Head Teachers' Instructional Leadership Practices and school Culture: Perceptions of Secondary School Teachers

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Abstract

This empirical research endeavours to explore teachers' perception of their head teachers' instructional leadership practices and its relationship with the school culture. Instructional Leadership Questionnaire (1LQ), having 40-items with seven subscales developed by Akram, Kiran and Ilgan (2017) was used to explore teacher's perception of heads' instructional leadership practices. Researcher developed School Culture Inventory (SCI) having 30 items, organized into eight factors was administered for assessing school culture. Survey method was used. A sample of 300 secondary school teachers including 150 men and women were selected through convenient sampling from 30 randomly selected public secondary schools of Lahore. Means, percentages and correlation coefficients were computed to determine the relationships between the variables. Findings revealed that six dimensions of the perceived instructional leadership had positive correlation with two elements of school culture. The findings suggested that head teachers (HTs) should practice instructional leadership skills to develop harmony of mission and vision among teachers and develop the culture of collaborations which may ensure quality education.

Key words: Perceptions, School Culture, Instructional Leadership

Introduction

Effective schools often demonstrate a culture of having a common vision, collective purpose, empowered human resource, data driven decision making, continuous quality improvement and positive acceptance for change (Kruse & Louis, 2009). As a part of the recent reforms in school education department, school heads have been facing pressure regarding school improvement and student achievement (Ashfaq, Dahar & Malik, 2018) as their role is vital in improving the quality of school, student's results and a learning environment. According to Khan, Asimiran, Kadir, and Basri (2020) school's effectiveness depends to a large extent on the heads' effective instructional leadership.

Leadership is a skill to influence, direct and guide one's followers for the accomplishing organizational goals. Leithwood (2004) stated, "Effective school leaders engage all stakeholders in a collaborative process to develop a clear vision, concrete goals, focused on student learning and growth and keeping school's goals at the forefront" (p. 619).

Instructional leadership may not cover all aspects of a school; however, it focuses on the central functioning of a school which is learning and teaching. According to Hallinger and Murphy (2012), it is an influential process of determining the direction for the school, coordinating school and classroom-based strategies and motivating staff by the leader for the improvement in learning and teaching process (p. 7). Similarly, according to Zepeda (2013), "instructional supervision intends to stimulate development, growth, collaboration, error-free problem solving, and a committed effort for teachers' capacity building" (p. 29). Both of these definitions emphasize the leaders' commitment to achieve professional standards through collaboration and professional growth of the teachers which can bring positive changes within the school environment. Lewis, School culture is a tool to influence and improve the practices through collaboration among leadership and employees. Asberry, DeJamett, and King (2016). So, head teachers (HTs) should have a strong knowledge of developing positive school culture.

Culture is shared patterns of beliefs, traditions, and values   that have developed over a period of time and express how school works (Deal

and Peterson, 1999). Yahaya, Yahaya, Ramli. Hashim and Zakariya (2010) viewed culture as a major component of success at the school as well as teaching learning process. Snowden & Gorton (2002) believed that school head is the dominant stakeholder for forming a positive school culture. Heads' instructional leadership practices, influencing and inspiring staff for using improved and modem teaching methodologies and thus improved teachers' instructional practices can add to the positive school culture followed by achievement of desired student learning outcomes. Darling-Hammond (2007) argued that it is not just the traits and training that ensure teachers' effectiveness. HTs' instructional practices that empower teachers to use their ability what they already know is also important.

HTs' instructional leadership has been found to be associated with teacher commitment and school culture (Shouppe & Pate, 2010; Khan, Asimiran, Kadir, & Basri, 2020). School's culture and teacher's instructional practices have been reported to be positively associated with students' better academic performance (Leithwood & Beatty, 2008; Helterbran, 2010; Hulpia, Devos & Van Keer, 2010; Bradshaw, Waasdorp, Debnam, & Johnson, 2014).

Many researchers explored the relationship between teachers' perceptions about school heads' effectiveness and the elements of school culture (Kelley, Thornton, & Daugherty, 2005; Shouppe & Pate, 2010). They also found Heads' Instructional leadership as a significant predictor of school culture (Ross & Gray, 2006; Sahin, 2011; Fusarclli, Kowalski, & Petersen, 2011; Arbabi & Mehdinezhad, 2015).

The main objective of this research study was to investigate this phenomenon in Pakistani context that how secondary level school teachers perceive instructional roles of their heads and its impact on school culture.

Statement of the problem
Effective school administration believes in continuous improvement. Most of the school improvement efforts are cautiously focused on formulation of realistic goals, curriculum development, assessment and evaluation and instructional practices. School's culture is an added element through which students' outcomes may be achieved in a better way. Head teacher's role as instructional leader and its impact on

school culture and on the academic achievement of students are research possibilities that may be investigated comprehensively. These investigations may have helped the head teachers to create a positive school culture for the desired school outcomes. Therefore, the objective of this research study was to explore the instructional role practiced by the head teachers as perceived by secondary school teachers of district Lahore and its influence on school culture.

Research objectives
 The guiding objectives of this study were as follows;
1. To discover the practices of head teachers as instructional leader as perceived by secondary school teachers.
2. To investigate the major features of secondary school's culture as perceived by secondary school teachers
3. To explore the relationship between practices of head teachers as instructional leader and factors of school culture.

Research questions
1. What type of instructional leadership practices HTs had been performing as perceived by secondary school teachers?
2. What type of culture secondary schools had and what were the perceptions of secondary school teachers about prominent features of schools' culture?
3. Does there exist any relationship between instructional leadership practices of head teachers and school culture as perceived by secondary school teachers?

Significance of study
    This study provides practical suggestions for school HTs may assist them to improve their practices to respond the instructional problems faced by secondary school teachers and transforms their current instructional leadership practices. HTs may use the findings to modify their leadership practices into good instructional leaders and ultimately create more effective and productive learning environment for their students. Teachers' perception of heads' instructional leadership practices and their commitment for positive school culture may result in

improvement of teachers' classroom and school practices and eventually improved student academic performance.

Review of related literature

Literature continues to debate not only the definition, but also usefulness of the term. Some researchers used the term instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2005). Some preferred the term instructional focused leadership (Murphy, Elliot. Goldring, & Porter, 2007). Knapp, Copeland, Portin, and Plecki, (2006) termed it as teaching focused leadership. MacBealh & Dempster (2008), Murphy et al., (2007), and Bush (2006), used the term leadership for learning.

Hallinger (2005) defined instructional leadership as the degree of principal/head influence on teachers' classroom instruction and learners' learning., delivering curriculum, provision of resources, instructional practices, development and execution of assessments, professional development, and establishing learning culture. Therefore, instructional leadership is the role of principal/head to closely monitor teachers' and students' instructional practices with the goal of guiding and improving the same and to expand and sustain teacher's instructional proficiency.

The school HT must have instructional leadership potential to carry out these tasks as well to be proficient enough to support the teachers to improve and develop their instructional talent. Tucker (2003) also made same assertion that HTs are supposed to be visionary and instructional experts. They should spend a major portion of their daily professional routine to implement curriculum, facilitate professional growth of the teachers and practice data-driven decision making, and to integrate the faculty into a united core for achievement of the desired student outcomes.

Hallinger (2011) emphasized a more collaborative style of leadership in his "leadership for learning" model focusing on advancement of positive school culture. McEwan (2003) proposed that powerful instructional leadership must understand school culture and form it by encouraging, demonstrating, driving, and practicing a variety of leadership characteristics as each schools has a distinctive culture that establishes the tone of the school culture (Marzano,Waters, & McNulty, 2005).

Schein (2010) defined culture as a group or organization's shared basic assumptions, espoused values, and artifacts. Lumby and Foskett's (2011) explained culture from an educational administrator's perspective. They argued that the administrator's actions and decisions directly influence the school culture. So, they should consider their actions and decisions for their long-term impact on the culture of school and thus on students' performance. Bolman & Deal (2013) noted that head teacher can create a quality culture and make it daily routine of functioning of school. Bradshaw et al. (2014) conducted a survey on a large sample of high school students and concluded that a positive school climate creates productive conditions for teaching and learning process followed by better achievement of students' learning outcomes.

School heads can influence culture by training the teachers pursuing shared mission and vision, building collegiality and collaboration to achieve these goals, participative decision making, encouraging staff development, building trust, care and collegiality, focusing on quality, rewarding and celebrating motivated teachers, sharing stories of accomplishments. Head teacher must train, coach and role model for developing a positive school culture (Schein, 2010).

DuFour and Marzano (2009) viewed that heads should devote a reasonable time from their daily routine for professional development of teachers through effective instructional leadership. Successful instructional leadership empowers faculty and students, endorses shared decision making and embraces shared responsibility for achieving and maintaining positive school culture (Hallinger & Heck, 2010).

Sufean (2014) found markedly interesting results while comparing high-performing schools and low-level performing schools on school culture and instructional leadership. In the schools with high performance, heads shaped a positive school culture for learning, sustained positive attitudes toward staff, students, and parents. Heads cautiously emphasize teachers' professional values and collegiality. Most striking features that made the difference between the two types of schools in terms of instructional leadership were upholding positive attitudes toward staff, parents, and students and communicating the vision and mission to the staff.

Theoretical Framework

Instructional leadership emphasizes on providing help in terms of developing the teaching skills of the teachers for teach effectively, enhance students' learning and learning outcomes. Hallinger and Murphy (1985) developed instructional leadership model and suggested framework of instructional leadership. This model posits three dimensions of principal's role as an instructional leader and their composite functions. These dimensions are; framing the shared vision, supervising the instructional program, and creating a positive school culture. Keeping in view this model, ILQ developed by Akram, Kiran and llgan (2017) was used to explore teacher's perception of heads' instructional leadership practices. Schein's (2010) proposed a school culture model and developed a frame work for its assessment. This model postulates three dimensions of school culture i.e. basic assumptions, espoused artifacts, and values. Each element of culture is interdependent and impacts group members. Based on this model, school culture inventory was developed for assessing school culture having eight dimensions i.e. school mission, empowerment, collaboration and participative decision making, trust and care, focus on quality, recognition, integrity, diversity. These dimensions were extracted with the help of existing literature on school culture.

Methodology

The study followed a quantitative approach and correlational design was used. All public secondary school teachers of Lahore comprised the population of this study. A sample of 300 secondary school teachers (150 men and 150 women) were selected conveniently from 30 randomly selected public secondary schools of Lahore. Instructional Leadership Questionnaire (ILQ) developed by Akram, Kiran and Ilgan (2017) was adopted to explore teacher's perception of heads instructional leadership practices. ILQ was a 40-items questionnaire with seven subscales i.e. maintaining visible presence, monitoring students' progress, instructional resource provider, professional development, maximizing instructional time, curriculum implementer, and feedback on teaching and learning. Authors reported overall internal consistency of the questionnaire i.e. 0.85 and reliability of the seven dimensions of

instructional leadership ranged from 0.76 to 0.95. For assessing school culture, School Culture Inventory (SC1) having eight factors and 32 items was developed by the researcher. For pilot testing, researcher approached for the opinion of panel of four experts to check the validity of the questionnaire. Experts were professors from the discipline of Education. There were few vocabulary mistakes and language issues with seven of the items that were sorted out at the spot with the guidance of experts. The purpose of this pilot testing was to clarify the questions and identify potential bias in word selection. For reliability analysis, overall internal consistency of the scale was computed and value of reliability was found 0.78 and reliability coefficient of eight dimensions were ranged from 0.68 - 0.89. Two items were discarded due to low reliability 2.38 and 2.56, respectively. The instrument was finalized with 30-items having eight dimensions of school culture i.e. school mission, empowerment, collaboration, participative decision making, trust and care, focus on quality, recognition, integrity, and diversity.

The questionnaire had three parts i.e. part A consisted on some demographic variables, part B comprised items on instructional leadership and part C consisted of school culture. The questionnaire was administered through research assistants, who personally visited schools and approached secondary school teachers to collect the data.

Findings

Perception about HTs' instructional leadership practices. Teachers' are stated that the HTs perform their role in practicing three dimensions more frequently out of the seven dimensions of instructional leadership. These dimensions are monitoring students' progress (M= 36.48, SD = 8.13), teacher professional development (M= 30.69, SD = 6.23) and maintaining visible presence (M= 32.19, SD = 6.36) to supervise. The respondents were also of the view that the three dimensions of instructional leadership less focused by the HTs are e maximizing instructional time (M= 19.18, SD = 3.35), giving feedback on teaching and learning (M= 19.44, SD = 3.26) and instructional resource providing (M= 17.52, SD = 4.51).

Table 1
Mean scores of seven dimensions of HTs' Instructional Leadership

Dimensions of Instructional Leadership	Mean	Std. Deviation
Instructional Resource Provider	17.52	4.511
Maintaining Visible Presence	32.19	6.363
Teacher Professional Development	30.69	6.216
Maximizing Instructional Time	17.18	3.349
Monitoring Students' Progress	36.48	8.133
Feedback on Teaching and Learning	19.44	3.261
Curriculum Implementer	26.28	3.872

N = 300

School culture. Teachers opined that the HTs focus on three of the elements of school culture i.e. Focus on Quality (M= 23.48, SD = 5.60), School mission (M= 21.20, SD = 4.57), and Integrity (M= 20.43, SD = 6.71). They think that two of the element of school culture i.e. Empowerment (M= 12.28, SD = 6.36) and collaboration and participative decision making (M= 14.69, SD = 5.13) are less focused by the HTs. Overall results showed that head teachers are conscious about the school culture and they maintained most of the elements of positive school culture in the schools. The details are in Table 2.

Table 2
Mean Scores on the Elements of School Culture Perceived by Teachers

Elements of School Culture	Mean	Std. Deviation
School Mission	21.20	4.566
Empowerment	12.28	6.363
Collaboration and Participative Decision making	14.69	5.126
Trust and Care	19.18	3.349
Focus on Quality	23.48	5.602
Recognition	19.44	3.261
Integrity	20.43	6.712
Diversity	18.72	5.723

N = 300

Correlation between instructional leadership and school culture. Table 3 depicts the cumulatively, low to moderate significant correlation among most of the dimensions of instructional leadership and school culture. Results also revealed strong correlation between instructional resource provider dimension of instructional leadership and three factors of school culture i.e. Collaboration & Participative Decision Making (r= 0.802, p = 0.00) , Focus on Quality (r= 0.761, p = 0.00), and Diversity(r= 0.892, p = 0.00), Maintaining Visible Presence role of head teachers' instructional leadership was significantly correlated with Collaboration & Participative Decision Making (r= 0.773, p = 0.01), and Focus on Quality (r= 0.732, p = 0.00) factors of school culture. The results also found positive significant correlation between head teachers' Professional Development role and Collaboration & Participative Decision Making (r = 0.764, p = 0.00), and Focus on Quality (r = 0.804, p = 0.00) factors of school culture. Maximizing Instructional Time dimension of instructional leadership also significantly and positively   correlated with Collaboration & Participative Decision Making (r = 0.728, p = 0.00), and Focus on Quality (r = 0.767, p = 0.00). Analysis also revealed positive and strong correlation between Monitoring Students' Progress of instructional leadership role. Focus on Quality (r = 0.611, p = 0.00) and Integrity (r = 0.817, p = 0.00) factors of school culture. There was positive and significant strong correlation between Feedback on Teaching and Learning by the head teacher and Collaboration & Participative Decision Making (r = 0.737, p = 0.01), and Focus on Quality (r = 0.832, p = 0 .00) and Diversity (r = 0.674, p -0.01) factors of school culture. It was also revealed that there was low to moderate level of significant correlation between head teachers' Curriculum Implementer role and all the factors of school culture.

Table 3
Correlation between dimensions of instructional leadership and elements of school culture

School Culture Elements / Instructional leadership Dimensions	Pearson Correlation Coefficient and alpha	School Mission	Empowerment	Collaboration & Participative Decision	Trust and Care	Focus on Quality	Recognition	Integrity	Diversity
Instructional Resource Provider	r	0.397*	0.405*	0.802*	0.335*	0.761*	0.323*	0.406*	0.892*
	p	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.002	0.000	0.002	0.012	0.000
Maintaining Visible Presence	r	0.405*	0.461	0.773*	0.235*	0.732*	0.374*	0.473*	0.461*
	p	0.000	0.071	0.018	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.000
Teacher Professional Development	r	0.335*	0.355*	0.764*	0.526*	0.804*	0.318*	0.435*	0.360*
	p	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Maximizing Instructional Time	r	0.323*	0.734	0.728*	0.318*	0.767*	0.521	0.493*	0.486*
	p	0.000	0.201	0.000	0.000	0.002	0.000	0.000	0.001
Monitoring Students' Progress	r	0.406*	0.473*	0.518*	0.435*	0.611*	0.493*	0.817	0.559*
	p	0.000	0.000	0.008	0.000	0.002	0.000	0.000	0.000
Feedback on Teaching and	r	0.392*	0.461*	0.737*	0.360*	0.832*	0.486*	.559**	0.674*
	p	0.003	0.007	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

Learning									
Curriculum Implementer	r	0.513*	0.476*	0.318*	0.465*	0.554*	0.516	0.874*	0.581*
	p	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.002	0.000	0.003	0.000	0.001

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)

Conclusion and discussion

The study found that HTs perform their role in practicing three dimensions more frequently out of the seven dimensions of instructional leadership. These dimensions are monitoring students' progress, teachers' professional development and maintaining visible presence to supervise. HTs monitor students' learning for making instructional decisions and giving feedback to the students and their parents about their progress and learning achievements (South worth, 2002). Head teachers set priority for monitoring students' learning improvements, clear evaluation criteria, monitor teachers' effectiveness and learners' improvement in achieving learning objectives (Hallinger, 2011; Zepeda, 2013). Head teachers are physically visible in all aspects of teaching and learning. They maintain visible presence to supervise and evaluate instructions. They make an obvious appearance which included working directly with teachers and students, focusing on learning objectives; providing guidelines in teaching and learning as an instructional leader, evaluation of teachers' class room observation, and demonstrating model lessons. Whitaker (2003) made the same assertion that being a visible principal is one of important characteristic of an effective school.

Most of the respondents were of the view that head HT provides opportunities of professional development to enhance teachers' instructional skills. Zepeda (2013) also viewed an effective instructional leader as a person who organizes staff development programs, arranges conferences and other opportunities for professional growth of the teachers.

The respondents were also of the view that three dimensions of instructional leadership were less focused by head teachers. These dimensions were maximizing instructional time and giving feedback to the

teachers on teaching and learning and instructional resource providing. Teachers reported that the HTs were less interested in maximizing instructional time. They were least interested in incorporating increasing time scheduled for purposes of instruction. The study found that teachers were not satisfied with the time spent on discussing irregular class attendance, utilize the full distributed time for directions, anticipate time that teachers will begin and end classes on time, inspecting classroom learning process. According to Marzano, Waters, & McNulty (2005), school principal should exhibit an exceptional joint effort with school personnel, visit to classrooms constantly, and provide regular feedback at the teaching learning process to the teachers.

Head teachers seemed less engaged in providing feedback to teachers regarding their classroom practices. They were also reluctant to provide sources for basic instructional needs and materials such as library, essential equipment of laboratories etc. These results are in harmony with the findings of Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon (2001) that head teachers were less interested in talking about instructional issues, giving feedback and criticism during the instructional time, inspecting classroom learning process, empowering instructional activities, and facilitating teachers through praise.

The findings revealed statistically significant association between instructional leadership and school culture as rated by the teachers. The study found positive significant relationship between six of the dimensions of instructional leadership and two factors of school culture i.e. maintaining visible presence, instructional resource provider, maximizing instructional time, teachers' professional development, monitoring students' progress, feedback on teaching and collaboration, participative decision making and focus on quality factors of school culture. These findings were found consistent with Bulach (2001), Schcin (2010) and Sabin (2011) who also found that principal's instructional leadership, had significant relationships with most of the dimensions of school culture. However, the magnitude of correlation found in this study was different from previous studies. Senol and Lesinger (2018) also reported correlation between higher levels of instructional leadership and positive school culture. Current research supports the claim that there is significant relationship HTs' instructional leadership practice and school

culture.

Implications and recommendations

Based on the conclusions, it was suggested that HTs of secondary schools in Lahore also need to focus on improving three areas of instructional leadership i.e. maximizing instructional time, giving feedback on teaching and learning and instructional resource provider and two areas of school culture i.e. empowerment, collaboration and participative decision making. They should have a commitment and deep understanding to improve the school's culture and mentoring with their instructional leadership activities. So, the institutes of teacher education and organizations of staff development should organize training sessions to enrich the instructional leadership skills of secondary school head teachers. They need to provide professional development training for them that emphasize thoughtful consideration to school culture through instructional leadership practices.

There should be weightage for focusing on culture in annual evaluation report of the head teachers. It would provide an additional measure to promote effectiveness among leaders in terms of consciously creating conducive culture for learning and teaching. It was a small-scale research; thus, its limitations of generalizability are obvious and may be considered. It can be expanded to the other levels of education in many ways to explore the instructional practices of heads and its role in promoting positive school culture.

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