

EVALUATING THE LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PRINCIPALS IN GOVERNMENT SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF PUNJAB

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Abstract

The case study was designed to investigate the leadership effectiveness of the principals working in government boys secondary schools in Punjab. Seeing the poor performance and unsatisfactory results of the students, the researcher tried to publically reveal the leadership effectiveness of a secondary school principal as perceived by the teaching staff of his school. Actually a specified government boys schools was interrogated, but the findings may be generalized/ fitted on a particular group of school principals. Fourteen teachers of the school under study were interviewed confidentially.

The principal does not focus on the management aspect in running his school. He lacks the instructional leadership of a principal which a principal should have. No wanted potential and leadership characteristics of an effective principal were found in him. The Principal is not a principal who strives for excellence; he just lets the school go on and on. It is interesting to discover that what the principal considers as 'good' or 'effective' does not actually match with what the students and teachers think of 'good' or 'effective'. It seems that there are many 'gaps' between the principal, teachers and students. These gaps, indeed, diminish leadership effectiveness, which in turn affects school effectiveness. Based upon the interviews of the teachers, conclusions are being published for the public, parents and district education authorities.

Keywords: principal, leadership effectiveness, government high school, teacher, student, Punjab

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is always an interesting, exciting and fascinating subject to students of administration. They are amazed by the charms of some powerful, dynamic individuals who could drive their followers (teachers) to produce an intensive commitment to themselves. They are also astonished by the power which leaders are embodied themselves with to influence their followers to believe a common value orientation emerges within the group. On the other hand, they are so surprised why some leaders are so despised by their followers who have only mistrust, suspicion, hate and vengeance upon their leaders. Indeed, questions about leadership have long been a subject of research (Azhar 2014; Ansar, 2025).

A school principal is regarded as the most important and influential individual in any school. The principal should be the keystone of the school system (Qasim Shani, 2024; Boda, 1996). As a matter of fact, all schools' pyramidal, hierarchical structures culminate at the common apex of the principalship.

However, the mere presence of the principal does not naturally lead to the success of a school. As Sergiovanni (1995) states that the school principal is so important that no other school positions can be compared. It is the principal's leadership that sets the tone of the school. And, it is he how has the greater potential for maintaining and improving quality schools (Hoy, 1992; Johnson, 2015).

Teachers give a good deal of credit to the effectiveness of their schools on an effective principal Educational leadership does have substantial impact on teacher performance. School leaders are important because they are directly responsible for the effectiveness of schools, the success of all schools rests very much on the perceived quality of leaders. Indeed, many research findings support that there is a close link between school effectiveness and the effectiveness of school leaders. It is no wonder that the present day literature of school reform, indeed, the literature

of education itself, is filled with calls for better leadership, stronger leadership, and more responsible leadership (Habibullah, 2025).

The conception of leadership effectiveness differs from writer to writer and varies widely. In the early development of leadership theories, research centered on the trait approach focus mainly on identifying the traits that leaders commonly exhibit, but the emphasis was later replaced by the focus on style theories to explain leaders' behavior at work rather than leaders' personal characteristics. Successful leaders infuse a common set of values, ideals, and principles in their schools. The task is to build school culture (Ansar, 2025; Doe, 2019).

According to Sergiovanni (1995), leadership can be viewed as comprising a set of "metaphorical" forces. These forces are technical force, human force, educational force, symbolic force, and cultural force. These five forces can be used by the principal either to push the school forward toward effectiveness or to prevent it from being effective. All five forces are important. The technical, human, and educational are foundational forces which ensure the school to work properly and run effectively. That is to say, these three forces help to keep the school up to a competent level. However, the presence of the three forces does not guarantee excellence. Excellent and successful schools can be achieved only if symbolic and cultural forces are provided. Symbolic and cultural are stretch forces which help the school rise to levels of extraordinary commitment and performance.

The technical force is concerned with the leader's managing techniques such as planning, organizing, coordinating and time management. Efficient and proper management is a basic requirement of all schools and it ensures that the school will be managed properly. The human force is about managing the psychological needs of teachers and students. It emphasizes human relationship, interpersonal competence, and instrumental motivational techniques. This force

helps the school to run smoothly and to enhance group cooperation and member motivation. The educational force is concerned with the leader's professional knowledge for providing supervision, evaluation, and staff development. These aforementioned forces are necessary of leadership qualities in order to run a school effectively.

However, the symbolic and cultural forces will help move the school towards excellence. The symbolic force is the power of a leader to provide students, teachers, and members of the community with a sense of what is important and what is of value in the school. They enjoy sharing this sense with others and commit themselves to the school enterprise. The cultural force is the most powerful force of the leader to establish a school culture with shared values, symbols, beliefs, and meanings among students, teachers and public (Day, 2009; Fiedler, 1998).

As an Associate Professor of educational administration, I have long been bewitched by the topic of leadership and its relationship with effective schools. I always wonder why some principals are so successful in building a culture which students, teachers, parents, and others share within the community whereas some principals are not even able to achieve the lowest level of effectiveness. What are the determinants of leadership effectiveness? How important is the role of principal in enhancing school effectiveness?

Statement of the Problem

The main statement of the problem was to explore how the principal leadership shapes the school climate and results of the students in government high schools. A particular group of school principals showing too poor results was the focus of the study.

Research Questions

The present study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How do the teachers under study perceive their Principal's leadership and its relationship with their school's effectiveness?
2. How would the Principal's effectiveness affect his school effectiveness?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Since this study is a qualitative research, formal interview method was used to get reliable answers of the research questions. Fourteen teachers were chosen as informants in this study. All of them have been working in this school for at least five years and they are very familiar with people and things in the school. In each interview, the researcher guided the fourteen informants through the same series of open-ended questions so that the collected data could be compared and contrasted.

Moreover, the open-ended questions enabled the informants to express their personal views and feelings freely. In the beginning of the interview, the informants were told briefly that I was doing a study on the principal's leadership, that the data collected would not be elicited to the principal under any circumstances. The guiding questions included a general discussion of each informant's background, what he felt about the principal, how the staff and people in the school felt towards him, whether he thought the principal was a good principal, and whether he enjoyed working with the principal. Each person interviewed was also asked about their opinions on the school that they were teaching at, and how they felt about the people in the community thought of their school. Finally, I asked each interviewee to describe their idea of a good principal and a good school. All the teachers interviewed were very willing to speak what was in their mind but one or two of them were rather reserved and modest in evaluating principal's leadership.

Data Analysis

The whole process of data collection and data analysis was done solely by me independently and no one really communicated with me about the inside stories of the field. I had to be aware of the limitations of my memory, subjective and emotional elements and other human attractions when decoding the data. If not, a gap might be created between what I perceive and what the readers understand.

RESULTS

Teachers' Perceptions on the Principal's Leadership and its Effectiveness

As a Man

As a Man, Principal is universally well spoken of. He is considered as a perfectly good man. The teaching staff generally believes that principal is good, nice, kind, friendly and easy to get along with, causal, not arrogant and has good relationships with everyone in the school.

As the Man in the Principal's Office

As the Man in the Principal's Office, all the teachers under study said that principal was not suitable for the job, not an effective principal and not capable of managing the school. Some teachers said that principal was ignorant, impotent, incapable, doing nothing every day and not knowing what is happening in the school. All of them said that principal did not play his role in enhancing school effectiveness. Some of them pointed out that principal should take the full responsibility of the present worst situation. All of them insisted that there is no way of reviving the school if principal does not leave his post. It is generally believed that principal is a very good man but not the right man for the Man in the Principal's office.

Views on the Characteristics of Effective Schools

All teachers under study basically agree that an effective school should have the bold personality with good looks. Though most of them do not agree that school effectiveness can be solely determined by student performance on examination scores, they strongly feel that the examination scores of students in an effective school should be, at least, on average or above. Moreover, there should be expectation for student academic achievement. However, they think the principal has no expectation for students' academic achievement. Students' performance on internal tests and examinations is not the top issue in the agenda of the staff meetings.

Different Attitudes towards Misbehaved Students

Teachers under study believe that an effective school should be striving for excellence and it should enjoy a reputation for excellence in the community. They do not mind working hard for a better school. However, they find that the Principal does not have the determination and courage to change the present situation, not to mention to strive for excellence. They say that principal spends too much time on 'talking about his great theories', 'his castle-in-air words' but not 'actions'. There are no 'concrete ways' to tackle students' misbehaviors and to improve the reputation of the school.

The teachers under study think that an effective school should be with low levels of institutional control and coercive punishment on students. However, it is interesting to note that they think that their school is not effective because it has far too low levels of control and punishment on the students. They told the researcher that it was an extremely hard work to manage students' misbehaviors in the school because they could not get enough support from principal. They could not penalize the misbehaved students heavily because using heavy punishment was all against the Principal's rationale of running the school.

They also said that they felt helpless because principal always stood by the students especially in the presence of the students' parents. In most of the cases, the teachers had to yield. One of the Discipline teachers pointed out that the students were getting worse and worse because the school authority was too tolerant of them and did not stand firm on its own position.

The teachers agree that students are spoilt and have 'nothing to be afraid of' in the school. The Physical Education Teacher (PET) added that they were restrained by principal's policy and they could do nothing. Moreover, it is a well-known fact that teachers who use control and punishment are not appreciated by principal. Teachers who use counseling method to students are regarded as good teachers in the eyes of principal. One teacher suggested that the Principal's over-leniency towards the students would ruin the whole school one day.

School Climate

Teachers under study think that an effective school should have a safe, orderly school climate and a positive learning climate. However, they do not think that their school has this characteristic. It is quite often to see that students are crazy wondering around in recess. Some seniors try to stop the students misbehaving but they do not listen to. They always quarrel with the seniors. It is noisy, uncontrolled and messy especially in the lower classes.

Learning Environment

Teachers under study believe that an effective school should provide an atmosphere in which the principal, teachers and students feel happy. As principal always emphasizes that 'happy environment' is very essential in school life.

However, the teachers under study think that the students are ‘far too happy’ in the school. In other words, the students are given too much freedom and autonomy to do what they like. It is absolutely acceptable for students to be wanderer and road runner. Even though principal walks by and sees students lying on the tables, speaking nosily, and wondering around, he will not do anything or say anything to these *awara* boys.

All Teachers are alike

Many teachers are very frustrated with the principal’s theory. Teachers who punish students or force students too hard are regarded as ‘bad teachers’ but teachers who try to please students and allow students to do what they want are regarded as ‘good teachers’ and their effort is appreciated by the school. Many teachers say that it is futile to push students to do better in the school because principal could hardly distinguish what is good and what is bad for students. The worst of all is that principal does not have expectation for student academic achievement. The teachers point out that if the Principal is the one who does not have expectation for his students, why should they care? Why should they work hard to make a difference in their students’ learning if the Principal is blind to their effort?

No Expectation from the Principal

The teachers under study think that in an effective school, teachers should have high expectation for themselves and they are working hard to make a difference in their students’ learning. The school authority should be able to recognize and reward its teachers’ effort and success. The morale of an effective school should be high.

However, all the teachers under study think that their school does not have the aforementioned characteristics. All teachers agree that the moral of their school is low. There are fewer and fewer teachers who are willing to work hard in the school. Many of them understand so well that principal does not have high expectation for teachers and he will not give pressure on them. Even though some classes perform poorly in the external examinations, the school authority does not demand the teachers to do extra work to help the students. All teachers know that they need not to be accountable for students’ success or failure. In this way, it is common to see that teachers put the blame on the poor intake of the students and argue that the school authority cannot expect anything from them

Low Morale

It is no wonder that one of the teachers said that the examination results of his students were none of his business. There is a common saying that ‘Do or not do - it depends on you’. If you do more, you’ll not get rewards. If you don’t do it, you’ll not be penalized.

One teacher told the researcher that even though he did his work poorly, no one actually cared about it in the school. Under these circumstances, some teachers in the school take advantage of

Principal’s weak character and perform very poorly. One of the teachers had been absent more than 100 periods throughout the whole school calendar and did not hand in their test and examination papers on time frequently. Many teachers complained about him but the school did not take any actions against him. One of the senior teachers asked the principal why he did not take any actions. Clearly, the school authority is not determined to take some strong actions against the misbehaved teachers, which in turn frustrates many good teachers. Many teachers feel disappointed with the school authority. In this way, the morale of the school is very low.

Laissez-Faire Policy

The teachers under study think that there should not be either strong instructional leadership or close supervision from the principal in effective schools. They admit that their school seems to adopt the ‘Laissez-Faire’ policy. That is to say, teachers are given considerable autonomy and independence to do what they like to do. Supervision of teachers and other regulatory means are minimized to a great extent.

At the first glance, the school under study has the characteristics of successful schools — no close supervision and strong instructional leadership from the principal. However, it is interesting to find that the teachers under study do not agree that their school has the characteristics of an effective school. They think that they are teaching in a school in which there is no management and supervision at all. They complain that principal is not able to name them and is not checking with teachers to see how things are going on. The government of Punjab has prepared standardized appraisal forms for all the teachers to evaluate their performance. Although this appraisal system has existed for a number of years, principal himself does not take it seriously. Many teachers think that principal does not actually look at their appraisal forms. Another teacher told me that he had been granted by principal not to do the appraisal forms of his colleagues because he had not time to do so. One of the teachers told the researcher that those promoted to senior posts had never undergone formal, serious, objective appraisal procedures such as classroom observations, monthly tests and inspection of student work by principal. In fact, he wondered how principal could promote a teacher without going through proper appraisal procedures.

It is generally believed that principal does not have a formal, objective appraisal system to evaluate his staff. As far as promotion is concerned, teachers think that it depends very much on how principal ‘feels’ about the staff. However, teachers are very doubtful about principal’s ability to find out the true character and the working ability of his staff members

Visions are ‘Blinded’

Basically, the teachers think that principal is absolutely not observant and is incapable of judging whether the staff is good or bad and he is always blinded by people's 'sweet words'. Principal likes to hear the staff saying something about 'visions', 'missions and 'high ideals'. The staff members also say that it is very easy to cheat principal or pretend to be a good teacher in front of him as long as they can talk. Teachers said that principal 'always uses his ears to judge, not his eyes'.

Over-emphasis on Interpersonal Relationships

Many teachers think that the school is not effective because principal emphasizes too much on individual's interpersonal relationship but he pays no regards to one's competence. Having a good personal relationship is an important criterion for promotion. An experienced teacher said angrily, 'Promotion is based on teachers' competence in many other schools. But, it is strange that it is good interpersonal relationship that is most important in our school'.

The privileged characters

Moreover, it cannot be denied that principal likes people with mild character and he cannot bear people who are strong-willed and aggressive. In theory, principal always says that he accepts people with different characters in building up a team.

In practice, principal only appreciates teachers with mild characters. One of the teachers pointed out that principal himself might not realize that he had bias towards teachers with strong characters because his prejudice was so subtle and deep-rooted in his sub consciousness. One of the teachers also said that he could not possibly be demanding and aggressive because he would not survive in the school if he did so.

CONCLUSIONS

In short, the teachers under study think that their school does not have the characteristics of an effective school and their Principal's leadership is not effective. The school is not an effective school because the examination scores of students are far below average and there is no expectation for student academic achievement. The school is not striving for excellence and it has a poor reputation in the community. Even though there are concern for the learning of all students and separate programs for less-able students, there are no whole school- approach strategies to help less-able children and to tackle problem students. The school does not have a safe, orderly school climate and a positive learning environment. The Principal does not recognize and reward effort and success. There is a formal appraisal system in the school but the Principal does not take it seriously. Indeed, there is no management and supervision at all in the school. The school's programs are not regularly reviewed and no one seems to be accountable for faults and mistakes. Promotion is not based on one's competence but on the Principal's "likes and dislikes" and on one's personal inter-relationship in the school. The Principal does not have much expectation from students, teachers, and himself. The morale of the school is low. It is well understood that the Principal wants to become a good leader. However, principal spends too much time on "words" rather than "actions". There are no "actions" to access to his visions. Clearly, there is a wide gap between his visions and the actuality of his school. These research based reflections are important for principals for they allow principals to sit back and think about their leadership effectiveness. It is an observation and qualitative research based picture of one principal, more than seventy percent of the principals sitting in government boys secondary schools fall in the same category. Reflections are important for principals for they allow principals to sit back and think about their leadership effectiveness as it directly affects their school effectiveness.

We personally observed, there is gup-shup and only time killing activities in the schools. More than ninety percent students attend the tuition academies soon after school hours to pass the annual exams conducted by Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education. Public and parents knowing the situation, cannot do nothing against these principals. Punjab government should realize this alarming situation. There should be strict performance appraisal system for the principals. Chief Executive Officer (Education) should invite the parents of enrolled students in his office confidentially for comments about the teachers and principals and these comments must be included in the annual performance report. Based upon the report, district education authority should take potent steps and bold action against these principals.

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