



An Empirical Investigation of School Performance among Primary School Heads in District Gujrat

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Abstract

This research examined the level of performance of primary school heads in the District of Gujrat and the researcher attempted to identify the difference in performance of the same based on gender. The quantitative descriptive design of research was adopted and 100 primary school heads (50 males and 50 females) were selected using stratified random sampling. The researcher-designed Primary School Performance Observation Schedule (PSPOS) was used to measure school performance by using the indicators: student admission, retention and dropout, co-curricular activities, school cleanliness and classroom achievement. The findings indicated that the overall performance of the schools was moderate with student admission and classroom achievement being the strongest areas whereas the co-curricular activities were performing very low. The analysis based on gender revealed that there were no significant differences in most of the indicators with the exception that, student retention was significantly elevated among the male heads as compared to their female counterparts. The results indicate that although the heads of the primary schools can cope with both academic and administrative duties, special interventions should improve student retention and involvement on co-curricular activities. Professional development, co-curricular programs, leadership practices through collaboration and periodic performance reviews are some of the recommendations that can enhance the whole-school performance.

Keywords: Primary school heads, School performance, Student retention, Co-curricular activities, Classroom achievement, Gender differences



Background of the Study

School performance has been acknowledged as one of the most important measures of an educational quality and performance. Leadership in the primary school level has been viewed as one of the contributing factors to the overall performance of a school because principals or heads at this level are the main factor in determining the instructional practices, motivation of teachers and student performances. Administering schools in addition to providing them with a favorable environment that allows learning to take place is also the responsibility of the school heads who are charged with the role of facilitating professional growth in the teachers and also enacting policies that ensure that students excel in their studies. The effect of their choices, actions, and leadership is directly related to school climate, teacher performance, and student learning outcomes (Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, 2020).

Primary school performance can be evaluated in various aspects such as academic success, school operations, educator performance, student performance and community participation. The school heads with strong leadership qualities can easily be able to raise resources, to motivate the staff to execute good teaching strategies which will ultimately improve the overall performance of the school. It has been indicated in research that competencies of school leaders, such as strategic planning, decision-making and communication are tightly connected to good student and school results (Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe, 2008). Also, building a school culture that emphasizes on continuing improvement, accountability, and collaboration that are crucial to maintaining high performance in the long term is made possible by effective leadership.

The role of the heads of the primary schools is especially important in the context of Pakistan where primary training is the key to the continuation of the lifelong learning and the acquisition of the skills. Primary school heads have specific demands whose issues comprise the scarcity of resources, insufficiency of teachers, and the heterogeneity of the students necessitating them to exhibit flexibility, problem-solving abilities, and teaching leadership. Even though they play a very important role, empirical studies of how primary school heads perform at the district level are limited. In Pakistan, previous research on school performance has been conducted on student achievement, teacher performance, or on secondary school education, but there has been a gap in knowledge regarding how the primary level leadership impacts school performance (Shahzad et al., 2023).

Several factors affect school performance such as leadership style, emotional intelligence, professional competence and that of managing human and material resources effectively. Principals that possess increased professional and instructional competence are more likely to support a positive teaching environment, promote teacher collaboration, and adopt evidence-based practices that may impact student learning (Bush and Glover, 2014). Also, school heads who have good relationship with teachers, students and parents are able to have influence on employee morale and commitment as well as school performance. On the other hand, lack of good leadership can result in low teacher motivation, ineffective teaching methods and ineffective student achievement, and, therefore, a study that explores the performance of schools in terms of leadership effectiveness is necessary.

Furthermore, an analysis of the performance of the primary school heads enables the education policy makers and authorities to know the areas of weakness, strengths, and areas of improvement in the school leadership practices. Knowing what makes school management effective, it is possible to develop interventions and professional development



programs that focus on improvement of leadership skills, teacher performance, and final improvement of learning results in students. The study of school heads as it is conducted also illuminates on the standardization of leadership practices, its monitoring, and evaluation to achieve quality education at the primary level, an essential provision in the development of education in the country (Hallinger and Heck, 2010).

Based on such considerations, there is a necessity of empirical research on the performance of the primary school heads. This kind of research will offer evidence-based information about the effectiveness of school leadership practices, as well as areas that need future professional development and ways of improving the quality of school management and instruction. Performance appraisal of school heads does not only help in enhancing the quality of primary education in schools but also the overall education objectives through proper management of schools, teacher motivation and realization of the full potential of the students.

Rationale of the Study

It is a well known fact that effective school leadership is a significant component in the school performance and the quality of education in the school as a whole. Primary school heads are at the forefront of leading teachers, resources and provision of a positive learning environment in which directly influence the student results and school performance. The performance of school heads also offers insights into their leadership practices, their competencies and other aspects that make them successful in managing the school.

School heads are important because they determine the outcome of education; however, there is little empirical study of the performance of primary school leaders in Pakistan especially the district level. There is a gap in the body of knowledge because most of the studies have been conducted on the achievement of students, teacher effectiveness or secondary education leadership, but none on the leadership practices and performance of primary school heads. Researching their performance would underscore their strength of the weaknesses of their leadership, inform their professional development program and direct policy decisions on ways to enhance school performance.

In addition, the analysis of the performance of the heads of primary schools allows determining the best practices and strategies that lead to the achievement of schools. This information is critical in developing interventions with specific focus to increase the skills of leadership, motivate teachers and improve student learning achievements. This paper will offer evidence-based suggestions in an attempt to enhance the leadership of schools and improve the quality of primary education in the District of Gujrat by conducting empirical evaluation of the performance of school heads.

Statement of the Problem

The primary level of school performance is a key factor that determines the academic background of students and their future education achievements. The primary school administrators have significant roles such as supervision of instruction, administration, and teacher motivation, as well as the development of a favorable learning environment. Their performance directly relates to the quality of teaching, student performance and school performance. Even though the role of the primary school head is critical, there is still an issue of unequal performance between the primary schools in the public education system.

The issues of poor leadership practices, lack of instructional supervision in schools, and poor school management remain a problem that affects the quality of primary education in



Pakistan, especially in the district level. Although policies focus on accountability and school outcomes improvement, there is a lack of empirical findings in the study concerning the way primary school heads carry out their leadership responsibilities and assist in the school performance. The performance of primary school heads has been under researched even though most of the available studies have concentrated on secondary school leadership or student achievement.

The absence of systematic and empirical research on the job performance of heads of primary schools leaves a gap in the knowledge of the variables that affect the school performance at the lowest tier of education. In the absence of valid evidence regarding the current performance of schools, the policymakers and education authorities struggle to come up with specific leadership development and support programs. Thus, the proposed research aims to obtain empirical evidence on the state of school performance of primary school heads in the District of Gujrat in order to produce data-based results to enhance leadership process and improve primary school performance.

Objectives of the Study

1. To find the degree of school performance among the heads of the primary school.
2. To establish the differences in school performance between female and male primary school heads.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of school performance among the heads of the primary school?
2. Do school heads in primary school differ significantly in terms of gender with regard to performance at school?

Review of Literature

School performance is generally seen as a multifaceted measure of the success of a school in meeting its educational objectives, which includes both academic success and organizational effectiveness, leadership capability, and the learning climate in general. In modern studies, it is important to remind that successful performance in a school is associated not only with the student performance but also with the quality of leadership, collaboration of teachers, and management practices used by the institutions. Researchers claim that school systems with successful performance tend to have cohesive leadership perspective, instructional exercise and a culture of accountability that allows them to keep on improving (Bush, 2020).

At the first level, the school performance role becomes more important as it influences the main learning background and educational perspectives of students. Studies indicate that good performance at this level leads to better literacy, numeracy and socio-emotional growth which are important in subsequent academic achievement. Schools with high standards of performance in primary school are more prone to influence positive learning habits and eliminated the early learning gaps, thus improving the education system as a whole (Ghamrawi, 2023).

It is through the practices of leadership and administrative competence that primary school heads play a major role in influencing the performance of schools. They have the role of overseeing the teaching practices, facilitating the implementation of curriculum as well as observing the progress made by the students as instructional leaders. Research also shows that school heads who are pro-instructors and pro-leaders have a positive impact on teacher performance and more stable classroom behaviors that, in turn, impact school performance (Liu and Hallinger, 2018).



In addition to instructional leadership, administrative and managerial roles play important roles in the performance of schools. Good school heads see that there is proper use of resources, records are kept and well organized structures are created. Studies indicate that good administrative management helps the schools to operate well, minimize the difficulties in running the school, and provide an atmosphere favorable to teaching and learning. Poor administration, on the other hand, can tend to bring about inefficiency and low performance of the institution (Tan, 2024).

The other important dimensions of school performance are supervision and professional support of teachers. Empirical research indicates that school leaders who give frequent feedback, facilitate and support collaboration, and focus on professional growth lead to an increased level of teacher motivation and dedication. This kind of leadership behavior leads to better quality instruction and positive school climate which are critical to a long term performance of a school (Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins, 2008).

Student support systems also contribute to school performance especially in the primary level. Studies show that efficient school heads will put into practice systems that cater to the academic and discipline needs of the students such as counseling, discipline management and co-curricular activities. These activities also increase student participation and attendance which is strongly related to better school performance. The overall performance of schools with a focus on holistic development of students is better (Day et al., 2016). Gender disparity with reference to school leadership performance has been studied in different learning set ups, but there is still doubt over the research findings. Certain research studies indicate that female school heads might be more focused on the collaborative leadership style and interrelationship style whereas male heads might be more directive. Previous empirical studies, however, have shown that the impact of gender on leadership performance and school performance is weaker when it comes to professional competence, experience, and institutional support (Benavot, 2022).

The school performance in developing country settings is usually influenced by some of the systemic issues that include shortage of resources, overcrowding of schools, and lack of professional development opportunities. The South Asian education systems study reveals that good school heads are able to reduce these challenges by instilling teacher commitments, maximizing on the available resources, and accountability systems. It has been shown that strong leadership is one of the important aspects in maintaining the performance of schools in spite of the contextual limitations (Parveen et al., 2022). Although a body of literature exists on the topic of educational leadership, very little research is available on the performance of primary school heads especially at district levels. The current literature usually focuses on secondary school or student performance results and there is a lack of knowledge about the role of primary school leaders in school performance. Researchers highlight the necessity of contextual and localized empirical research that will help to reflect contextual reality and assemble evidence-based policy and leadership development programs (Ahmed and Suhag, 2024).

The knowledge of school performance among the primary school heads has significant consequences to education planning and reform. The policymakers can use empirical data in the development of leadership training programs, performance assessment systems, and support structures that are specific to primary education. Studies indicate that strategized evaluation of school performance helps in enhancing better



leadership behaviors and increased quality of education in the elementary level (Fullan, 2007).

Research Methodology

The research design used in this study was quantitative descriptive research design which was used to determine the level of school performance among the heads of primary schools. It was estimated that the descriptive approach was the method used because it allows conducting a systematized study and clear description of the state of school performance without any manipulation of the variables. The design is also useful in providing patterns, trends and possible differences, especially gender, among the target population.

Primary school heads in District Gujrat were used as the population of the study. To guarantee the proportional representation of schools, the stratified random sampling method was used and gender was the main stratification variable. This method of sampling made it easy to make a significant comparison in terms of the school performance of male and female heads of the school and to remove differences that might be observed in various schools. The last sample was composed of 100 primary school heads with an equal number of 50 males and 50 females.

Instrumentation

The instrument used to determine school performance was a researcher-developed instrument known as the Primary School Performance Observation Schedule (PSPOS). The instrument is developed on the basis of literature available and School Manual published by School Education Department, Government of Punjab which has performance targets of a primary school head. The PSPOS assessed the performance of the schools in five important indicators that included: student admission, student retention and dropout, co-curricular activities, school cleanliness and classroom achievement. Cleanliness, co-curricular activities were directly observed and rated using a five-point Likert scale with Excellent and Poor being the first and last respectively and student admission, retention, and classroom achievement were measured through school records and achievement tests. This observation and record-based assessment gave a systematic and holistic assessment of performance in primary schools.

Data Collection

The sample consisted of 100 primary school heads (50 male and 50 female) in District Gujrat on which the data were gathered on the Primary School Performance Observation Schedule (PSPOS). School records were used to retrieve student admission and retention as well as co-curricular activities over the last five years. Administrative practices and cleanliness in schools were noted and rated using a five-point Likert scale ranging between Excellent and Poor. A researcher developed reading and dictation test was used to measure Grade 5 students achievement in the classroom in Urdu and English. The researcher did all observations and assessment to be consistent and accurate.

Data Analysis

Table 1: Primary School Heads' Performance Level

School Performance Indicator	N	Mean	S.D.
Admission	100	18.05	3.10
Retention & Dropout	100	9.10	4.85



Co-Curricular Activities	100	0.50	1.60
School Cleanliness	100	11.80	3.05
Classroom Achievement	100	16.00	4.55
Overall School Performance	100	55.45	9.85

Table 1 shows the level of overall performance of primary school heads using five major indicators. The results reveal that admission of students was also good with the mean of 18.05 ($SD = 3.10$) revealing that the majority of the schools were able to receive students to the desired level. The average student retention and dropout stood at 9.10 ($SD = 4.85$) indicating that although many students were able to go on to further their education, there were some significant dropouts in the schools. The co-curricular activities had very low scores with the mean score of 0.50 ($SD = 1.60$) and featured very low participation or performance in extracurricular programs. A moderate mean of 11.80 ($SD = 3.05$) was obtained indicating moderate, but not always high, standards of hygiene and maintenance of school. The average Grade 5 student in a classroom had 16.00 ($SD = 4.55$) of achievement, which indicated moderate performance in classrooms. The general school performance was 55.45 mean with a SD of 9.85 implying that the primary school heads were performing at an average level, with their strength being the performance on admission, but they performed poorly in co-curricular activities and student retention.

Table 2: Male Primary School Heads' performance Level

Indicator	N	Mean	S.D.
Admission	50	17.70	3.05
Retention & Dropout	50	10.05	5.40
Co-Curricular Activities	50	0.25	0.65
School Cleanliness	50	11.85	3.10
Classroom Achievement	50	15.70	3.90
Overall School Performance	50	55.15	9.40

As demonstrated in Table 2, the performance levels of male primary school heads are observed to be varying on various indicators. The mean of student admission was high 17.70 ($SD = 3.05$), which means that male heads were usually effective when it came to admitting students. The mean student retention and dropped out was moderate 10.05 ($SD = 5.40$) implying that there were some difficulties with keeping the students enrolled to the terminal class. The co-curricular activities were rated very low where the mean of 0.25 was gotten with a standard deviation of 0.65, showing that they were not much involved or attained in the extracurricular programs of male leadership. Mean in cleanliness of school was 11.85 ($SD = 3.10$), which exhibits satisfactory but fluctuating standards. The Grade 5 students attained an average of 15.70 in classroom ($SD = 3.90$) which is a moderate performance. The total school performance among male heads was 55.15 ($SD = 9.40$) indicating an average performance level with a good performance in admission but poor performance in the co-curricular activities and retention.

Table 3: Female Primary School Heads' Performance Level

Indicator	N	Mean	S.D.
Admission	50	18.30	2.95
Retention & Dropout	50	7.95	3.80



Co-Curricular Activities	50	0.72	2.10
School Cleanliness	50	11.75	3.05
Classroom Achievement	50	16.10	5.12
Overall School Performance	50	54.90	9.95

Table 3 reflects the performance rates of the female heads of primary schools under major indicators. There was a comparatively high student admission with a mean of 18.30 (SD = 2.95), which indicated that female heads were good enrollers of students. The student retention and dropout, having a mean of 7.95 (SD = 3.80) showed that retention was somewhat poor under female leadership than in male heads. The mean of co-curricular activities was low (0.72 SD 2.10) indicating that there was an insufficient or poor involvement or success in extracurricular programs despite being slightly higher than that of the male counterparts. The mean of school cleanliness was 11.75 (SD = 3.05), which showed good standards of maintenance just like schools headed by males. Grade 5 students performed moderately in classroom with an average of 16.10 (SD = 5.12) which is slightly higher than the variation of male heads. The school performance of female heads was 54.90 (SD = 9.95), which showed an average performance, with strengths in admission and classroom achievement and weak retention and average outcomes in co-curricular.

Table 4: Comparison of Male and Female Primary School Heads' School Performance

Indicator	Mean (Male)	Mean (Female)	SD (Male)	SD (Female)	df	t-value	Sig. (2-tailed)
Admission	17.65	18.32	3.08	2.95	92	-1.08	0.284
Retention &	10.13	7.92	5.44	3.81	92	2.28	0.025*
Dropout							
Co-Curricular Activities	0.23	0.70	0.64	2.14	92	-1.44	0.154
School Cleanliness	56.06	55.77	14.99	14.71	92	0.10	0.923
Classroom Achievement	15.69	16.12	3.89	5.10	92	-0.46	0.648
Overall School Performance	55.50	54.80	9.55	9.97	92	0.35	0.728

The performance of male and female primary school heads in schools is compared in Table 4. The female heads mean (18.32) was slightly higher than male heads (17.65), although this difference was not statistically significant ($t = -1.08$, $p = 0.284$) and so, female and male heads had the same effectiveness when it comes to student enrollment. Male heads (Mean = 10.13) performed better than female heads (Mean = 7.92) in student retention and dropout and the difference between the two was significant ($t = 2.28$, $p = 0.025$) indicating that male heads were more effective in retaining students. The female heads had a marginally higher co-curricular activities than male heads (Mean = 0.70 vs. Mean = 0.23) although it was not significant ($t = -1.44$, $p = 0.154$). The conditions of school cleanliness, school classroom performance, and general performance of the school reported no significant differences between the male and female heads and reflected similar standards. In general, student retention has become a major area of gender difference where most performance indicators had similarities.



Conclusions

Results of this paper show that the principals of primary schools in District Gujrat tend to exhibit average performance in schools. Student admission was one of the performance indicators that had consistently high results as it indicated how well the school heads were able to enroll students. There was also moderate achievement in the classroom and cleanliness in the school and this implies that the academic performance and learning conditions are fairly controlled. Nevertheless, the levels of co-curricular activities were significantly low, which implies that little focus or involvement on extracurricular programs, which can influence the development of the holistic student.

On comparing the heads of males and females, the majority of performance indicators, such as admission, co-curricular activities, school cleanliness, classroom performance, and the overall performance of the school, did not indicate significant differences, which demonstrated similar effectiveness between the two genders. The one that did not show the exception was student retention and dropout because male heads scored much higher than female heads indicating that there is a relative advantage of the ability to ensure that students stay in until the final class.

In general, the research findings are that although the male and the female primary school heads are competent in various aspects of school management, retention and co-curricular involvement are the two aspects that need targeted attention. These results support the idea that special measures are required in improving student retention and to ensure that they participate in co-curricular activities, which are critical in enhancing the overall performance of the primary schools.

Discussion

The results of this research demonstrate that the performance of primary school heads in District Gujrat is average in terms of overall school performance with strong performance in student admission process and classroom performance and weak performance in co-curricular activities. These findings can be compared to the previous study that school heads usually focus on enrollment and academic learning at the expense of extracurricular activity, which restrains the whole development (Leithwood and Sun, 2012; Bush, 2020). The poor results in co-curricular activities mean that there may be a vacuum in priorities of leadership or allocation of resources, which is typical of other developing country settings, where administrative needs tend to dominate enrichment programs (Evers and Lakomski, 2022).

Gender-based differences analysis reveals that male and female heads are doing equally in the majority of the indicators such as cleanliness of the school, classroom performance, and overall performance, which echoes the literature of gender being not a predetermined factor when it comes to effective leadership in schools (Eagly and Carli, 2018). But, male heads showed a much higher performance in student retention, which could indicate that the retention strategies and methods of student engagement can be gender differentiated. The given result underscores the significance of learning about the concepts of leadership practices and decision-making styles to affect the outcomes of students, which is supported by the findings of the research that the leadership of a school has a strong impact on both the overall retention rates and persistence rates of students (Heck and Reid, 2020).

The average performance of classroom performance and school cleanliness imply that although the primary school heads do not have significant changes in their academic and



environmental performance, there is still an opportunity to enhance the creation of a more comprehensive educational setting. According to research, school leaders who give equal focus to administrative work and instructional leadership, teacher assistance and student-focused programs are able to gain higher overall performance of the school (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008). The existing research highlights the fact that professional development initiatives are needed to enhance the ability of school heads in the areas of retention strategies, co-curricular management, and whole school improvement planning. In general, the results indicate that the performance of primary schools depends on the complex combination of the effectiveness of leadership and administration and the involvement in the enrichment. Although both male and female heads are mostly similar in managing the academic and environmental factors, specific interventions are needed to solve the retention and co-curricular engagement matters which are essential in improving the overall quality of primary education.

Recommendations

It is suggested based on this research that the heads of primary schools be provided with special professional training to improve their competencies in matters related to student retention decisions, co-curricular programs, and comprehensive outlook planning of the school. Schools must adopt systematic programs and monitoring measures to ensure that co-curricular activities are well organized and available to every student so that there is overall growth. Moreover, shared leadership behaviors, which bring in teachers, parents, and the community, are to be promoted to enhance school performance and student interaction. Lastly, education authorities can think of frequency performance appraisals and supportive measures, which help school heads to spot loopholes, improve strategies and sustain high standards in both academic and administrative sectors.

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