their knowledge about the best practices in providing basic education.

Urban school principals are perceived more knowledgeable because there are a lot of professional institutions offering school management courses or school principals training programs in urban areas as compared to rural areas. Moreover, urban areas have lesser problem in having untrained teachers. Unlike urban private teachers who want to get experience and utilize their time, most of the rural teachers choose this job to fulfill the basic needs albeit the fact they lack educational background and experience.

In rural areas, being socially acceptable and respectful is very important in order to have better interaction with the community because school principals and teachers live nearby and have a close-knit relationship. In urban areas, the majority of the school principals and teachers do not stay in the same neighborhood and they face very competitive environment. Therefore, being honest and behaving ethically is perceived higher in rural areas. However, in term of interpersonal skills, rural principals are perceived lower because they are still maintaining very strong cultural values in which male school principals maintain their power by keeping a distance from staff and female teachers. Moreover, people in rural areas are more time oriented. Therefore, they are perceived to be more disciplined in doing their tasks. Regarding the infrastructures, most of the rural private schools have larger areas and owned by the school owners, while the majority of urban schools are still

renting the school buildings. Therefore, some of the urban private schools lack space for having playing ground and school library. This paradox condition is one of the reasons why many private schools fail to retain students to complete a full cycle of basic education, which is resulting in high dropout rates (Rohrmann, 2013; Kearney, 2015). Achieving school performance is not just evaluated by the strong personal characters of a school principal. It should also be assessed by leadership competencies of driving result in order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning process, teacher-student ratio, student engagement (rather than student attendance), and student retention (Lynd, 2007; I-SAPS, 2010; Rohrmann, 2013; Malik et al., 2014; Kearney, 2015).

In the book *“Running All the Red Lights: A Journey of System-Wide Education Reform”*, Holliday and Clark (2010) mention that complacency is the barrier why school principals are not aware of their weaknesses. It seems that school principals are in their comfort zone because no complaint means everything is under control and therefore nothing should be improved. Furthermore, taking into consideration the high power distance of Pakistan society (Hofstede, 2001; 2016), school teachers are reluctant to mention or discuss what to improve because they are dependent on the close supervision of school principals. What is more important to teachers is to maintain the principal-teacher relationship to be safe in their current teaching position, as compared to attaining school performance. A combination of high power distance, collectivism, and feminine culture (Hofstede, 2001; 2016) has molded Pakistani people to be concerned more about a personal relation, instead of a task. That is why teachers do not mind if school principals lack the capacity to drive results.

To sum up, this study shows that the two competencies to run school performance are seen as an independent aspect. A right combination of the two perceived competencies will enable private school principals to act effectively in leading to superior performance.

Conclusion

This study reveals that there is a paradox situation in which private school principals in urban and rural areas are perceived as having strong personal characters but lack the competencies in driving results. The finding of this study illustrates that personal characters and the competencies of driving results are not yet seen as interrelated in managing school professionally. This is one of the reasons why many private schools fail to provide students to complete a full cycle of basic education. School underperformance, such as high dropout or low student engagement, is usually put into the blame to external factors (i.e., poor student attendance, lack of parental support, inadequate supplies and technology). If this condition remains untouched, the quality of education and learning process in private schools will not be improved for a period of time.

Private school principals in urban and rural areas must realize the impact of lacking competencies in driving results on the quality of basic education. They are not

aware yet that by linking personal characters and the leadership competencies of driving results, they will be able to manage and achieve the objective of educating the young generation in urban and rural areas. Leadership competencies in this study are based on the perception of school teachers. There is a need for future research to consider the perception of other stakeholders, such as parents and local community; in order to get a better understanding of how the community perceive principals' way of managing private schools in urban and rural areas.

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KOMPETENCJE PRZYWÓDCZE DYREKTORÓW SZKÓŁ: PRZYPADEK MIEJSKICH I WIEJSKICH SZKÓŁ PRYWATNYCH W PAKISTANIE

Streszczenie: Szkoły prywatne wykazują poprawę jakości edukacji w Pakistanie zarówno na obszarach miejskich jak i wiejskich; i stały się drugim największym pracodawcą po przemyśle włókienniczym. Niewielki rządowy budżet przeznaczony na edukację powoduje brak monitoringu w kwestii zapewnienia minimalnego poziomu edukacji w Pakistanie. Dlatego jakość edukacji zależy przede wszystkim od tego, w jaki sposób szkoły są zarządzane. Celem artykułu jest zbadanie kompetencji przywódczych dyrektorów szkół prywatnych na obszarach miejskich i wiejskich w Pakistanie. Analiza problemu została oparta na studiach wywiadów pisemnych z 26 szkół prywatnych. Badanie to pokazuje, że na obszarach miejskich i wiejskich dyrektorzy szkół prywatnych posiadają silne cechy osobowe, ale również brak kompetencji do osiągnięcia wyników. Głównym wnioskiem artykułu jest to, iż kompetencje przywódcze dyrektorów i osiągnięte wyniki odbierane są jako dwa niezależne aspekty, zamiast wskazania wzajemnie silnych relacji. Jest to jeden

z powodów niskiej jakości kształcenia i problemów szkół z utrzymaniem uczniów do ukończenia pełnego cyklu kształcenia podstawowego.

Słowa kluczowe: kompetencje przywódcze, dyrektorzy szkół prywatnych, obszary miejskie i wiejskie, Pakistan, edukacja podstawowa, analiza treści

學校的領導能力：巴基斯坦城市和鄉村私立學校的案例

摘要：私立學校在城市和農村地區不斷發展，以提高巴基斯坦的教育質量，並成為紡織業後第二大雇主。由於政府對教育的預算很少，巴基斯坦缺乏對最低教育標準的監測。因此，教育質量主要取決於學校的管理方式。這項研究的目的是探索巴基斯坦城市和農村地區私立學校校長的領導能力。利用內容分析來分析來自26所私立學校的書面答复。這項研究顯示，在城市和農村地區，私立學校校長被認為有強大的個人品質，但缺乏推動結果的能力。這項研究的主要發現是，個人角色和駕駛結果的領導能力被認為是兩個獨立的方面，而不是相互補充。這是許多私立學校未能保留學生完成一個完整的基礎教育週期的原因之一。

關鍵詞：領導能力，私立學校校長，城鄉地區，巴基斯坦，基礎教育，內容分析。