Leadership Competencies and Participatory Decision-Making Effects on Teachers' Retention at Secondary Education in Pakistan

Muhammad Amir Saeed[1], Sadia Saba[2,] & Saeed Ahmad[3]

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate the effects of institutional leadership competencies and the opportunities of participatory decision making on the attrition / retention rate of teachers at the secondary level of education in Pakistan. A semi structured questionnaire was used to achieve the purpose of this study. Researchers collected dara with 398 questionnaires distributed in person and through postal service. In addition to this , the researchers use the reflective open-ended responses and the follow up interviews with the teachers and identified themes through Nvivo 11 software. The responses were evaluated on the basis of three selected variables: teachers' views on the institutional leadership competencies (independent variable), professional and administrative collaboration in the participatory decision-making process (independent variable), and the teachers' retention / attrition (dependent variable), and four indictors were tested, i.e. gender, age, level of education, and the type of institution. Various themes were identified in the data that addressed the selected variables for this study. The study indicated that the leadership competencies and the participatory decision-making opportunities exert many implications on the teachers' retention / attrition, although statistically it was found insignificant on three indicators in both streams: (1) gender, level of education and the type of institutions in the stream namely the effect of leadership competencies on teachers' retention / attrition; and (2) gender, age, and the type of institution in the second stream namely participative decision making and teachers' retention / attrition. The study concluded that positive institutional culture under competent leadership and the opportunities in the administrative and professional participatory decision making may lead to achieve high quality professional standards for the teachers.

Key Words: *Leadership competencies, Participatory Decision making, Teachers' retention/attrition, Secondary Education Pakistan*

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[1] School of Mathematics and Statistics, Central South University, Changsha (China) Email: aamirsaeed66@yahoo.com
[2] School of Mathematics and Statistics, Central South University, Changsha (China) Email: sabasadia67@yahoo.com
[3] English Language Institute, Jazan University, Jazan (Saudi Arabia) Email: saeed_edu@hotmail.com

Introduction

The trajectories of teachers' attrition are an under researched area of academic field Kutsyuruba et al (2020). The need is to understand why it happens that once into the profession, some teachers' prefer to leave their jobs in search of better opportunities in monetary terms, personal inclinations, institutional atmosphere, students' characteristics, available teaching resources, working conditions, teachers' politics and the involvement of pressure groups, organizational and transfer policies, etc.(Borman et al;2008). Although the literature throws light on the above mentioned attributes of teachers' retention problems ,Ramos and Hughes (2020), yet very few of them, focused on the factors of leadership competencies and power sharing problems as a reason for teachers' attrition; and the reasons for a voluntary quit by the teachers. Teachers' retirement is also a big challenge for the department which proves rigid in ever expanding educational scenario Cavalcanti (2020). The other variables, also important, to consider in this matter, are the age of retirement of the teachers, the number of years of their professional experience, family pressure and the number of dependents, the level of their expertise/qualification and degrees obtained, salary levels, etc.

Background of the Study

The province of Punjab (Pakistan) is a home to 7000 secondary schools hosting more than four million students and more than one lac teachers Qaisar et al (2020). One of the important factors that tremendously affect the quality of education is the availability of adequate faculty. According to the UNESCO report on the Status of Teachers in Pakistan Ahmad et al (2020), Pakistan is suffering from the chronic teachers' shortage. This report shows that one in five teachers quits job due to many reasons, i.e. lower salaries, school atmosphere, and/or family reasons. The province of Punjab is currently facing a shortage of more than 60000 teachers owing to the less emphasis on attracting or retaining teachers. High turnover reports have been seen without a quick replacement. A large number of schools are non-functional owing to the shortage of teachers. The UNESCO Report Talance (2017) says that an unprecedented demand on teachers made by the government authorities coupled with unfavorable work environment is a disincentive to retain teachers in this profession.

Teachers' turnover in Pakistan is a serious issue in the recent times with the availability of myriad opportunities available to the workforce at the national and international level Ahmad and Adil (2020). This menace has been multiplied with the vast scale awareness about the higher education opportunities and the availability of scholarship/education funding by the national and international academic bodies. The teachers at the entry level with a passion to perform and attain the height of successful accomplishment are generally demotivated shortly with a closer look at the organizational set up, monetary

returns of their hard work, less future scope, job instability, lower social prestige, overnight changes in the departmental policies, over and extra work with less or no financial benefits, low professional growth, institutional culture and leadership incapability to cope with the emerging issues, and less opportunities of decision making in terms of professional or administrative matters at the school level Shah et al (2010). The paucity of qualified and dedicated teachers in the field is a major concern for the policy makers and administrators Tanveer et al (2020). There is a dire need to address this issue if the objective of education is to increase quality in the overall national workforce. It is indeed hard to find the replacement of competent teachers Tanveer at al (2020) . This situation creates dearth on the part of teachers, especially for certain core areas of learning, like English, Mathematics and the other science (pure and applied) related subjects. Furthermore, it over-burdens the school administrators and the other stake holders with opening recruitment every year which itself is a big challenge for them. The situation worsens with the gender basis recruitments, and the lesser approach in the far-flung areas with the lower salaries and lesser development in the basic surviving capacities. The novice teachers take several years to teach effectively and prove themselves as the functionally reliable workforce for the department Farooq et al (2020). The opening passage for the irrelevant qualification into the teaching profession, medics/paramedics and engineers for instance, creates long term threats to the departmental objectives overall. The concerned authorities need to curtail these trends in the educational sector since their administrative incapability will no longer be held responsible for the declining quality in education in the long run.

Literature Review

Evaluating the teachers' perceptions on the institutional leadership competencies Yin et al (2020) is a landmark in improving the result-based pedagogy at the public sector secondary level of education. The institutional success mostly depends upon the satisfaction of the workforce Cayir et al (2020). This is a crucial variable which determines the performance of the workers. The researchers in the field of school education are unanimous on one single point that the success of school mostly depends on the effective leadership, either it is from the point of students' learning outcome Townsend (2007), or reformative school culture Jacobson et al (2005), organizational commitment Karrach and Turner (2017), or job satisfaction Hersen (2004) or the teachers' retention/attrition Day et al (2006). Salfi (2011) reported in his study that the institutional heads who promoted a shared vision and an atmosphere of trust, support and collaboration succeeded in improving the quality of education. They distributed responsibilities and empowered others to accomplish the tasks, involved all the stake holders in the process of improvement, developed and maintained interpersonal relationship, and promoted participation in the professional development programs.   In

Pakistani situation, the heads of educational institutions are supposed to adopt a collaborative approach in articulating the schools vision, fostering group goals, and articulating high performance expectations Zulfqar et al (2016). On contrary, some researchers have reported the problems in setting the merit for recruitment Béteille (2020), insufficient accountability on the parts of the academic leaders Tanveer et al (2020), inefficiency in the governance of the institutions and under-qualified staff Sial et al (2011). Many studies, however, concluded that the institutions can work better if they maintain a balance in the power sharing, support and performance expectations Bryman (2007), and adopt transformational type of leadership with a participatory decision making approach in the institutions Tipu et al (2012).

Teachers' attrition / retention is an important issue for the administrators and the policy makers. The availability and adequacy of effective and competent teachers is a must to promote quality education. Many a research focus on the characteristics of school leadership who retain effective teachers, and, the government policies for the recruitment and running schools Tanveer et al (2020). The education department and the institutional leaders should emphasize on following the appropriately-set recruitment policies and providing incentives to retain the available staff because the number of school-going population is an ever increasing phenomenon, and more so, the natural causes of teachers' attrition is unavoidable Marchand and Weber (2020).

Research Objectives

1.   To explore teachers' perceptions about the leadership competencies at secondary level of education in Pakistan.
2.   To explore teachers' perceptions on the given opportunity in the participatory decision making at the institutional level.
3.   To find out whether the institutional leadership competencies has any impact on the teachers' retention / attrition in the selected variables, i.e. gender, age, level of education and the type of institution?
4.   To find out whether the participatory decision-making opportunities has any impact on the teachers' retention / attrition in the selected variables, i.e. gender, age, level of education and the type of institution?

Research Method

A mixed method approach was taken to carry out this study, i.e. quantifying the questionnaire and an interpretative thematic analysis of their reflective responses and the leading interviews. The data for the study was collected through a semi structured questionnaire with 48 closed-ended items and twelve open-ended responses, and interviews with 24 teachers, selected on the basis of certain responses in the open ended questions. For the closed-ended items, the statistical package regression was used. And,

for the open-ended responses, the study was guided by organizing data, coding text and breaking down into manageable and meaningful chunks for understanding what the data says instead of categorizing them into arbitrary units prior to searching for themes and/or meanings. The confidentiality of the information was promised during data collection. Hence, for the sake of anonymity, the respondents were given pseudonyms in this study.

Data Collection

The questionnaires were sent to the sample population (500 secondary school teachers in the public and private sectors in the province of Punjab) with a request to participate in the study, explaining to them the objectives and the possible outcomes of the data collected from them. A total of three hundred and ninety-eight teachers, however, responded appropriately to the questionnaires and wrote reflective responses. Twenty-four teachers were selected from these respondents for the follow-up interviews. Their selection was made on the basis of their reflective responses on the open ended questions in the questionnaire. To follow the research ethics and protocol, a formal informed consent was taken from every participant of the interview. The data was sorted out and finally selected for inclusion in the study. The average time of the interview was recorded as forty minutes. The interviews were audio recorded for subsequent analysis. There were many discussions related to their institutional leaders' competencies, participatory decision-making opportunities and professional well-being in different schools leading to the teachers' attrition / retention in the profession. The irrelevant discussions were omitted and over-sighted while interpreting and analyzing data. Only those thematic presentations were included in the study which directly helped finding out answers to the research questions.

Analysis of data

Different approaches of data analysis have been reported by the experts. Mason (2017), for example, reported about three possibilities in data analysis, i.e. (1) literal approach in which the focus is on the exact use of language in a script, (2) interpretative approach in which the participants' sense of meaning is counted instead of the literal language chunks so that the researcher interprets their meaning, (3) the reflexive approach in which the main focus is on the researcher's contribution to the data and its analysis. In practice, the researchers normally use a combination of all these approaches, beginning with organizing the data, coding and breaking into manageable chunks, trying to hear what the data says instead of splicing it into mere arbitrary language units in search of themes and topics. The qualitative approach used in this study, however, was informed by Miles et al (1994) descriptive and interpretative analysis theory to ascribe meaning. As Ahmad and Rao (2013) said, "Codes do not emerge uninfluenced from the pre-existing theory". A large amount of data was set for Nvivo 11 program for an in-depth analysis

proceeding initially with a word frequency query followed by a search for the most common words used in the text to a text-search query to obtain the participants' particular concepts. The principles of inductive thematic analysis guided by the research objectives were followed. All the data collected in this study (data corpus) was dealt manually to the selection of data set (data used in this study) to ascertain data items (which refer to every individual part of data which addresses any particular research objectives) for an interpretative analysis.

Stream 1: The effect of leadership competencies on teachers' retention / attrition

Research hypotheses:

1. There is no significant difference in male and female teachers' opinions about the leader ship competencies in the school heads.
2. There is no significant difference in below 35 and above 35 years' teachers' opinions about the leader ship competencies in the school heads.
3. There is no significant difference in bachelor and master degree holder teachers' opinions about the leader ship competencies in the school heads.
4. There is no significant difference in Public and Private school's teachers' opinions about the leader ship competencies in the school heads.

Results at 5% level of significance

Table 1 *Effect of leadership competencies on teachers' retention / attrition*

Hypothesis	n_1	n_2	t- Statistic	P-Value	Concluding Remarks
$\mu_{Male} = \mu_{Female}$	196	202	-1.016	0.277	Non-significant
$\mu_{below35} = \mu_{above35}$	312	86	-3.513	0.002	significant
$\mu_{Bachelors} = \mu_{Masters}$	203	195	0.477	0.668	Non-significant
$\mu_{Private} = \mu_{Public}$	165	233	0.429	0.539	Non-significant

In the table 1 we compared four different aspects for the leadership skills and competencies with the level of significance was 0.05 Alpha to evaluate whether there is any significant difference in (i) male and female teachers, (ii) age factor of teachers (Below35 and above35), (ii) education of teachers (Bachelors and Masters) and, (iv) the type of institute whether public or private. We observed that both genders possess almost the same type of opinion on leadership skills and competencies, and there was statistically no significant difference. On the age factor, the teachers' opinion differs and there was seen a statistically significant difference. On the level of education, whether they are bachelors or masters both have same type of opinion on leadership skills in their head teachers. And, on the last aspect, the type of institute whether public or private, there was found no statistically significant difference in the opinion of teachers.

Stream 2: Participative Decision Making and Teachers' Attrition

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in male and female teachers' opinions about the power sharing / participatory decision making opportunities at schools.

2. There is no significant difference in below 35 and above 35 years' teachers' opinions about the power sharing / participatory decision making opportunities at schools.

3. There is no significant difference in bachelor and master degree holder teachers' opinions about the power sharing / participatory decision making opportunities at schools.

4. There is no significant difference in Public and Private school's teachers' opinions about the power sharing / participatory decision making opportunities at schools.

Results at 5% level of significance

Table 2 *Participative Decision Making and Teachers' Attrition*

Hypothesis	n_1	n_2	t- Statistic	P-Value	Concluding Remarks
$\mu_{Male} = \mu_{Female}$	196	202	-3.205	0.081	Non-significant
$\mu_{below35} = \mu_{above35}$	312	86	-4.364	0.258	Non-significant
$\mu_{Bachelors} = \mu_{Masters}$	203	195	-0.255	0.0001	Significant
$\mu_{Private} = \mu_{Public}$	165	233	-0.265	0. 364	Non-significant

In the table above we compared four different aspects for the participator decision making opportunities with the level of significance 0.05 Alpha to evaluate whether there is any significant difference in (i) male and female teachers, (ii) age factor of teachers (Below35 and above35), (ii) education of teachers (Bachelors and Masters) and, (iv) the type of institute whether public or private. We observed that both genders possess almost the same type of opinion on the opportunities of participatory decision making in the school matters, and there was statistically no significant difference. On the age factor, there was statistically no significant difference. On the level of education, whether they are bachelors or masters, the teachers' opinion differs and there was seen a statistically significant difference. And, on the last aspect, the type of institute whether public or private, there was found no statistically significant difference in the opinion of teachers about the participatory decision making opportunities for the participant teachers.

Thematic Analysis of Data (Open ended questions and the Interviews)

Thematic analysis is a less recognized and poorly demarcated data analysis technique that is used in qualitative studies offering a theoretically accessible and flexible approach in analyzing data. *Thematic analysis is a poorly demarcated and rarely-acknowledged, yet widely-used qualitative analytic method* Boyatzis (1998). Although it helps presenting the research data in a considerably more rigorous and deliberate manner, it is mostly a neglected method of analyzing qualitative studies in education and language

teaching. On the whole, as Holloway & Todres Holloway and Todres (2003) argue, qualitative approaches present complex, nuanced and incredibly diverse array of research techniques. Thematic analysis is a threshold of qualitative research which the aspirants first learn as it will lead to grasping other qualitative analysis techniques Braun and Clarke (2006). It enjoys the status of a full method with its own right, though Ryan & Bernard Ryan and Bernard (2000) claimed thematic coding just as a process that is merely performed in major analytic studies rather than a specific approach. The major advantage of using thematic analysis is its quality of flexibility Braun and Clarke (2006). It has two basic strands: using in particular theoretical positions Kasper (2006), and analyzing interpretative phenomenon (as advocated by Smith & Osborn Smith and Shinebourne (2012). Under its broader spectrum, thematic analysis is visible grounded theory Corbin and Strauss (2014) , narrative analysis Smith (2003) and, discourse analysis Nuttall (2006).

The data analysis shows the identified themes under specific variables. The transcript fragments or their nearest synonyms are given in the table on Annex-1 with the frequency and percentage of occurrence in the original stories. The frequency refers to the proportional number of fragments that match with the particular variable strands. The successful institutional heads tend to promote a shared vision through creating a culture of collaboration and mutual trust. They believe in empowering others for a collective cause and shared responsibilities involving different stakeholders in decision making and try to maintain professionally acceptable relationship amongst the school workforce. They also tend to emphasize professional development for self and others with a view to improve the quality standards for the teachers and students.

The table (Annex-1) indicates that the academic leaders in various cities of the province of Punjab tend to promote a collaborative approach to decision making although it applies mostly to the matters of teachers and teaching, and less about administrative matters. The situation, however, demands to introduce transformational strategies for involving the faculty in other job-related matters that will lead to effective classroom instructions and better achievements on the part of students. It is because, as Ramsden (2003) elucidated that the transformational type of academic leadership effectively communicates the programs' mission and goals, and have a clear vision about the institutional goals and tasks in hand. This situation requires precise explanations, leading to fostering a dynamic environment where the faculty can collaborate and share their knowledge and experiences freely. Such type of leadership will make a difference by conceiving the future needs and creating a unique image of the educational institution. They help inspiring a positively productive vision in faculty, encouraging them to shift this collaborative attitude to their followers and students to create an overall transformational atmosphere in the organization. They work as models for excellence and goal orientation, expecting the best from those who follow. This will ultimately

increase their credibility for others. Zhu et al (2012) favored this type of leadership, providing clear instructions, effective feedback and encouragement to assure attaining the ambitious goals of the program. As Northouse (2018) also demanded for a leadership that should be able to ascertain the real potentials of their subordinates and decision making on distributing assignments amongst them accordingly, and at the same time, boosting their mental and emotional capacities, and developing their abilities to address the newly emerging problems in innovative ways.

The secondary teachers generally find themselves in an endless struggle for professional development, updating themselves on the emerging teaching methodologies and approaches Ahmad and Rao (2012). They need a continuum of self-evaluation and improvement for a competence-based teaching practice. Teachers' alignment with the emerging trends in education can be achieved through reflective teaching. And, the research-based pedagogy can be helpful in coping with the challenges faced during teacher development programs. They need to be active decision makers, addressing to the emerging context-sensitive everyday challenges in the classroom.

Conclusion

This research conceptualized and empirically proved that a distributed form of leadership is one of the crucial elements in the current democratic scenario of school management. It has proved itself for improving students' learning outcome and the teachers' self-efficacy plus retention. Furthermore, it enhances the faculty morale and the level of job satisfaction. The quality of deliverance improved where the faculty and staff were engaged and involved in the decision making process. Effective interpersonal skills on the part of teachers were seen where they were trusted in power sharing and decision making. This situation may helps improving capacity building and improvement in academia.The main purpose of our study was to examine the effect of leadership competencies and participatory decision-making on teachers' retention at secondary education. In this study, the researchers examined teachers' perceptions on the institutional leadership competency. The conclusion is based on the results obtained from the responses on close ended and open ended questions in the questionnaire, and the interviews with the selected teachers. That means this study aimed at finding the perspective of teachers on their leadership competencies and participatory decision making at secondary schools in the province of Punjab (Pakistan). Institutional leadership competency has positive effect on the teachers' retention in the profession. There was found no significant difference in teachers' opinions on two factors, i.e. gender (male and female), and the type of institute (public and private) on the teachers' attrition / retention as an effect of leadership competencies and participatory decision making. However, there is a significant difference in age and the level of education variables on the teachers' attrition / retention as an effect of leadership competencies and

participatory decision making. The study absolutely focused on self-reported responses by the public and private sector secondary school teachers in the province of Punjab (Pakistan), future researcher may consider the other aspects to conduct studies about leadership.

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