

ANALYSIS OF HEAD TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL ROLE IN RELATION TO QUALITY IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVES AT PRIMARY LEVEL

Abstract

Several policy initiatives have been put in place to address the issues of quality of education in primary schools of Sindh province. These initiatives included provision of free textbooks and scholarships to children, up gradation of physical facilities in schools, professional development of teachers, head teachers and educational managers for the improvement of teaching- learning situation; strengthening School Management Committees (SMCs) and providing professional support to schools. Despite these initiatives, the quality of teaching and learning in primary schools in terms of students' achievement has not been claimed satisfactory. This paper attempts to find out the role of head teachers (HTs) in implementing and responding these initiatives and to underline issues and challenges in the implementation of school improvement initiatives. Data was collected from head teacher by using structured questionnaire. The major findings of the study suggested: Very limited number of HTs had attended any leadership training program prior to joining the position of headship. HTs spent their major fraction of their time for visiting district education office, very minor parentage of time was spent for monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning activities. HTs get minimal support from Supervisor Primary Education (SPEs) in implementing 'Quality Improvement Initiatives'. Regarding the issues, head teachers pointed out that there was lack of interest among community members about children education and there was low level of physical facilities in primary schools. This paper has suggested various policy measures to improve the quality of primary education with reference to role of head teachers.

Keywords: Quality Improvement Initiatives, Primary Education, Head Teacher

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Introduction

The Education System in Pakistan has been categorized as primary (Class K to V), middle (class VI to VIII), secondary (class IX to X), higher secondary (class XI to XII) and university level. Primary education is the cornerstone of any educational system.

Comfort, Usen & Ekpenyong (2013) elaborated that primary education is universally accepted as the base laying level of education in all nations of the world. It provides the mini-structural framework on which the quality of other levels of education depends. In order to improve primary education, different protocols and conventions have pledged not at national level but also at international level.

Pakistan is the signatory of all such pledges and conventions. Successive governments in Pakistan have struggled to improve primary education system in the country. Since the inception of Pakistan on 14th August, 1947, several plans and policies were developed and implemented. The purpose of all plans and policies were to achieve universal primary education, to reduce gender disparity and to improve the quality of education is noteworthy to mention here that there are four provinces in Pakistan i.e. Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan, and Khyber Pakhtoon Khawa (KPK).

Each province implements the provisions of national education policies by its own way. In order to achieve the targets of Education for All (EFA), each province has devised its own policy framework. These policy frameworks have suggested different actions to improve the state of education in the province. In the province of Sindh, the major education reform programme SERP (Sindh Education Reform Programme) is in place.

The SERP has four major pillars: i) improving fiscal sustainability; ii) improving education sector management; iii) improving access to quality schooling; and iv) improving quality of teaching and learning. In order to improve the quality of education at different levels of education, the Education Department, Government of Sindh, has taken several policy measures.

These measures included improvement of physical facilities, professional development of teachers and head teachers, provision of free textbooks and stipend to meritorious students, professional support to schools etc. At primary level, for the improvement of quality of education particularly for enhancing the effectiveness of teaching and learning different initiatives were taken.

Different stakeholders are responsible for the implementation of these policy initiatives at grass root level. Among them the key stakeholders are educational managers (Supervisor primary education, district education officers), teachers, and school management committee and head teachers.

The role of head teachers in facilitating these quality improvement initiatives is very crucial and vital. The present study is an attempt to understand the professional role of head teachers in facilitating and implementing quality improvement initiatives in primary schools of District Sukkur, Sindh.

Statement of the Problem

The present study intends to understand head teachers' role in responding different policy inputs with reference to improvement of teaching- learning situation in primary schools.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent head teachers' in government primary schools are performing their professional roles in responding to quality improvement initiatives?
2. What policy measures are needed to improve the quality of education with reference to head teachers' role?

Literature Review

Literature suggests the role of head teachers very important in uplifting the quality of education in schools. Khaki (2006) elaborated that the importance of the role of head teachers in

making schools better for teaching and learning has been fairly established by a wide array of studies all over the world. No doubt, the role of head teachers is very important the process of school improvement.

Principal leadership is consistently shown in the literature to have a strong influence on the success of school change efforts (Fullan, 2002; Sebring & Bryk, 2000, Cited in Joo-Ho Park & Dong Wook Jeong, 2013). UNESCO (2006) report on head teachers states that the major educational policy trends observed around the world place the school at the heart of the reforms. Growing decentralization and autonomy place the principal responsibility for implementing those reforms on head teachers and their ability to bring all the staff and the pupils together to work for common objectives.

Challenges of Policy implementation in Pakistan

Regarding the Policy implementation several challenges emerged at in the context of Pakistan. According to study conducted by Bhatti, Bano, Khanam & Hussain (2010) "There were many factors which were badly affecting implementation of national education policies. Some of the major factors were, policy targets are too ambitious lack of technical and trained educational managers, financial resources constraints and political instability".

Methodology

The study was descriptive in nature. It attempted to explain 'how Head teachers responded the plethora of educational reforms pertaining to the improvement of quality of education in primary schools and what challenges they faced in implementing the initiatives in their respective schools.

Population and Sample of the study

Head teachers working in government primary schools of District Sukkur were comprised of the population of the study. According to Sindh Education Management Information System (SEMIS, 2011) the total numbers of schools in District Sukkur are 1373, of

which 1227 primary schools are, 74 are middle and elementary schools, and 72 are secondary and higher school schools. The Sukkur District is further divided into 5 subdivisions. These subdivisions are New Sukkur, Sukkur City, Pano Aqil, Saleh Pat and Rohri.

For data collection, 50 primary schools from two sub-divisions i.e. Sukkur City, Pano Aqil were selected purposely. The following criteria were kept in mind while selecting head teachers:

- Participation of urban and rural areas schools
- Participation of girls and boys schools
- Participation of mixed gender schools

Data Collection Instrument

For this study a structured questionnaire was designed to seek the views of head teachers (HTs) regarding their qualification, experience as a HT, trainings attended, priority as a head teacher, their role in SMCs, role as an instructional leader, available help from district education office, issues which HTs perceived and their suggestions for primary school improvement.

In the beginning of the study, the questionnaire that was designed for data collection was different in approach, because it contained structured and some open ended questions for head teachers. The researcher visited schools personally to collect data, it was experienced that:

- Schools were scattered on a vast area. It requires lot of time and resources to visit 50 schools. Financially it was difficult to visit one or two schools in a day.
- It was the hottest summer in District Sukkur; the temperature remained between 46-51 Celsius. It was difficult to move freely in such an extreme weather.

- Teachers of single schools (The schools where one teacher was responsible for all functions of school) showed their unwillingness to respond the questionnaire because they were overburdened.
- Out of 10 schools, which researchers visited, 06 head teachers were busy at education office. Our visit went futile.
- This situation led researchers to talk district education office, they advised researchers to hand over the questionnaire to District education office, because head teachers, most of the time, visit the office.
- Keeping in view the contextual realities, I again improved the questionnaire with the help of my research supervisor. As a result, some items were deleted and open-ended questions were converted into structured questions.

Analysis of Data

Data was analyzed in frequencies and percentages. In order to facilitate readers the tables were made for further clarification.

Interpretation of Data

Profile of Head teachers

Table 1 Gender of respondents

| Gender of Head Teachers | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Male | 37 | 74% |
| Female | 13 | 26% |

Table 1 illustrates that out of 50 primary schools, 74% head teachers were male and 26% were female in District Sukkur. All mixed gender schools were headed and managed by male HTs.

Qualification of Head Teacher

Table 2 Academic Qualification

| Name of Degree | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Master of Science | 0 | 0 |
| Master of Arts | 11 | 22 |
| Bachelor in Science | 5 | 10 |
| Bachelor in Arts | 29 | 58 |
| Intermediate | 5 | 10 |
| Matriculation | 0 | 0 |
| Any other | | |

Table 2 illustrates that the Academic Qualification of 58% HTs was Bachelor in Arts. Only 22% HTs has Master of Arts degree.

Table 3 Professional Qualification

| Name of Degree | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|------------------|-------------------|
| Master in Education | 5 | 10% |
| B.Ed. | 10 | 20 |
| Certificate in Teaching(CT) | 5 | 10 |
| Primary Teachers Certificate Course(PTC) | 30 | 60 |
| Any other | | |

Table 3 illustrates that majority of HTs (60%) had PTC; Only 10% HTs having M.Ed. degree.

Table 4 Experience as a Head Teacher

| Teaching experience as | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Between 1-5 years | 23 | 46% |
| Between 6-10 years | 16 | 32 |
| Between 11-15 years | 7 | 14 |
| More than 20 years | 5 | 10 |

Table 4 illustrates that a quite large number of HTs have joined as a HT during the last five years. Only 10% HTs had more than 20 years working experience as a HT in primary schools of District Sukkur.

Table 5 Head Teachers Training

| Trainings (Refresher Courses) Attended | Duration of Training | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|----------------------|-----------|------------|
| "Primary 12000 In-service Teachers Training program | 6 weeks | 24 | 48% |
| "Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA led Professional Development) | 30 days | 22 | 44 |
| Education Leadership and Management training | 6 days | 2 | 4 |
| Any Other | | 2 | 4 |

Table 5 illustrates that majority of HTs had attended trainings as a teacher but only 4% HTs had attended any leadership training program.

Table 6 Responsibility as teacher

| Do Head Teachers Teach in school? | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Yes | 40 | 80 |
| No | 10 | 20 |

Table 6 illustrates that majority of HTs (80%) were also engaged in teaching different subjects at schools. Only 20% did not teach in schools.

Table 7 Priority as a Head Teacher

| Priority as a Head Teacher | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|--|-----------|----------------|
| To reduce students drop out | 2 | 4 |
| To increase students enrolment | 5 | 10 |
| To involve community in school improvement | 26 | 52 |
| To improve students' learning | 7 | 14 |
| To carry out the orders of ADOE office | 10 | 20 |
| Any other, please specify | | |

Table 7 illustrates that HTs in government primary schools were taking different initiatives for schools improvement, when researcher asked them to prioritize their areas of concern, 52% mentioned that their main priority was to involve community in school improvement. Only 14% showed their willingness to improve students' learning as a priority area.

How many times SMC conduct its meeting in the school?

Table 8 SMC meeting

| Number of times SMC conduct its meeting | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| Once in a week | 00 | 00 |
| Once in a month | 12 | 24 |
| After 6 months | 29 | 58 |
| After 1 year | 9 | 18 |

Table 8 illustrates that The govt. primary schools HTs in District Sukkur conduct SMCs meetings in their schools; in this regard 58% head teachers arranged these meetings twice in a year. Only 24% HTs conducted meetings once in a month.

Table 9 Initiative for SMC meeting

| Who takes Initiative to call upon SMC meeting? | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Chairman/ Chairperson/Head Teacher | 30 | 60% |
| General Secretary | 20 | 40% |
| Teachers | | |
| Any other | | |

Table 9 illustrates that 60% HTs had taken initiatives for SMCs meeting in their schools.

Table 10 Focus of SMC meeting

| Focus of SMC meeting | Frequency | Percentages |
|----------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Teachers problems | 5 | 10% |
| Students low enrolment | 6 | 12 |
| Utilization of SMC fund | 35 | 70 |
| Quality of Teaching and learning | 4 | 8 |
| Any other | | |

Table 10 illustrates that regarding the focus of SMC meetings, 70% HTs were of the opinion that the meetings were called to discuss the utilization of SMC funds.

Table 11 SMC empowered to solve the school problems

| Is SMC empowered to solve your school problems? | Frequency | Percentages |
|---|-----------|-------------|
| Yes | 20 | 20% |
| No | 80 | 80% |

Table 11 illustrates that 80% HTs believed that SMC were not empowered to solve school problems.

Table 12 Justification of HTs time

| How head teachers justify their time in school? | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| Visiting SPE and ADOE office | 21 | 42% |
| Visiting accounts office | 12 | 24 |
| Meeting teachers in school | 5 | 10 |
| Visiting classroom to observe teaching | 3 | 6 |
| To meet teachers union representatives | 7 | 14 |
| Any other, please specify | 3 | 6 |

Table 12 illustrates that regarding the justification of time, 42% HTs were of the opinion that most of the time they used to visit SPE and ADOE office. The purpose of visits was to address salary, accounts and promotion matters.

Table 13 Supervisor educational visits

| Whether Supervisor visits your school? | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Yes | 43 | 86% |
| No | 7 | 14 |

Table 13 illustrates that majority (80%) HTs were of the opinion that Supervisors visited schools.

Table 14 Availability of copies of National Curriculum of Pakistan

| Copies of National Curriculum of Pakistan available in primary schools | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Yes | 3 | 6% |
| No | 47 | 94 |

Table 14 illustrates that 94% govtmtnt primary schools did not have the copies of National Curriculum of Pakistan.

Table 15 Making of time table in your school

| Schools make time table in your school | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Yes | 50 | 100% |
| No | -- | -- |

Table 15 illustrates that all primary schools in District Sukkur develop their time table.

Table 16 Implementation of course outline in the classroom

| Implementation of Curriculum: | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|------------------|-------------------|
| By Checking Teachers' Lesson Plans | 5 | 10% |
| By discussing the outline of the course with teachers | 13 | 26 |
| By visiting the classroom and monitoring lessons delivery | 6 | 12 |
| By checking students sample work | 6 | 12 |
| Verbally asking teachers about the topics they teach | 20 | 40 |

Table 16 illustrates curriculum implementation, 40% HTs responded that verbally asked teachers about the topics they taught and 26% HTs discussed the outline of the course with teachers.

Table 17 Visiting classrooms

| Do HTs visit classrooms | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Yes | 50 | 100% |
| No | -- | -- |

Table 17 illustrates that visiting of classrooms, all HTs responded in affirmation.

Table 18 Number of times HT Visit classrooms

| How many times Head teachers visit classrooms? | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Once in a day | 27 | 54% |
| Once in a week | 12 | 24 |
| Once in a month | 00 | 00 |
| Occasionally | 11 | 22 |

Table 18 illustrates that 54% HTs of government primary schools visited classroom once in a day, while 24% visit classrooms once in a week and 22% occasionally visited classrooms.

Table 19 Focus of classroom visit

| Head Teachers' Focus of classrooms visit | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| To check students' attendance | 12 | 24% |
| To check whether teacher is available in the classroom | 30 | 60 |
| It is a routine visit | 5 | 10 |
| To gauge students progress | 3 | 6 |

Table 19 illustrates the purpose of visit, 60% HTs of government primary schools mentioned that it was to check the availability of teachers, and 24% responded that essential purpose was to check students' attendance; only 6% mentioned that visit purpose was to check students' progress in the classroom.

Table 20 Check list for monitoring teaching

| Use of check list during monitoring lessons | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| Yes | 10 | 26% |
| No | 40 | 80% |

Table 20 illustrates that 80% HTs of government primary schools in District Sukkur did not use any check list during monitoring lessons.

Table 21 Ensuring learning in Classroom

| How HT ensure students are learning in the classroom? | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| By asking content specific questions only from selected students | 14 | 28% |
| Depend on the results which teacher share with HT | 30 | 60% |
| By checking students sample of work | 4 | 8 |
| Individually meeting with students and asking about their progress | 2 | 4 |
| Any Other | | |

Table 21 illustrates that regarding students learning in the classrooms, 60% HTs of government primary schools in District Sukkur depend on the results which teacher share with them, while 28% HTs asked content specific questions from selected students in the classroom.

Table 22 Focus of assessment in your school

| The focus of assessment in your school | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Completion of the course in time | 11 | 22% |
| To prepare students for annual examination | 33 | 66 |
| To ensure high percentage of pass students in the school | 6 | 12 |
| Any Other | | |

Table 22 illustrates that majority of HTs (66%) mentioned their focus of assessment was to prepare students for annual examination and 22% said that their focus in school was the completion of the course in time.

Do parents come school to discuss the academic problems of their sons/daughters?

Table 23 Focus of Parents

| Whether parents come school to discuss the academic problems of their sons/daughters | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Yes | 20 | 40% |
| No | 30 | 60% |

Table 23 illustrates that 60% HTs responded that parents came schools to discuss the academic problems of their sons/daughters while 40% had different view.

Table 24 Support of SPEs and SDEO help HTs in performing academic tasks

| SPEs and SDEO help HTs in performing academic tasks | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| Yes | 20 | 40% |
| No | 12 | 24% |
| No Comments | 18 | 36% |

Table 24 illustrates that 40% HTs were of the view that SPEs and SDEO helped schools in performing academic tasks while 36% HT did not respond the statement.

Table 25 Kind of academic support

| Nature of support provided by SPEs and of SDEO to help schools in academics | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| SPEs and ADOE help in teachers and HTs professional development | 5 | 10% |
| By arranging workshops | 5 | 10 |
| By Co-planning lesson | 7 | 14 |
| By individual mentoring | 3 | 6 |
| Sharing lessons and resources | 13 | 26 |
| No comments | 17 | 34 |

Table 25 illustrates the nature of support provided by SPEs and SDEO to help schools in academics, 26% HTs mentioned that the

help included the sharing lessons and resources while 34% HTs did not comment on the idea.

Table 26 Prioritizing school issues

| How Head Teachers prioritize the issues of their school? | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|------------------|-------------------|
| Shortage of Teachers | 3 | 6% |
| Absenteeism of Teachers | 2 | 4 |
| Students low enrolment | - | - |
| Students drop out | - | - |
| Lack of interest among community members about children education | 20 | 40 |
| Poor quality of Building | 19 | 38 |
| Not Properly Trained Teachers | 3 | 6 |
| Poor quality of teaching | 3 | 6 |
| Any other | | |

Table 26 illustrates that the HTs of government primary schools had prioritized issues which they faced in schools, 40% HTs lack of interest among community members in cheating wanted their children, second issue related to the poor quality of building, third issue related to the other factors.

Table 27 Head Teachers suggestions for School Improvement

| Head Teachers Proposed Suggestion to improve the quality of education | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| The standard of in-service training may be improved | 3 | 6% |
| Provide Funds for SMCs | 15 | 30 |
| Improve the level of professional support to primary schools | 5 | 10 |
| Improve the level of physical facilities in school | 20 | 40 |
| Teachers may be given opportunities for professional development | 3 | 6 |
| Mathematics and Science teachers may be appointed by SPSC | - | - |
| Teaching resources and books be provided to schools | 00 | 00 |
| Teachers unions may be abolished from schools | 3 | 6 |
| Head teachers may be authorized to use SMC fund | 01 | 02 |
| Teachers may be given scholarships for higher studies | 00 | 00 |

In order to improve the quality of education in primary schools of District Sukkur, HTs gave different suggestions. Among them 30% suggested allocating funds for SMCs, 40% suggested to improve the level of physical facilities in schools.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study indicated that majority of HTs in Sukkur District did not possess formal qualification of headship. HTs are promoted on the basis of sonority rather than on qualification in education leadership and management. Memon (2010) confirms that schools in Pakistan are being managed by unqualified school heads.

The findings of the study suggested that majority of head teachers (58%) had educational background in Humanities or Arts subjects. There is flexibility in Pakistan, that in order to acquire degree in arts or humanities one can appear in examination as an external candidate. It did not require regular classes to attend. At present, the teaching of Mathematics and Science is suffering in primary schools because majority of head teachers are from humanities background. In a study conducted by Mughal (2012) it was revealed that the schools where HTs were science graduates their students performed better in Standardized Achievement Tests.

HTs in government primary schools always complain about the low participation of parents in the education of their children. School management committees (SMCs) have been established in primary schools and government has provided funds to SMCs yet 80% of HTs believed that their autonomy in spending SMCs funds is very limited. There is extensive literature available which confirms that in the process of school improvement, the devolution of power at grass root level is success of any reform.

Another very important finding of the study is regarding the role of head teacher as an instructional leader revealed that HTs were not fully cognizant of their professional responsibilities. In public sector, the head teachers consider them as the 'public servants'. Their perception regarding their role is very limited. They do not consider them as change agent. HTs think that they are bound to their duties only in office hour (8 am to 2:30 pm). The findings of the study indicated that HTs were not fully aware of their roles. Here two situations arises, either HTs were not aware of their role as an instructional leader or they are fully aware of their roles and not responding effectively their professional roles due to some reasons. The reasons may be the lack of support in implementing reforms at grass root level. The study findings revealed that 80% HTs do not use any check list for monitoring teaching and learning activities. For the implementation of quality improvement interventions in primary schools HTs gave different suggestions. These suggestions included the improvement of physical facilities and activation of SMCs was prominent one.

Suggestions

Head Teachers should undergo a rigorous training in education leadership and management before embarking upon as head teachers. Primary school has no designated position of HTs, based on length of service; senior teachers are promoted as HTs. The study recommended to promote potential candidates as HTs among teachers of the same school and a position of deputy HT be created in every primary school. Primary schools may be given funds on priority basis. SMCs should be made responsible to utilize funds. These funds should be utilized for improving the quality of teaching and learning. The role of teachers' unions may be restricted, union officials may not be allowed to conduct their meetings in schools.

Conclusion

The role of head teacher is crucial in implementing school reforms. Head teachers have to influence not only teachers and students but also other stakeholders. There is need to change existing procedure of selecting head teachers for primary schools in Sindh. Head teachers' response to plethora of quality improvement interventions is not so rapid as desired. If head teachers are fully aware of recent developments in education, we can expect that they will respond quickly as well as professionally to the education reforms. As Joo-Ho & Dong (2013) states that "In contrast, schools having problems with leadership were reported to have a slower implementation of school reform" (p.35).

In sum, system leadership is a vital concern.

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