

Exploring the Teacher Empowerment Strategies of School Heads at Secondary Level in Punjab, Pakistan

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Abstract

Teacher empowerment strategies are essential for a positive organizational identity. School heads are expected to use a variety of empowerment techniques to maximize the potential of their faculty members, inspire them in various ways, and motivate them to work. The current study intends to investigate the teacher empowerment strategies of secondary school heads in Punjab, Pakistan. A study was based on a qualitative research design. The semi-structured interview protocol was used to collect data. A purposive sampling technique was used. The sample was comprised of 57 secondary school teachers. Data were analyzed through the thematic analysis technique. The findings show that school heads have given their staff members greater autonomy by fostering opportunities for group decision-making, praising employees for good work, increasing self-efficacy, and promoting effective teacher collaboration. However, school heads have less focus on professional growth opportunities, supporting teachers' autonomy, and improving their status.

Keywords: Teacher Empowerment Strategies, School Heads, Secondary Level

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Introduction

The school leader has a great influence on the teacher empowerment process. Empowered teachers follow their leaders' behavior and internalize their responsibilities (Ganiban, Belecina, & Ocampo, 2019). School heads have the responsibility of empowering teachers in educational systems (Vrhovnik, Maric, Znidarsic, & Jordan, 2018). As stated by Harpell and Andrews (2010) school heads that are cognizant of this, realize that empowering individuals has an impact on the entire organization. As, empowered teachers exchange their information, talents, prospects, and visions with others. This condition ensures the improvement of the organization (Alosaimi, 2016; Ledesma & Lalaine, 2015; Longwell-McKean, 2012).

A study conducted by Wall (2012) shows that the effective use of leadership by school heads can enhance teachers' empowerment. The combined efforts of teachers are seen to have a direct impact on improved student achievement. As a result, teachers' job is vital for both schools and society as a whole. Similarly, Bogler and Nir (2012) stated that a supportive school environment and empowered teachers are possible solutions for problems related to educational effectiveness.

However, teacher empowerment is a topic that gets a lot of attention in the field of teacher education. Significant improvements in one's professional abilities, increasing independence, and participation in decision-making processes are all components of empowerment (Bogler & Nir, 2012). As stated by Kimwarey, Chirure, and Omondi (2014) an empowered person has the skills and information necessary to act or progress constructively. Teachers become more capable and learn about their weaknesses and skills as a result of being empowered. Teacher empowerment is linked to educational motivation. It provides teachers with information about themselves and their co-workers so that they can work together to improve student performance (Dee, Henkin, & Duemer, 2002).

Moreover, empowered teachers have faith in themselves and their abilities, are aware of the system, commit time and energy to their profession, and treat others with respect (Irwin, 1996). After reviewing the studies on teacher empowerment, it is found that school heads use empowerment strategies such as rewarding, assisting teachers, communicating, fostering an environment where decisions are made, and building trust (AvidovUngar & Arviv-Elyashiv, 2018; Celik & Konan, 2020; Cetin & Kiral, 2018; Ganiban et al., 2019; Kiral, 2015; Konan & Celik, 2017).

Literature Review

A study by Cheong, Yammarino, Dionne, Spain and Tsai (2019) indicated rewarding is one of the most useful empowerment strategies. It has been demonstrated that rewarding employees through a variety of methods boost their motivation, desire, and success (Maslow, 1943). School heads try to motivate their staff members by rewarding them financially, physically, or psychologically to get the efficiency they want from them (McGregor, 1966). Rewarding teachers' efforts in classroom management are boosted, helping the school to achieve objectives, and developing an effective school climate and culture (Rangel, Suskavcevic, Kapral, & Dominey, 2020; Yunus, Sukarno, & Rosyadi, 2021).

Another useful strategy is teachers' involvement in educational decisions such as program development, and assessment of learner accomplishment. Allowing teachers complete participation in critical decisions has an impact on the quality of their work (Short, 1997). Therefore, their opinions are heard in several professional settings. Kiral (2015) stated that the participation of teachers in organizational decision-making is crucial for the administration's smooth operation.

Are several expectations supporting employees' involvement in decision-making processes? Kang, Park, and Sorensen (2021) suggest that internal teacher motivation may result from the school head informing teachers about the situation at the school or from setting up internal problem-solving groups and involving teachers in the decision-making process. The goal of teacher empowerment is to give educators more power and responsibility in their subject areas (as cited in Acaray, 2010).

Additionally, when teachers participate in decision-making, their problem-solving abilities improve, which benefits the entire school and strengthens their sense of commitment to the whole organization (Dee, Henkin, & Duemer, 2002; Devos, Tuytens, & Halpin, 2014; Moran, 2015). Therefore, giving teachers the power to make decisions is an essential element of teacher empowerment. Conversely, to prevent it from becoming the privilege of a small number of teachers, school heads should establish clear and well-understood teacher participation criteria (Celik, & Kiral, 2022).

Furthermore, school administrators must support teachers' professional development initiatives (Rangel, Short, Short, & Eckley, 2020). The key to supporting teachers is to give them opportunities for professional growth, assist them in resolving issues at the school, have an open-door policy, be reachable by phone, and make sure that they know the school head is always there for them. Teachers' internalization of their profession will grow as

long as they behave in this way, which will strengthen their commitment to their organizations (Kiral, 2020).

Heads support teachers by fostering their professional development, offering resources, assisting with problem-solving, and encouraging personal growth. Creating opportunities is fundamental to teacher empowerment (Yunus et al., 2021). It will be easier for students to acquire the knowledge and abilities they need to have as long as teachers continue to advance in their profession, which will be to the benefit of both the students and the student's learning. The head of the schools will also be able to accomplish their objectives considerably more quickly (Celik, & Kiral, 2022).

Another key element in the empowerment process is teacher status. The status of teachers has an impact on their intellectual capabilities, as well as their prestige at school and in the community. It also relates to their points of view that they are professionally respected by other teachers in the school because of their knowledge and abilities (Klecker & Loadman, 1998; Short, 1997). Teachers desire to be treated as professionals. They keep control over their teaching methods (Maeroff, 1988). As a result, Rinehart et al. (1986) recommend that school head empower their teachers to support or facilitate their work.

Additionally, teacher autonomy is also considered an important factor in empowerment. Teacher autonomy refers to their ability to make decisions about time, lessons, books, and teaching plans (Klecker & Loadman, 1998). Teachers have more autonomy over their job, this gives them the freedom to make their own choices and take more chances (Short, 1997). According to Short and Greer (1997) in this approach providing a supportive environment helps to boost teachers' autonomy.

Teachers, who are more self-sufficient like to attempt new things in their classrooms, take risks, assist students, and learn new things. In this method, allowing teachers to participate more in new initiatives and responsibilities can promote teacher autonomy (Bayer, Ozcan & Yildiz, 2017). It has a positive impact on student learning when teachers are confident in their abilities. Teachers' feelings of competence are thought to be influenced by empowering them. However, school heads can improve teachers' abilities by simply praising them and acknowledging their student progress, thereby praising teachers who have helped students in achieving their goals (Kimwarey et al., 2014).

Establishing a relationship of mutual trust between the head of the school and the teachers is another strategy for empowering teachers (Kimwarey et al., 2014). Similarly, trustworthiness and communication play also an important role to empower teachers. Communication makes the structure of the school dynamic by facilitating the growth and maintenance of

relationships between the stakeholders inside and outside the school (Celik & Kiral, 2022). Teachers should be organized and free to express themselves at any moment, and school heads should be aware of the favorable organizational atmosphere (Rangel et al., 2020; Yunus et al., 2021).

Although, according to Wall (2012) the administrator has the authority to establish a vision for the teachers, foster relationships through communication, and improve a team environment, all the while enabling everyone to grow in responsibility and effectiveness and to discover hidden talents. When teachers feel empowered and involved in the decision-making process, they will act to change and have an impact on classroom instruction and school.

Most of the quantitative studies are found in the literature on teacher empowerment (Avidov-Ungar & Arviv-Elyashiv, 2018; Celik & Konan, 2020; Ganiban et al., 2019; Kiral, 2015; Kiral, 2020; Melenyzer, 1990, Short, 1992; Wilcoxon et al., 2019). However, limited studies conducted on teacher empowerment by using qualitative research design in the literature (Cetin & Kiral, 2018; Yin, 2018).

Therefore, it is anticipated that the present study will help school heads in the teacher empowerment process and give a profound viewpoint to the literature. Sometimes teacher empowerment strategies can't be put into practice because of legal restrictions or other issues (Celik, & Kiral, 2022). This study was conducted to determine the empowerment tactics used by secondary school heads in line with the views of teachers.

Objective

The objective of the current study was to identify the teacher empowerment strategies of school heads at the secondary level in Punjab, Pakistan.

Research Question

This study centered on the following research question:

What are the views of teachers about empowerment strategies that school heads implement?

Methodology

The present study was based on a qualitative research design. Researchers have used a semi-structured interview protocol. Secondary school teachers were purposively selected for the interview. Thematic analysis was used to

reach the results. Thematic analysis is utilized, following Clarke and Braun (2013), to identify themes that are noteworthy or important, such as data trends, and to apply these themes to address the research problem.

Population and Sampling

All the teachers at public secondary schools in Punjab's province were the study's target population. According to Census (2018) Punjab has 133260 secondary school teachers (67346 men and 65914 women). A purposive sampling technique was used. The sample size was comprised of 57 secondary school teachers (male & female). As suggested by Britten (1995) studies using individual interview often consists of 50 to 60 participants, so that researchers can manage the complexity of the analysis.

Interview Protocol

For a more in-depth study of the phenomenon, researchers have used a semi-structured interview protocol. The interview questions were formulated after consulting the relevant literature. To validate the interview protocol, researchers took the opinions of three experts on interview questions. Lastly, after receiving the feedback, the researchers formulated a revised form of the interview protocol. Each participant spent up to 30 minutes with the researchers answering open-ended questions in an interactive individual interview.

Data Collection

Researchers took formal permission from interviewees with interview questions after obtaining permission from the appropriate authorities. Additionally, participants were asked to choose a convenient time and date for the interview.

Results

Findings indicate the perceptions of teachers about the empowerment strategies used by the school head. The data were analyzed using the thematic analysis technique. The analysis reveals the empowerment strategies implemented by the school head also indicated some strategies that are not implemented. The results are discussed below:

Decision-Making Opportunities

In this regard, the majority of respondents (n = 39) stated that their school heads must involve teachers in meetings and prioritize teacher input for taking the decision, while some respondents (n = 6) indicate that their school head motivates teachers to participate in meetings and exchange ideas regarding decision-making, so they feel empowered. However, some of the respondents (n = 12) say their school head asks for their input, which makes them feel content. They also state that their head ensures the active involvement of teachers in the decision-making process. (Respondents 6 and 11), answered that "The best way is to make decisions together, Otherwise, teachers would fail to naturalize these decisions, and a slew of problems will occur; therefore, teachers' perspectives must be preferred so that they can function at their best".

Professional Growth Opportunities

In this regard, the majority of respondents (n=47) have a negative perception of their school head empowering teachers through professional development opportunities. Respondents further elaborate that the education department is responsible for providing training sessions and refresher courses for teachers, while school heads do not have the authority to create professional growth opportunities for teachers at the school. Although some respondents (n = 10) indicate that the government provides training sessions and school heads allow their teachers to attend these sessions, these sessions are merely formalities. (Respondent 6), answered that "The government provides funds for teacher professional development, and the principal arranges workshops in the school". However, almost all the respondents expressed that there is a lack of professional development opportunities.

Communication and Trustworthiness

Regarding this area, the majority of respondents (n=37) think that school heads have worked to improve teachers' communication, make the school more attractive to the workplace, and encourage trust-based relationships. They further say that their school heads communicate the school mission with teachers and students. The mission of the school is discussed in meetings, assemblies, and on the bulletin board. According to some respondents (n = 20), school heads organize social activities to increase communication and trust among teachers, and social attractiveness at school. However, all of the respondents agree that communication is a key aspect of teacher empowerment, (Respondent 10) answered that "To accomplish the school's goal, the heads of the schools interact formally or

informally with teachers and students to share ideas, experiences, and significant information".

Acknowledgment

In this regard, the majority of respondents (n = 30) have a favorable opinion. According to respondents, the head of their school awards certificates to teachers for outstanding performance and also encourages underperforming teachers to improve their performance. While some respondents (n = 19) say that in staff meetings and assemblies, school heads orally recognize and acknowledge teachers for their good work. (Respondent 5), answered that "through clap in assemblies show appreciation for teachers." However, just a handful of respondents (n = 8) said that the school head holds an annual award ceremony to recognize teachers for their excellent work. (Respondent 15), say that "teachers are recognized annually with an award and a certificate of appreciation," although some respondents (n = 17) indicate that school heads recognize teachers in their classrooms to keep them motivated.

Increase Self-Efficacy

In this regard, the majority of respondents (n = 37) have a perception that their school head recognizes teachers by honoring them in staff meetings for their students' achievement which increase the self-efficacy of teachers. In addition, respondents state that after analyzing students' performance, the head expresses gratitude to the teacher in front of their students. While other respondents (n = 20) say their head constantly encourages them to keep up the excellent job by recognizing their abilities and providing positive feedback. (Respondents 22 and 24), answered, "that the principal's encouragement boosts teacher confidence and makes them more competent".

Teachers' Status and Autonomy

The status and autonomy of teachers refer to their sense of professional respect and independence. In this regard, the majority of respondents (n = 49) indicates that their head does not fully support them when they have problem with the student. Lack of support by the school head has a bad impact on teacher status. (Respondent 7), said that "Teachers struggle to follow policy (Maar Nahi Pyaar) because they are aware of the realities at their school". Respondents indicate that teachers are obligated to rigorously obey the rules, and they are unable to act on their own. According to the responses, the government sets limits through rules and teachers must obey them. However, a small number of respondents (n=8) believe that their

school's head tries to promote teachers' prestige and autonomy by protecting them when they have conflicts with parents or students.

Discussion

The findings of this study explore the empowerment strategies used by secondary school heads in Punjab, Pakistan. The majority of respondents claim that their heads ask their opinions in the decision-making process. This is one of the key elements of the teacher empowerment process. Balyer et al. (2017) indicate that involving teachers in decision-making had a great influence in empowering them. Teachers' empowerment can be achieved through their involvement in decision-making (In'am, 2015). Similarly, Kimwarey et al., (2014) indicated that participating in group decision-making processes can also help teachers improve their problem-solving skills. Furthermore, in the current study, most respondents hold a negative view of their school heads empowering teachers through professional development opportunities. Respondents stated that their school heads do not have the right to provide school teachers with professional growth opportunities, however training sessions and refresher courses are provided by the education department, but these sessions are merely formalities. As stated by Kimwarey et al. (2014) a significant aspect of teachers' empowerment is to develop their professional competence.

Conversely, regarding communication and trustworthiness, the majority of respondents believe that the school head has worked hard to make the school a more attractive place to work, to promote trust-based relationships, and to improve communication to empower teachers. Respondents elaborate that their school heads communicate the school mission with school members in different ways to build an effective school environment.

However, respondents hold a positive opinion about rewarding and praising by school heads. When it comes to empowering teachers by acknowledging their good performance and increasing self-efficacy among teachers, almost all respondents stated that their school heads issued certificates in recognition of their best performance also encourages underperforming teachers to improve their performance. Increase self-efficacy by constantly encouraging teachers to keep up the excellent job by recognizing their abilities and providing positive feedback.

Further, the majority of respondents held an unfavorable opinion of enhancing teachers' status and autonomy in the empowerment process. They emphasize that the student-centered system has a poor influence on the status of teachers. Respondents also added that teachers are obligated to

rigorously obey the rules, and they are unable to act on their own. School heads need to trust that their teachers will complete the necessary tasks for students to achieve greater success.

Conclusion

The current study's findings determine that the school heads use empowerment strategies and play an important role in empowering teachers at the secondary level in Punjab, Pakistan. The results show that school heads empower their teachers by allowing for joint decision-making, recognizing teachers' good performance, increasing teachers' self-efficacy by recognizing their abilities, providing positive feedback, and fostering good communication among teachers.

However, it is also identified that school heads have less focus on professional growth opportunities which is one of the key elements of teacher empowerment. The current study also indicates that the status and autonomy need to be improved to empower teachers at the secondary level.

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