A study of a head teacher's perception about her role as an educational leader

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Abstract

Understanding a head teacher's role as an educational leader is a mostly neglected area especially in developing countries including Pakistan. Most of the head teachers perform managerial and administrative roles, and very little time is given to academic leadership, which negatively affects the quality of education in the schools.

I conducted a study to understand a head teacher's perceived and performed role in a community school located in Karachi. In order to understand the head teacher's different dimensions of the role a qualitative approach was used. Data was gathered through a variety of methods including interviews, classroom observations, discussions and document analysis to cross-check information for triangulation purpose.

The findings suggest that the head teacher perceived her role as a facilitator, team builder and change agent. She also acted as an instructional leader and a manager. These role dimensions indicate that the head teacher acts as an educational leader by giving professional support to teachers, by enriching curriculum, creating close relationships with community and by creating a collaborative learning environment at school. There seems to be harmony to some extent between the head teacher's perceived and performed roles.

Keywords: *Educational leadership; school management; perceived roles; performed roles*

Introduction

We know from decades of research that a strong school leader is an essential ingredient for school improvement. Literature on educational leadership and management also suggests that successful school improvement depends on the quality of leadership in schools. There is a generally held opinion among the educators and researchers that school improvement is directly related to the nature of school leadership. An effective educational leader deals with the transformation of the school, for the accomplishment of its aims and objectives (Kunwar, 2001). Schneider and Burton (2008) describe the four pillars of school leadership: leadership, management, pedagogy and personal intelligence. Sergiovanni (2001) considers three key qualities of headship: capacity to synthesize, to innovate and to be perceptive. Middleton (2001) argues that leaders should be responsible for sustaining the school community's energy and nurture the core purpose of increasing the ability of all children and preparing students for the future.

Current research also suggests that effective school leaders set a tone of mutual trust and respect among teachers, students, parents, and community members. They take deliberate actions to understand their school communities and form partnerships that focus on learning both inside and outside of the school. Therefore, schools need leaders who visualize successful student learning, understand the work necessary to achieve it, and have the skills to engage with others to make it happen. Hence, the role of head teacher is pivotal to the success of the school in improving the quality of the teaching and learning process. The school improvement literature in the developing world also suggests that the role of school heads is significant in making a difference in schools (Halai, 2002; Shafa, 2003). Hence, the literature from the developing world on school leadership, though scant, tends towards the same conclusion (Kunwar, 2000; Shafa 2003).

Thus, from the above mentioned discussions, it becomes clear that the school head plays a pivotal role in making a school successful, yet finding effective leaders is not easy. Commenting on this concern Memon, (2010) stated that "in any education system, school heads are considered as powerful actors, however, in Pakistan school heads are recruited on the basis of the prevailing myth, that any experienced teacher can become head, and most of the heads are promoted based on their seniority in their teaching cadre" (p. 280). Memon (2010) further stated that "these school heads do not have any prior management knowledge and skills, nor do they have any management experience or qualifications" (p. 280). In this given situation one cannot expect these heads to develop their schools as learning organizations (Senge, 1990).

While discussing leadership practice in Pakistan, Rizvi (2008) highlighted that the primary schools do not have any budgeted headship position, nor do they have hiring, firing and financial power. School heads operate in a traditional manner of school leadership, without delegation of power. Sometimes the heads consult with their superiors in operational matters, which seems to be a common practice in centralized education systems (Sabanci, 2008). "Those school heads who work in the public sector consider themselves government servants and comply with their supervisors' instructions, which has further promoted a compliance culture" (Memon, 2010, p. 281).

Regarding the educational structure of the government sector, Merchant and Ali (2003) shared a longitudinal research study that was conducted in Gilgit-Baltistan of Pakistan, which has rightly stated that the governance structure of education is tied up in routine and inspectorial work, rather than pedagogical improvement and innovative solutions. Taking this idea further Malik (2007) added that despite apparent decentralization the education governance structure maintains the centralizing tendencies of the past. Further, studies of educational leadership in Pakistan by Simkins, Sisum and Memon (2003) indicate that due to the hierarchical system of education, head teachers in Pakistan do not recognize their role as pedagogical leaders.

Hence these studies reveal shortcomings of governance structures in terms of the effective delivery of education and ability to deal with education reform and innovation in Pakistan (Khaki & Safdar, 2010). Therefore, this study was conducted to understand the head teacher's perceived and performed roles of educational leadership in a real context and examine whether the roles are similar or different from each other. Furthermore, this research was conducted in the specific social and cultural context of Pakistan, and sought answers to the following research question:

To what extent were the head teacher's perceived roles congruent / incongruent with the performed roles and why?

Hence, this research will significantly contribute to the pool of existing literature, which focuses upon the various dimensions of the head teacher's role as an instructional leader, which would eventually lead to improvement in the quality of teaching.

Literature review

Grace (1995) unpacks the concept of educational leadership by arguing that educational leadership can be shared, transformed, empowered and be a democratic enterprise. Senge (2000) believes that educational leadership is all about facilitating teachers' and students' learning. He states that educational leaders build learning organizations, where people continuously expand their capabilities to understand complexity, clarify vision and improve shared mental models that are responsible for learning. Supporting this idea further, Miller and Miller (2001) maintain that educational leaders empower teachers and students and facilitate them rather than direct changes. Likewise, Van de Grift (1990) holds that educational leadership is the capacity or ability of a head teacher to stimulate and motivate teachers, so that the latter may carry out their tasks as effectively as possible.

Likewise, Harris, Day and Hadfield (2003) maintain that educational leadership is about the vision of the school. The leaders are aware of the purpose of the school. Educational leaders have the clarity of vision for their

future and adapt to change (Miller & Miller, 2001). On the other hand, Mullins (1993) states that the roles that individuals play within the groups are influenced by a combination of situational and personal factors such as requirements of the task, the styles of leadership, values, attitudes, motivation, and ability and personality of the person. Furthermore, school principals at school level are influenced by long duty hours; an emphasis on administration rather than leadership; and political participation at the societal level as interference in school affairs (Mansoor & Akhtar, 2015). While investigating the influence of contextual factors on the nature of leadership, Khaki (2006) found that although they are similar in their vision of providing quality education, leadership roles differed, largely due to their background, beliefs and organizational settings. Brandt (1992) thinks that the similarities and differences among roles point at the complex, uncertain, and changing nature of the head teacher's world of work. Some of them, however, closely resonate in characterizing their job-related practices. It seems that head teachers' roles are influenced by the nature and the intensity of the tasks.

Hence, from the literature of diverse countries it appears that head teachers perceive their roles in multiple dimensions. Although head teachers perceive themselves to be the leaders within the school, they are also under the influence of higher authorities, where the bureaucrats take decisions without involving the head teachers. Memon (1998) states that head teachers as educational leaders are not involved in policy matters and are not responsible for the implementation of new policy initiatives, and this may develop a sense of frustration among the leaders. Head teachers are supposed to take initiatives and if they are not involved in decision-making, they may not be able to implement effectively. Sabanci (2008) comments that "school heads adopt an autocratic style because of centralized and rule-bound managerial positions" (p. 523). These head teachers are not yet ready to face uncertain situations and they generally use a managerial approach. With the globalization of education and knowledge, society has added more challenges, which require head teachers to be prepared as pedagogical leaders to meet national, regional and international challenges.

The majority of school head teachers in Pakistan are developed through an apprenticeship model and seem to be more task oriented than relationship oriented (Memon, 2010). Hindle (2000) also complains that educational managers lose sight of their objectives. They get so involved in their activities that they forget their purpose. In response to Hindle's argument, Daresh, Gantner, Dunlap and Hvizdak (2000) argue that unfortunately the path followed by school head teachers in the development of their leadership capabilities is typically fragmented and unfocused.

On the other hand, Khaki (2006) in his exploration of the beliefs and behavior of effective head teachers of government and non-government schools in Pakistan found that the role of head teachers in Pakistan is changing. His study reveals that in some cases school heads play a more active role; they are not just managers but leaders, who work to improve the quality of teaching and learning in their schools. Similarly, Shafa (2003) argues that there is unanimity of views amongst school improvement researchers worldwide that head teachers are the key stakeholders in any initiatives to improve what goes on in their schools. The quality of the services provided by schools is determined and reflected by the level of enthusiasm, professionalism and commitment of the head teachers leading those schools.

While presenting the role of educational leader, Bana (2010) argued that the role of a head teacher in a school has been considered central to all educational reforms over the last few decades. The head teachers in most of the schools of Pakistan viewed themselves as 'the Head', with total authority. There is a need to reconsider this role in the light of new thinking on educational leadership. Gaziel (2003) further clarifies that, "leaders experience confusion and a sense of being off balance and out of control" (p. 477). Hence, in a fast-paced and uncertain environment, head teachers are expected to meet competing expectations about priorities, decision-making processes and school outcomes. They are forced to have more collaborative decision-making processes, without being given any sense of direction.

The above-mentioned arguments reveal that the head teachers have to perform complex tasks, for which they need knowledge and skills. It is because:

> In a knowledge society, school heads are expected to be knowledge workers and to contribute towards the knowledge society. Since schools are no longer simply places to transmit knowledge to the younger generation, they have to engage teachers, students and others to actually generate knowledge through various forms of enquiry and active learning. (Memon, 2010, p. 284)

Hence school leadership needs to be developed to address new challenges of education in the country. Contrary to this

> Pakistan is already facing a lack of leadership capacity and no concentrated effort has been made to tap potential individuals to develop as future school heads yet. Not a single institution exists in the public sector responsible for developing aspiring and serving head teachers in the country. (Memon, 2010, p. 284)

Although

> ...the government of Pakistan's (2008) Draft New Education Policy recommends school heads should have a role as educational leaders, responsible for improving school performance through enhanced student learning outcomes. This cannot be achieved without making a substantial investment in the capacity building of school leadership. (Memon, 2010, p. 284)

At the same time, the government of Pakistan has not yet made educational leadership qualification mandatory for school heads. Hence, schools in Pakistan are being managed by unqualified school heads, and they have not reached the level required to perform as educational leaders.

> From different sources it seems that leadership conceptions regarding head teachers are rather traditional, and they are not aware of their roles, which hinders the process of change and the implementation of school improvement plans. There is also a need for the identification of talented teachers as potential heads, and the training to develop them as part of succession planning. (Memon, 2010)

Hence, continuous professional development to improve leadership and personal qualities is critical for those who lead schools (Pansiri, 2008). Memon (2010) also suggests intensive and practical professional development programmes for school leadership.

In order to improve school management and governance Memon (2010) suggested that the provincial and district government of Pakistan should introduce pre-appointment preparation and continuing professional education programmes for school heads, which will improve their leadership capacity and raise their professional status in the country. Memon (2010) further proposed that government should also consider converting selected elementary colleges of education into 'District Educational Leadership Centers' to conduct continuing professional programmes for school heads and others in the area of educational leadership and governance. Until these institutions and centers are established, the higher education institutions in the public and private sector could offer these programmes, accredited by the higher education commission. This would help to improve leadership and governance capacity and the culture of improving efficiency of educational institutions.

Regarding the appointments of head teachers, Khaki and Safdar (2010) added that very often heads are appointed on the basis of seniority (75%) and by direct appointments at grade 17 through public service commission. By seniority, is meant not experience in the area of headship, but years of teaching experience. When a head is appointed as head teacher he/she has to learn the tricks of the profession through trial and error and hands-on experience, without any training. This does not put the head teacher in a very enviable position in

the school. In contrast, in many advanced areas like North America, Europe and Australia, heads are appointed through a rigorous system of selection and prior qualification. In many developing countries, including Pakistan, no such rigorous criteria are applied to select the heads. Thus the position of head teacher needs to be brought into the limelight of the reform agenda and the position taken very seriously, if schools' needs are to be put on a professional footing (Khaki & Safdar, 2010).

Simultaneously, on the issue of head teachers' independent decisions, Khaki and Safdar (2010) also argued that the freedom for head teachers to develop policy in their schools needs to be identified within the district culture and context of Pakistan, so that an enabling policy framework can be developed to help the heads govern their schools with efficiency and effectiveness, with both professional knowledge and acumen, and with skills and competencies that are essential to fulfil this office successfully.

In conclusion, Khaki and Safdar (2010) have further suggested four areas which need to be developed to bring improvement in schools and head teachers' practice. Firstly, there is a need to understand the significance of head teacher positions and what they entail; secondly, to develop leadership skills through professional development opportunities; then, to have selection criteria for recruiting heads from early on or from the teaching cadre through a rigorous system of screening; and lastly, after the selection of head teachers, further opportunities need to be provided in all areas of school administration, management and – very importantly – leadership. Also needed are the development of collaborative decision-making strategies; distributed leadership practices; a culture of collegiality and community; processes for organizational change and renewal; and the development of management competence in the analysis and use of data and instructional technologies to guide school improvement activities (Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2004).

Methodology

Research design

The nature of this study demands a research approach which is scientifically rigorous but still sensitive to the complex life world of human beings (Sergiovanni, 2000). Hence, to investigate the perceived and performed role of a head teacher, a qualitative approach was adopted, which is the most appropriate course of action. Within this particular qualitative approach, a case study method (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) was deemed to be most beneficial. In order to attain more breadth and depth, this research study comprises a case involving one school principal (Yin, 2003).

Furthermore, to get the relevant, broader and richer understanding of the head teacher's perceptions, I used different methods and tools, such as interviews, observations, informal discussions, document analysis, reflective journals and field notes. It is believed that by using multiple sources, a researcher can get a better understanding of the phenomena under study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). This helped me to cross check data from one source with data from another source.

Semi-structured interviews were my major data-collecting tools, to explore the head teacher's conceptual understanding about her role. I conducted seven in-depth interview sessions with the head teacher, teacher, coordinator and deputy head teacher to get a true picture of my study. Apart from interviews, observing the head teacher on the job allowed me to compare the perceived and performed roles of head teacher in a natural setting. Overall, the qualitative methodology helped me to investigate and explore the perceived and performed role of the head teacher.

The research context

This study was conducted in a community primary school, which provides education to their community children in Karachi. The community primary school was serving mostly the low socio-economic background community members of different parts of Pakistan and Afghanistan. There were 200 students from grade early childhood

education (ECED) to grade five. The head teacher was a very experienced person, having some training through an Advanced Diploma in School Management. The school was managed by a School Management Committee (SMC) and headteacher. The structure of SMCs consists of a chairperson, honorary secretary (the headteacher), finance member, and five other members, including two to three parent representatives whose children are studying in these schools. The role of SMC, according to the terms of reference of the community school, is to run the dealings of the school with the help of head teacher. The head teacher was the main person on whom the major responsibility fell as the Secretary to the SMC, besides working as head teacher.

The rationale for a primary school was that little work has been done to understand the role of a primary school head teacher and it requires more studies. Hence, the selected school was feasible from a number of perspectives, particularly where the saving of time and energy was concerned. The head teacher showed her interest and dedication to participate in this study.

Findings and discussions

Being fulltime head teacher of a primary community school, she was the main person upon whom major responsibility fell as the Secretary to the SMC, besides working as a head teacher. She was seen as a central person in a particular socio cultural context in the whole process of school improvement (Sullivan, 2013). The head teacher's leadership role is seen in many forms as gatekeeper and responsible person to transform the school to the highest levels of improvement. She works within the community network in a participatory collaborative approach in the dynamics of specific socio culture context and processes in which leadership is embedded (Qutoshi & Khaki, 2014).

Hence, the head teacher's role in the sample school is like 'a key that opens the lock'. She considers herself the backbone of the school. The data analysis shows that the head teacher plays multiple roles in the school. She said, "Overall, I have to see to all the things, I am the motivator, facilitator, academic leader, administrator and a manager" (Interview, January 15, 2015). In response to a question about her perceptions of her role as an educational leader, she said, "As an educational leader my role is multi-dimensional" (Interview, January 15, 2015). It seems that the head teacher perceives her role in multiple ways. Data suggests that her perceived roles can be categorised into three forms – facilitator, team builder and change agent, which are discussed below.

Head teacher's perceived role as a facilitator

The head teacher perceives her role as that of a facilitator. She believes her role is that of facilitator, and helps teachers to enhance their knowledge and skills by involving them in professional development activities. She considers that the most important element in teacher development is support and encouragement, for better learning. The head teacher stated:

> *I am facilitating and encouraging teachers to move forward and take part in professional development activities. If we do not have any motivational and friendly attitude, we will not be able to achieve any single objective.* (Field notes, February 18, 2015)

Head teacher's perceived role as a team builder

Building teams for school development is the main vision of the head teacher. She knows the potency of teamwork as a vehicle for organizational learning. She considers herself as a team builder, who creates a learning environment in the school, where teachers, with their talents and expertise, come together and share their ideas and resources with each other. She thinks that sharing expertise and working together helps teachers to overcome their problems. The head teacher mentioned that:

> *Without having teamwork we cannot achieve our result. We cannot ignore our parents, students, teachers and even the managing committee, altogether we try to achieve the vision and to do this we try to motivate them to work smoothly.* (Interview, January 27, 2015)

It seems that the head teacher understands the value of team building for achieving the organizational objectives.

Head teacher's perceived role as a change agent

The head teacher considers herself an adventurer, always introducing new initiatives. She is prepared to take risks, particularly in trying out new ideas in the school. As a result of her participation in different training, head teachers' forums and seminars, she brings back examples of the best practices, and applies them appropriately in the school. There is a consensus among the staff that the head teacher is good at initiating and managing change in the school. She thinks that change cannot be imposed from outside, it comes from within. It appears that an individual's efforts and attitude can bring about change in the system.

Head teachers' performed roles

As an educational leader, the head teacher performed various roles in the school. Her role is seen as a moral agent – a leader with high levels of commitment, patience, care and facilitative role, and on the other hand, effective manager to run the affairs of school efficiently by fulfilling expectations of the stakeholders in a participatory approach (Lizotte, 2013; Sergiovanni, 2000). But two roles, instructional leadership and managerial, seem to be relevant to this study.

Head teacher's performed role as an instructional leader

Providing support for teacher learning and growth is a vital role of the school head teacher. The head teacher plays her role as an instructional leader, who leads the school by her own efforts. As an instructional leader, she ensures empowerment of the teachers. In order to provide support to teachers, to design meaningful learning tasks and activities, the head teacher guides teachers. She asserted that everyone should initiate change and contribute to school effectiveness and continuously develop their capacity, as well as enable the students' higher achievement. She engages in facilitating teachers in lesson planning, observing their lessons, checking examination papers and arranging workshops, which gave me a clear picture of the head teacher's role as an instructional leader. She mentioned:

> *I reviewed the textbooks, syllabus, curriculum and teaching learning materials in the school. Then I enrich them gradually. Last year we enriched the early childhood curriculum and even now we think that there is need for more enrichment and modification.* (Interview, January 15, 2015)

This is also evident from a teacher's interview where she stated, "In the beginning we made only yearly plans. Later on, the head teacher played a major role. She showed us how to make yearly and monthly syllabus plans and how to implement them" (Interview, January 20, 2015). It shows how the head teacher's understanding helped her to enrich the curriculum for the classes.

During my fieldwork, I found that the head teacher supports teachers by giving educational articles, and by lending them reference books from the library. The teachers stated "The head teacher guides us by giving us articles and letting us borrow reference books. She encourages us to make activities from the reference books" (Field notes, February 19, 2015). It clearly indicates the head teacher's responsibility towards the implementation of new initiatives. It implies that the head teacher understands her role as an educational leader.

Another important function of the head teacher is to observe and evaluate classroom instruction (Gordon, Meadows & Dyal, 1995). The head teacher sought to find sufficient time to get into the classroom for teacher observation, and she considered this to be a crucial aspect of her role as an educational leader. While sharing

the purpose of the observation, the head teacher stated, "The purpose of my observation is to support teachers in their subject areas for better learning" (Field notes, February 10, 2015). It shows that the head teacher considers feedback as a tool for teachers' professional development.

The head teacher generally welcomes teacher development. She helps the teachers professionally, through providing leadership opportunities within the school, and by providing external support for them. For example, during my fieldwork, the head teacher provided different internal and external opportunities for managing teacher development. The head teacher identified the teachers' needs during their classroom observations and conducted workshops for their development. In this regard she said, "I identify the needs of the teachers, and internal, as well as external, support is provided through workshops and trainings" (Field notes, February 16, 2015).

In addition, the head teacher has generated maximum possible opportunities to identify and groom talented teachers and utilize them at their highest potential ability. For example, she appointed coordinators and a deputy head teacher, and delegated different responsibilities to different teachers to develop their professional skills. These in-charge teachers conducted workshops and carried out observations and feedback sessions in the school. This shows that the head teacher develops the teachers using various means. As the head teacher stated:

> *A head teacher cannot do everything alone in the institution. Therefore, whatever human resources are available here; I started to make deputy head teacher and academic coordinators. These people internally conduct workshops and support teachers in their teaching learning process.* (Interview, January 15, 2015)

In response to a question meant to explore the head teacher's perceptions towards a teacher's professional development, she stated:

> *We are sending our teachers to different organizations to attend different trainings and workshops for their professional development. That is why I have taken membership from different educational institutions. If their concepts will be clear, they will teach more effectively in the classrooms.* (Interview, January 15, 2015)

In building a healthy relationship, the head teacher is a model for teachers and students. This was noticeable in the school. The head teacher is good at developing and maintaining good relationships with teachers, students and parents. She has generated a high level of commitment with others through her openness, honesty and the quality of her internal personal relationships. She has started generating positive relationships with parents and fostering a view of the school as being a part of the community. The head teacher shared, "Our teacher relationship should be good and on trust. My job is to give teachers the confidence and capabilities to take on new responsibilities and develop their skills" (Informal discussion, February 26, 2015).

The head teacher preferred to interact with teachers regarding their concerns and issues in their teaching learning process. During staff meetings she appreciates the teachers' work and encourages them to initiate more. They celebrate the success of teachers and students when they perform well. It was evident from the status report that they had a teachers' recreation day to celebrate and acknowledge the teachers' initiative and successful change. She believes that the teachers are the main source of bringing about change in a school.

Furthermore, the head teacher had close interactions with the community. According to the head teacher, schools do not exist in a vacuum. They are linked formally and informally to the social community, and school managing committees and boards. Being a leader of the community school, she strives to build a positive and sound relationship between home and school, and to make parents feel welcome and at ease on the school premises. The head teacher was trying to create meaningful and constructive linkages between school and community. She stated:

> *I am trying to keep in touch with parents and give guidance. At first there was a gap between parents and teachers. But now our attitude has changed. We both understood what our roles are, what the school's roles are and what the parents have to do. Now as a head teacher I communicate with them all the time.* (Interview, February 20, 2015)

It was also observed during the data collection period that the head teacher was communicating with parents in a friendly manner. During parents' meetings she shared the progress of the school and shared the children's previous and present progress in their studies, and guided them to help them at home. They were free to come and discuss their children's problems. Apart from that, the head teacher claimed that she involved the parents in school activities. She said: "We share any new policy and new initiative with parents and listen to their suggestions and on the basis of their suggestions and feedback we make the final decisions". (Interview, February 20, 2015).

The data suggests that the school is very active in carrying out community involvement and awareness activities related to the school's academic programmes.

Head teacher's performed role as a manager

An important dimension of the head teacher's work includes a variety of administrative and managerial roles, including such tasks as coordinating professional development activities, making decisions on resources, school priorities, scheduling time, space and opportunities for teachers to work and learn together. The head teacher generally performs her administrative tasks by ensuring that the school functions are completed through effective planning, organization, supervision and development of human and other resources. The head teacher is responsible for overseeing the schedules of materials and resources. She stated: "The role is such that we have to see everything from leadership and management side, but in a balanced way" (Interview, January 15, 2015).

Monitoring is one of the essential management skills of the head teacher. As a monitor her important role is to maintain the day-to-day running of the school. During informal discussions the deputy head also recognized that the job demanded more risk taking than was previously expected and that the head was expected to monitor innovations and changes within the organization. The head teacher mentioned:

> *Programmes are launched but they are not monitored effectively. Why good programmes are not sustained. It is because the management does not play its strong role over there. There is no continuing follow up programme, where management does not care for that. That is why every effective programme cannot be sustained for a long time.* (Interview, January 15, 2015)

It shows that the head teacher understands her role in sustaining the programmes in the schools.

The head teacher actively monitors, assigns tasks and helps teachers, who are accountable for the responsibilities that have been delegated to them. She regularly visits the classrooms, and informally observes the school at work. She looks at teachers' tasks, examines the samples of pupils' work, observes the implementation of school policies, reviews tests, and assessment information and evaluates pupils' performance and progress. The data shows that the head teacher understands the effects of monitoring in the school. During discussion, she said that monitoring is regarded as fundamental to the quality of the education being provided to the school and embraces both students and staff.

Comparing / contrasting head teacher's perceived roles with performed roles

The data suggests that the head teacher performed both the instructional leadership and the managerial role in the school; however, the roles often overlap in real life situations.

From the data it appears that the head teacher perceived her role as that of a facilitator, team builder and change agent. She initiates new strategies in the teaching / learning process. For example, during fieldwork, I observed that the head teacher provides intensive support through mentoring and coaching. Being an experienced

principal, she plays her role as a catalyst for change and prepares teachers to hold themselves accountable for student achievement results. Furthermore, she introduces open learning sessions in the school, and achieves this task by delegated responsibilities to teachers to make resources and identify relevant resources for the children. It is her vision that the implementation and follow up of the programme is the main responsibility of the head teacher.

The findings also indicate that the head teacher acted as an instructional leader and a manager. The head teacher commented that she had moved from a more management orientation to a more leadership orientation very rapidly. This professional shift can be attributed to professional development courses which she has attended. Similar findings have been shared by Mansoor and Akhtar (2015) that the head teacher's perception of their role remains unchanged primarily due to the lack of administrative support; however, there is an overall acceptance that the head's traditional role of a manager needs to be transformed into the wholesome leadership roles of a facilitator, mentor, a community leader and a counsellor in order to become a part of the paradigm shift. The head teacher's role in management and governance are crucial for improved outcomes for change.

Thus the role dimensions indicate that the head teacher acts as an educational leader by giving professional support to teachers, by enriching curriculum, creating close relationships with the community, and by creating a collaborative learning environment at the school. There seems to be harmony, to some extent, between head teacher's perceived and performed roles.

Conclusions

The ultimate goal of the study was to understand the head teacher's perceived and performed role as an educational leader. An attempt was made to compare and contrast the head teacher's perceptions with her practices, in order to get a clear picture of her roles and responsibilities. However, from the data, it appeared that the head teacher perceived a 'variety of role orientation' (Hallinger, 1992). She perceived herself as a facilitator, a team builder and a change agent. She also performed her role as an instructional leader and a manager simultaneously.

Specifically, the head teacher was fulfilling her role as an educational leader. She was engaged in teachers' personal and professional development. The study revealed that there is significant harmony between the head teacher's perceived and her performed roles. She generally played a leading role in enriching the curriculum, and in assisting teachers in understanding and applying new teaching and learning methods. As far as managerial skills are concerned she had good time management, and a close monitoring system, and used her resources quite effectively.

The heavy workload of the head teacher, the turn-over of teachers and the lack of teachers' content and pedagogical knowledge and skills to promote change in schools were hindering factors. This conflict reminded me that change takes time. Resources, patience and competencies of teachers are needed to implement and sustain change, as already discussed in the earlier sections. For sowing the seed, the ground is prepared well, so as to nurture the plant in a better way. Likewise, the head teacher has just started to take initiatives to shift her role from that of a manager to that of a leader. Hence, she faces these difficulties, but her personal commitment, knowledge, enthusiasm and the interpersonal skills that she acquired from the programme seem to be a driving force in motivating her as head teacher and helping her in practising new ideas.

In conclusion, it is apparent that in the changing times head teachers have to play more challenging roles, according to context. To cope with a range of situations, head teachers have to understand their role and develop their knowledge and skills. This study provided me with a conceptual understanding of the perceptions, practices, and challenges of the head teacher's role as an educational leader. The head teacher is the key person, whose knowledge, skill, interest, guidance and strong vision can make a difference in the school.

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