

## A STUDY OF LEADERSHIP STYLES EXECUTED BY PRINCIPAL AND ACADEMIC COORDINATOR IN ONE OF THE PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN GILGIT-BALTISTAN, PAKISTAN

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### ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the leadership styles of school principal and academic coordinator in one of the private schools in Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan. A qualitative case study approach was employed to generate the study data using semi-structured interviews as major data generation tool. A pre-designed interview guide was used to facilitate the interview discourses. The findings of the study showed that both, the principal and academic coordinator mostly execute democratic leadership approach to facilitate learning processes in the school, though this style becomes varied under different circumstances. This dominant leadership style was seen effective in bringing about positive learning environment within the school. The study recommends that exploration of similar comparative studies in same context may be continued to generate more in-depth understanding of the context and to devise appropriate plans in educational sector.*

**Keywords:** Leadership style, professional leader, decision-making

### INTRODUCTION

Schools exist to create conducive environment for ensuring the effective learning of the learners. Here, the role of school principals becomes quite important as they are the leading bodies to initiate positive reforms to ensure learning. Therefore, such important leadership position of principals to enhance the effectiveness of school cannot be over looked. Hoy and Smith (2007) theorized that, the single most important factor in school effectiveness is the principal. In this regard, various research studies from different countries and different school contexts have shown the powerful impact of leadership towards school development. (Nowlan, 2001; Barnett, 2005; Oluremi, 2008; Adeyemi, 2011).

The leading schools show the division of leadership responsibilities in a hierarchical order. To ensure the smooth implementation of the planned reforms, a second tier of leadership exist in the form of academic coordinators to produce greater interventions-based results. Being leadership a process, the school principals become prudent to influence, involve and gain support from these second-tier leaders.

The styles of leadership has been changed with regard to the passage of time and needs of the situations. In recent time, the autocratic leadership style (a conventional practice) has changed into transformational leader, charismatic leader, democratic/participative and transactional leadership. These modern approaches have their own successes and limitations. For instance, it is considered that a democratic, collaborative style of leadership may help the school principal to effectively deal with the growing demands in terms of personal and professional resources (Nowlan: 2001). The important consideration in this regard is that the leadership should invite all the stakeholders by providing opportunities where each individuals in the school may jointly work to achieve the objectives of improved learning. Hettige (1996) reveals that positive leadership behaviour of the principal and the decision-

making process has made an impact in developing teachers' interest on school activities, loyalty and job satisfaction.

The important consideration is that principals need to shift their existing roles, i.e. from management perspectives to leadership. Additionally, they have to adopt leadership strategies and styles suitable for hierarchical school organization. As various studies show that many principals have been practicing as mere administrators than professional leaders (Lekamge *et al*; 2007). So there is need to revert those practices by giving preferences towards leadership than administration and management.

The proposed study has been conducted in Gilgit-Baltistan, one of the remotest contexts of Pakistan. Being the remotest zones, it represents resources dearth to facilitate the learning processes in the past. Hence, the context mostly shows the management aspect of leadership in the past. Currently, various new reforms have been introduced and the leadership styles have been changed with the passage of times. Therefore, this study is based on discerning the leadership styles executed by school principal and academic coordinator for providing greater learning opportunities for the teachers and ultimately improving the learning opportunities for the students.

## **PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The purpose of the research study was to explore the leadership practices executed by school principal and academic coordinator, hence the study focused on the given main and subsidiary questions:

### **MAIN QUESTION**

How do the school principal and academic coordinator apply their roles as leaders in one of the private schools in Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan?

### **SUBSIDIARY QUESTIONS**

1. How do school principal and academic coordinator ensure participation of teachers and other stakeholders in decision-making?
2. In what ways the principal and academic coordinator create opportunities for improving students' learning?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Leadership is a concept that has been widely studied and researched across a variety of domains including both the business and educational worlds. In schools, Principal plays this leadership role for managing the school activities and bringing improvement measures to sustain the change processes in schools. S/he is considered as gate keeper (Fullan, 2001) of the change as s/he has to deal with wider group of people while bringing improvement reforms inside school. Educational policy makers are also convinced that the principal is the key variable in a student's scholastic achievement (Murphy, 1990). For that the principal become volatile in his/her actions. According to Day (2004), the Principal executes different roles at different time intervals. At the same time, s/he is the manager and administrator, instructional leader, pedagogical leader, curriculum leader and coach at different times in a day.

The important role of school principals in enhancing students' learning and improving their motivation is also recognized by Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe and Meyerson (2005) by saying that:

Teachers are the front lines of learning but principals at the school level are uniquely positioned to provide a climate of high expectations, a clear vision for better teaching and learning, and the means of everyone in the system adults, and children to realize that vision. (p.2)

So, based upon the literature perspectives, it is quite evident that a principal is the key player who has the authority to apply various leadership styles to initiate and manage the improvement process. Highlighting the democratic leadership style, considering a powerful approach, McNamara (1999) shares that the democratic leaders allow their teams to decide how the task will be tackled and who will perform which task. He further adds that a good democratic leader encourages participation and delegates wisely, but never loses sight of the fact that he bears the crucial responsibility of leadership. Advocating this proposition, Woods (2005) proposes that the theory and practice of democracy and democratic leadership is essential in understanding how society will understand how to improve schools. Some of the other studies also consider the democratic and distributive leadership style as powerful tool to convince the teachers and create greater outcomes. In this regard, Green (2000) narrates that it is important to consider that principals must show confidence in their teachers through distributive leadership and by providing opportunities to do the activities. In contrast, some researchers like Goodsworth (1998) and McNamara (1999) argue that often, the democratic leadership style is too democratic and leads to a lack of progress within a group.

Various other studies advocate different principal's leadership approaches regarding school improvement. For instance, Hallinger and Heck (1996) assessed the principal's role with school effectiveness. Their studies revealed that administrative leadership was among the factors that made the greatest difference in student understanding and learning. Some of the other studies (Hoban, 2002; Harris & Chrispeels, 2006) endorsed the holistic approach of principals for school improvement. They enforced that effective principals use instructional leadership approaches to analyze students' data, and determining appropriate staff development activities.

In view of other researchers, the transformational leadership style is considered as most important approaches to produce greater impact on teaching and learning processes. Bass (1990) considers this approach as powerful one as it brings changes in individual, needed to bring change in the whole teaching process. Similar views have also been uttered by Yammarino and Lee (2009) that mentoring is one of the best tools to improve followers' performance. They add that transformational leaders are good mentors who provide coaching to their followers which ultimately show a profound impact on teaching and learning. Research conducted by Judge and Piccolo (2006) also confirms that transformational style of leadership has a positive correlation with team performance. Similarly, Goleman (2000) favors the authoritarian style of leadership, often regarded as opposite to the democratic leadership style, saying that this style impacts the climate of groups the most. Exploring the contextual realities in Pakistani contexts, Alam (2012) recommends democratic leadership style emphasizing that success of various initiatives are achieved when the principal delegates tasks for teachers, enhance their self-esteem, applies participatory approach and assigns the tasks to teachers after their willingness to participate in different activities. For that Kanwar (2000) proposes that the principals need to focus on the latest approaches in school leadership. He considers visionary leadership approach as important aspect to support teachers.

In the afore-mentioned paragraphs, the literature perspectives on various leadership styles have been highlighted. So, when leadership approaches are reviewed, it is clear that a suitable leadership is essential for the success of any schools and to produce greater achievement. It is

evident that schools need effective leaders who are proactive in their stance and their approaches resulting in increased teachers' job satisfaction, performance and commitment. Though various researchers advocate for particular styles of leadership but it seems that any single leadership styles cannot be generalized as the best approach. Schools own various challenges, and leader has to apply the appropriate approach to deal with the specific issue. It is a fact that one leadership style may become effective for any specific matter but it may not work for other. The important consideration is that effective leaders must understand the issue. Additionally, they need to be flexible enough to accept critique by their colleagues by encouraging their voices. They need to accept the given feedback as a tool for professional improvement and apply needful modification in their leadership style. In conclusion, school needs to bring important reforms which are directly linked with teaching and learning processes. There is need to revisit the traditional approaches of leadership and align it towards more productive lines.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study applied qualitative research methodology and the data was gathered through semi-structured interview. Refereeing towards interviews as data generation tool, Bogdan and Biklen (1992) advocate that, "an interview is used to gather descriptive data in the subject's own words so that the researcher can develop insight on how subjects interpret some piece of work" (p.96). In line with this proposition, an interview guide was developed and questions were asked to study the subject matter. Additionally, the probing questions were being asked to gather the data in deeper meanings.

### MAIN THEMES THAT EMERGED FROM THE INTERVIEWS

#### Interview from Principal

<i>Quotes from the interview</i>	<i>Main Theme</i>	<i>Leadership Style</i>
"I use consultative and shared decision for school"	Principal involves all the stakeholders in decision making	Democratic
"We develop scheme of work and school development plan through mutual consensus."	Principal encourages teachers in preparation of improvement plan	Democratic
"There are set rules and norms, I am persuasive towards those rules, and ensure their applicability"	Principal shows authority towards implementation of rules	Autocratic
"I involve all the teachers in decision making process"	Principal encourage teachers' participation	Democratic
"My teachers are happy to accept any challenging task and we do it quite easily."	Principal focuses on motivating his teachers	Transformational
"I arrange field trips and project work to students. I observe lessons and discuss with the teachers about the progress of students. These activities remain helpful in improving students' learning"	Principal facilitates students' learning	Facilitative
"I have introduced performance appraisal for reward and penalty"	Principal shows incentives to motivate teachers	Transactional
"I have developed various teams. I have involved all the teachers in these teams"	Principal enforces team-work approach	Democratic

“I discuss with the teachers informally. I observe teachers lessons and give feedback to improve their teaching.”	Principal focuses on professional development of teachers	Transformational
“The teachers are also encouraged to share if they feel any difficulty in their teaching”	Principal believes on sharing mechanism and team work	Democratic
“I can say that I am working as social reformer, not boss”	Principal believes on positive social relations	Democratic
“The major challenge is how we will improve grades of the students. For that we conduct repeated meetings”	Principal encourages teachers experiences for improving students’ learning	Democratic

**Interview from Academic Coordinator**

<i>Quotes from the interview</i>	<i>Main theme</i>	<i>Leadership Style</i>
“I don’t decide about any issue by myself. For that I invite all the teachers before making any decisions”	Teachers can raise their voices in decision-making processes	Democratic
“My style is that if I feel any problem, I consult with the principal, and through mutual consensus decisions are made for bringing improvement reforms in school”	There is shared mechanism in decision-making	Democratic
“I facilitate teachers in lesson planning and provide feedback. They incorporate my feedback and improve their teaching”	Teachers are facilitated in professional development	Transformational
“I arrange meeting with parents for students’ learning”	Parents are involved in academic activities	Democratic
“I arrange speech and creative writing competitions. It helps the students to improve their performance”	Student centered approach is used in teaching process	Visionary
“There are many people around us who are talented and do social work. For that the school must invite educationist and community members to guide us.”	Collaborative approach is encouraged	Democratic
“I always try to improve learning of the students, but they are not up to the mark. I raise this issue in our meetings and we always try to work on it”	Sharing mechanism is observed to improve students’ learning	Democratic

**ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

To probe the leadership styles in the school, the given data was thoroughly analyzed. The shared data revealed that the Principal becomes more vibrant in different situations and phases. The responses shared by the Principal seemed quite accorded with the proposition that the Principal executes different roles at different time intervals (Day, 2004). At the same time, he is the manager and administrator, instructional leader, pedagogical leader,

curriculum leader and coach at different times in a day. For instance the response towards the question how do you ensure teachers' time schedule, he uttered that "there are set rules and norms, I am persuasive towards those rules, and ensure their applicability" refers to autocratic style of leadership (Bass, 1990). Similarly, while decision-making, the response "I involve all the teachers in decision making process" indicates the democratic or participatory style of leadership (Hackman and Johnson, 1996). Primarily, and to the best of my understanding and experiences, the leaders play three types of roles: social perspective, the professional competency and decision making. Bennett (1996) denotes them as interpersonal, informational, and decisional roles. Under interpersonal role, the leader motivates, directs and assesses the performance of the employees. At informational level, the leader monitors and disseminates the information. While at decisional level, the leader leads as resource allocator, conflict handler, disturbance handler and negotiator. So, these roles were quite evident in the data.

Besides various other need-based styles, the democratic leadership style seemed quite dominating in both the data, particularly the narrations shared by the principal. It reflected that the principal mainly executes his roles through democratic style of leadership. This was also authenticated by data shared by academic coordinator. The responses in this regard seemed quite evident that both the principal and academic coordinator always involve the teachers, assistant head, and other stakeholders for making any decisions. The principal, through a democratic approach decides about the activities needed to bring improvement reforms in school. It endorses that the school observes a harmonize culture (Silins, 1994) among all the stakeholders and everyone has a say in decision-making process. Similar aptitude was also seen while analyzing the data provided by academic coordinator. It revealed that though she has the authority to lead the teachers under her supervision but she invites the teachers to share their feelings. She mostly executes democratic style of leadership to facilitate the teachers. Her response about how you facilitate the teachers was quite advocating towards democratic approach. For instance, she responded that "I invite all the teachers before making any decisions" indicates her democratic leadership style. Additionally, responding to the question about how she handles problems, she said that, "if I feel any problem, I consult with the principal, and through mutual consensus decisions are made for school improvement". So, these kind of responses authenticate that the overall school instructions are based upon democratic leadership styles.

Some of the probing discussions with the principal and academic coordinator showed that the application of democratic leadership style seemed to have positive impact on overall teaching and learning processes at school (Grift, 1990). One of the advantages was that the objectives seemed to have completed effectively. When the scheme of work was observed, the tasks were completed in due dates and proper mechanism was built in the school for reporting of the implemented activities. It was noted that the tasks have been assigned to teachers through their consent and consultation; hence they face minor issues in accomplishing the planned activities. They complete syllabus on time, and carry out other activities in timely and effectively as well. It was observed that a conducive work environment (Leithwood, 1994) was created in the school and little gap exists among teachers, academic coordinator and principal of the school. There is a frequent exchange of learning and feedback process among these all entities and ultimately learning is evident between teachers and students.

Moreover, due to involvement in decision-making process, teachers seemed to have sense of belongingness towards planned activities. The response by principal, "my teachers are happy to accept any challenging task" shows that teachers are motivated and there is less chances of any political culture inside the school premises. Additionally, being a shared-culture, there seemed minute gap in communication process. The principal and academic coordinator are

always open to teachers' critique and prefer to apply their suggestions in decision-making process. When I compare my teaching experiences with such practices, I can say that if communication channels are opened and a collegial culture was developed among various stakeholders, the performance of students always remain at higher levels.

However, it is difficult to generalize that both principal and academic coordinator apply democratic leadership style throughout their daily practices. There were certain occasions, where they have utilized transformational, transactional and autocratic leadership styles. It depends upon the nature of tasks and nature of the issue related to overall functioning of the school. However, the democratic style of leadership was quite obvious while comparing both the data. Though, this approach has shown a profound impact on overall structure and culture of the school but yet this leadership style is not challenge free. The narratives shared by the principal and academic coordinator showed that they need more time to make decisions as they have to consult all the teachers in decision making. Hence delayed decision-making may produce delayed outcomes. Some research studies endorse such statements that democratic styles can often be less effective for complex problems and prove to be more time consuming (Chelladurai and Doherty, 1998). Similarly, as this approach applies a sharing mechanism (Murphy, 1990) by all the stakeholders, but all ideas may not be adjusted in decision making. Principal or teachers may refute some ideas and may be rejected sometimes. Hence, there is possibility that teachers may feel isolated as their idea has been rejected.

Although the school has been improving due to effective leadership approaches executed by the principal and academic coordinator, yet it is observing certain challenges. Though they shared different types of challenges, but their responses were somehow matched towards the payments of academic fees and academic learning of the students. It was reflected that due to untimely fee payments, learning hampers as many teaching-related materials become hard-to-buy in time.

The study shows various implications for the principals and coordinators working under similar circumstances. The findings of the study can be used to improve the leadership practices and to produce greater outcomes. Additionally, various ways to develop a collaborative and shared culture may be applied to improve the overall schools' cultures, particularly in the Gilgit-Baltistan contexts of Pakistan. In this regard, and to authenticate the results of present study, more comparative case studies may be carried out to generate the richer data, so that a more clearer picture may be developed for the systems working in educational field.

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