A CRITICAL VIEW OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: IN PERSPECTIVE OF ROLE OF HEADTEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

Headteachers and school improvement are tightly bound to each other and headteachers (HTs) are known as the key persons with this process. Where instances of school improvement exist there is always an effective HTs involved in the process. This study was conducted to explore the role of HTs in school improvement in the primary schools of Karachi in Pakistan. It was a quantitative study as the data has been collected through a purposely designed questionnaire consisting of 14 items having five-point Likert Scales (0 to 4). The data collected from randomly selected 348 HTs was statistically analyzed by using Chi square tests (SPSS version 10). Fourteen null hypotheses were formed to explore the role of HTs with respect to school improvement and the areas focused were the vision of the HTs, and, related, administrative or academic actions being taken by them for school improvement. The data collected through observations and semi structured interviews, gave the research a qualitative dimensions as well. It emerged from the study that visionary HTs could only bring improvement in the schools with the cooperation of teachers, students and parents/community by adopting pedagogical skills, developing effective communication with stakeholders and by using technology effectively. HTs could arrange Continuous Professional Development program for their teachers to make them motivated, committed updated members of a team, so that they could
bring change in themselves and contribute towards school improvement. Headship at the primary school level was found the most ignored area needed to be explored further and developed.

**Keywords:** Headteacher; School Improvement; vision; development; outcome; commitment

**Introduction**

The role of HTs and school improvement are tightly bound to each other. Various studies like Tariq, et al (2012), Khaki (2005), Shafa (2003) and Memon (1998) reflect that success of the HTs is strongly related to the success of the school and vice versa. School improvement is the single most important business of the school. It is the process that schools use to ensure all students are achieving at high levels. Morphat, (1999) described a set of thirteen elements and activities that are responsible for school improvement; Shamim, (2009, p. 215) recommended six major areas for WSI (whole school improvement); and Mithani and Khan, (2010 p.231) discussed six indicators for school improvement. John, et al. (2011) and Tariq, et al. (2011) argued that students perform better if their parents help them in their daily studies at home.

School improvement has always been a process that is led from the front; leading requires clarity of future expectation, and the roles and responsibilities of individuals’ (Mithani and Khan, 2010, p.230). It clearly emerges from the above statement that challenges in school improvement and the role of HTs are strongly interlinked to each other. So it is true that in the absence of one, the other cannot survive. The necessity of active HT engagement with program of improvement is also urgent and prescient as: “there is dire need to transform most schools (Retallick and Farah, 2005).

“The basic cause of inefficiency of any institution is lack in administration and incompetency of its head, if the principal or HT is man of principles, hardworking and honest then one will demand the same from one’s teachers, and if the head himself is idle and shirk-worker then one’s team-mates will also be like him” (Riaz, 2012 p. 8)\(^\text{12}\).

A key challenge facing any school is to bring about whole school improvement (WSI) as soon as possible, but in such a way as to ensure that the improvements are deeply embedded in the work of the school and can be sustained. Heads need to work with others to do this

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\(^\text{12}\) Professor Dr Mahnazir Riaz (Psychologist), presently acting as Dean at Frontier Women University, Peshawar, and she has produced 13 PhDs and 11 MPhils.
effectively. There are a number of issues to be considered, including leadership, staff morale, how to involve parents, and balancing external pressure against the internal capacity for change. A sort of brain wash is done through training. It helps in building favorable attitudes towards the teaching profession. During the course of training many doubts of the teachers stand removed. It results in creation of love and respect for the teaching profession. If we are interested in raising the standards or the quality of education then a trained teacher can be a great help in improving the quality of education and also checking wastage (Aggarwal, 2007 p.415).

In the light of research carried out by the above, a questionnaire consisting of 14 items in school improvement was prepared for quantitative research. Fourteen null hypotheses and alternative against each one were also established to have insight of the study. The schools selected through random sampling were surveyed by the researcher or his representatives trained by him. Data was also collected through observations, field notes and unstructured interviews of the HTs, which made the study as qualitative as well. HTs of 348 (public: 172 and private: 176) schools which is 9.2% of the population were selected out of 3752 public and registered private schools of Karachi for survey through random sampling. Consideration was given to equal participation from both the public and private sector and in this way 4872(348x14) quantitative observations were obtained from the HTs using the questionnaire.

**Research Question**

The research question was consisting on following three major areas:

**a. Headteacher’s Vision**

Is the support of teachers and students having significant effect in fulfilling headteacher’s vision for school improvement?

**b. Administrative Actions**

To explore the criterion of use of administrative actions taken by the HTs in private and public primary schools, the research was focused on following questions:

i. Is the regular arrangement of professional development programs for teachers having a significant effect on school improvement?

ii. Is the practice of prescribed rules for teachers having significant effects on school improvement?

iii. Are prescribed rules to keep students’ discipline in school having significant effects on school improvement?

iv. Are the arrangements to control students’ behavior during break time having significant effects on school improvement?
v. Are the prescribed rules for students’ attendance having significant effects on school improvement?

vi. Is the involvement of students’ parents to solve school’s problem having significant effects on school improvement?

vii. Is the regular check-up of building by the building authority to give building safety certificates having significant effects on school improvement?

c. Academic Actions

To explore the strategy for improvement of academically weak areas, the HTs adopted in public and private primary schools, the research was focused on following questions:

i. Is the arrangement of field trips for students’ direct learning having significant effects on school improvement?

ii. Is preparation of lesson plans by teachers before classroom teaching having significant effects on school improvement?

iii. Is the students questioning during classroom teaching having significant effects on teaching and learning process, which results in school improvement?

iv. Is the visit and interaction of professionals with students having significant effects on school improvement?

v. Is the interaction of headteachers during morning assembly having significant effects on school improvement?

vi. Is random checking of compiled results by the headteachers having significant effects on school improvement?

Methodology

The strategy of research adopted in this study was to conducted surveys through visits to selected public and private primary schools in accordance with stratified random sampling procedure. In the majority this study revolves around quantitative research methods, however some qualitative data were also collected through observations, field notes and unstructured interviews, and the same was used in support of results & discussions.

The population of study was the HTs of public and private schools at primary level from 18 Towns of Karachi. The stratified random sampling method as recommended (Sudman, 1976, p.30) was used to collect data. Twenty schools from each town including ten public and ten privately managed schools were included in the sample consisted of 348 (172 public and 176
private schools) HTs. There are 1199 public primary schools, while on the other hand there are 2553 registered private schools in Karachi as per the list provided by the Department of Education (Sindh Education Profile 2005-2006). Almost all the private schools are having co-education as well having both primary and secondary sections.

While keeping in view the merits and demerits of both methods of research, the design of study was made quantitative as well as qualitative in nature. A questionnaire (appended below) consisting of 14 items was constructed and the respondents were given five options to choose from (0-4) about each particular item.

**Questionnaire (For Headteachers)**

**Note:** Please rate the following items in the appropriate column as per your practice. ‘0’ means not in practice or having fully disagreement; ‘1’ means very low rate/sometimes practice; ‘2’ means moderate or average rate of practice; ‘3’ means often/high rate of practice; ‘4’ means the always/highest rate of practice or fully agreed/committed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. No</th>
<th>Specification</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Do you ask your teachers and students to support you in fulfilling your vision?</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Do you make regular arrangement of teachers’ professional development courses?</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Do you implement teachers’ code of conduct?</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Do you practice prescribed rules to keep students disciplined in the school?</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Do you make arrangements to control students’ behavior during break time?</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Do you practice prescribed rules for students’ attendance?</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Do you involve students’ parents to solve a school’s problems?</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Do you get building safety certificate from the authority?</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Do you conduct field trips for students’ direct learning?</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Do you ask your teachers to prepare lesson plans for effective teaching?</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>Do you encourage students questioning during classroom teaching?</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>Do you interact/address to students during morning assembly?</td>
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<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Do you make checks of compiled results?</td>
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Then Chi Square one-tailed statistical formula was selected for testing the developed hypotheses, as it is useful for comparing the observed data with data we would expect to obtain according to a specific hypothesis.  
Chi Square one-tailed formula:

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(F_o - F_e)^2}{F_e}$$

Whereas $\sum$ is sum, $F_o$ is observed frequency and $F_e$ is the expected frequency and the SPSS version 10.0 was also used for all necessary statistical calculations and to test the following fourteen null hypotheses and alternative to each one were established against each of the sub question to the research question in order to support the study:

1. Null Hypothesis ($H_0$): There is no significant effect of teachers’ and students’ support in fulfilling HT’s vision for school improvement.  
   Alternative Hypothesis ($H_1$): There is a significant effect of teachers’ and students’ support in fulfilling HT’s vision for school improvement.

2. Null Hypothesis ($H_0$): There is no significant effect of regular arrangement of teachers’ professional development programs on the school improvement.  
   Alternative Hypothesis ($H_1$): There is a significant effect of regular arrangement of teachers’ professional development programs on the school improvement.

3. Null Hypothesis ($H_0$): There is no significant effect of the practicing of prescribed rules for teachers on the school improvement.  
   Alternative Hypothesis ($H_1$): There is a significant effect of the practicing of prescribed rules for teachers on the school improvement.

4. Null Hypothesis ($H_0$): There is no significant effect of prescribed rules to keep students’ discipline in the school on school improvement.  
   Alternative Hypothesis ($H_1$): There is a significant effect of prescribed rules to keep students’ discipline in the school on school improvement.

5. Null Hypothesis ($H_0$): There is no significant effect of arrangements to control students’ behavior during break time on the school improvement.  
   Alternative Hypothesis ($H_1$): There is a significant effect of arrangements to control students’ behavior during break time on the school improvement.
6. **Null Hypothesis** ($H_0$): There is no significant effect of prescribed rules for students’ attendance on school improvement.

**Alternative Hypothesis** ($H_1$): There is a significant effect of prescribed rules for students’ attendance on school improvement.

7. **Null Hypothesis** ($H_0$): There is no significant effect of involvement of students’ parents to solve a school’s problems on school improvement.

**Alternative Hypothesis** ($H_1$): There is a significant effect of involvement of students’ parents to solve a school’s problems on school improvement.

8. **Null Hypothesis** ($H_0$): There is no significant effect of regular check-up of buildings by the building authority to give a building safety certificate on school improvement.

**Alternative Hypothesis** ($H_1$): There is a significant effect of regular check-up of buildings by the building authority to give a building safety certificate on school improvement.

9. **Null Hypothesis** ($H_0$): There is no significant effect of arrangement of field trips for students’ direct learning on school improvement.

**Alternative Hypothesis** ($H_1$): There is a significant effect of arrangement of field trips for students’ direct learning on school improvement.

10. **Null Hypothesis** ($H_0$): There is no significant effect of preparation of lesson plans by teachers before classroom teaching on school improvement.

**Alternative Hypothesis** ($H_1$): There is a significant effect of preparation of lesson plans by teachers before classroom teaching on school improvement.

11. **Null Hypothesis** ($H_0$): There is no significant effect of students questioning during classroom teaching on school improvement.

**Alternative Hypothesis** ($H_1$): There is a significant effect of students questioning during classroom teaching on school improvement.

12. **Null Hypothesis** ($H_0$): There is no significant effect of visits and interactions of professionals with students on school improvement.

**Alternative Hypothesis** ($H_1$): There is a significant effect of visits and interactions of professionals with students on school improvement.

13. **Null Hypothesis** ($H_0$): There is no significant effect of interaction of the headteachers during morning assembly on school improvement.
Alternative Hypothesis (H₁): There is a significant effect of interaction of the headteachers during morning assembly on school improvement.

14. Null Hypothesis (H₀): There is no significant effect of random checking of compiled results by the headteachers on school improvement.

Alternative Hypothesis (H₁): There is a significant effect of random checking of compiled results by the headteachers on school improvement.

Discussions

It is pertinent to mention that correlation of items was calculated and found to be 98% which reflected that the items were highly reliable for the study. The data was statistically analyzed using $\chi^2$ one-tailed formula. Referring the table of Chi-Square (one-tailed), it was found that the computed value at $\alpha = 0.05$ was greater than tabulated value in each case. Since calculated $\chi^2$ falls in critical region, therefore the null hypotheses were rejected and the alternative ones accepted. Therefore, it was concluded that all the areas mentioned in the designed questionnaire were important in the context of the role of HTs in school improvement. Moreover it was noted that the schools were effective ones where the HTs having their practices of rate 3-4 against the items mentioned in the questionnaire, the same was observed during the visits, conducting un-structured interviews and while taking field notes.

Conclusion

The overall purpose of the study was to explore the role of HTs in various areas to contribute in school improvement at primary level in Karachi. The following is concluded from the findings:

1. HTs believe that they need support of teachers and students for school improvement but they rarely share their vision with the students. It has been observed from the schools that HTs of private schools do share their vision with the teachers and students and even with the parents as well.

2. HTs believe in continuous professional development of the teachers but don’t provide opportunities to all teachers to attend such arranged programs. However, the private schools have more serious approach towards training of their teachers because they arrange on-campus and off-campus training sessions/ guest lectures.
3. HTs have a code of conduct for teachers in their schools but they avoid implementing e.g. appointment letters to the teachers are not being issued in most of the private schools.

4. HTs have prescribed rules for students discipline but don’t use such rules during break time when students adopt so many negative things in their behavior.

5. HTs believe in effective teaching and learning but don’t give due consideration to the lesson planning and other related areas.

6. HTs pay attention to teaching methodology used by their teachers which is considered the most important area in teaching and learning process but they avoid to take classes.

7. HTs re-check the marked answer sheets of a teacher but don’t consider the co-curricular performance of the students while compiling results.

8. HTs are using old postal system/ notices in diaries to inform parents but don’t use latest SMS system for effective communication and remain reluctant to involve them in problem solving.

9. HTs of private schools in particular focus on safety of the building of school whereas the public schools have its own building department to look after the issues. However, the standard of general cleanliness of building and surroundings in majority of schools were not satisfactory.

10. HTs evaluate teachers on the basis of students’ performance but don’t ask teachers to check students’ assignment/copies and point out the mistakes.
Recommendations

We have entered in 21st century, so we need to have strong school leadership that should have a deeper understanding of education, a charismatic style and a proactive approach to create a community of learners in schools. It is recommended that the areas affecting on the school improvement emerged from findings are as under:

1. HTs should develop their vision. Moreover s/he should try to develop a trust worthy environment with teachers as well as students because without their support, the achievement of visions for school improvement is not possible.
2. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) courses should be conducted for teachers’ improvement and courses should be arranged as per the needs of the teachers, moreover all teachers should be provided equal opportunities to attend such courses.
3. HTs should develop themselves as pedagogical leaders, have random checks of copies/assignments of students and motivate the teachers’ for the noble cause and ensure their accountability.
4. HTs should implement the rules for the teachers religiously using their leadership and managerial skills.
5. Rules for students should be developed and implemented to keep them disciplined. Moreover there should be arrangements for vigilance and observation of students during break time to avoid delinquent behavior.
6. There should be an effective communication system (SMS) to provide information to parents, Parents Teachers Meetings (PTMs) should be arranged regularly, they should be involved in solving the problems of the schools, give them feelings of equal partners.
7. HTs should take class to become a role model for teachers and planning of any event /lesson should not be compromised for effective teaching and learning process. They should learn technology and develop the same culture in schools.
8. There should be criteria for the appointment of HTs, which should be based on leadership quality rather than length of service or experience or seniority. EQ stability, rigorous training followed by exam should be conducted before appointment of a HT. S/he should be focused / monitored for at least three months and for a further period of three years at least.
References


