Constraints in Empowering School Culture: A Case Study of Novice Principals in District Mardan, Pakistan

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Abstract: This study aimed to explore novice principal's challenges in an attempt to transform a more progressive, cultivated and constructivist school culture. The goal of this qualitative case study was to strengthen and enrich qualitative results and to address the novice principal's leadership and teachers beliefs with reference to the acquisition of cultivated school for the transformation of quality education. Research questions include: How do school principals find the challenge in reshaping the school culture? Research design adopted was qualitative multiple case studies. Purposive sampling was carried for participant's selection while convenient sampling for school selection. Data was collected, analyzed following the emergence of themes and their findings produced valuable recommendations for school principals, educational practitioners and policy maker's i.e. an in-service Continuous Professional development program for school principals and teachers is recommended to reshape and reorganize the school culture. School principal should be free in formulation of rules and regulations for admission, examinations and scheme of studies. Principals need to encourage collaboration between school staff, in order to ensure that best practices are shared for attaining common goal of transforming quality education.

Key terms: Leadership, positive school culture, challenges, principal practices

1. Introduction

Novice school principals encounter numerous challenges during their early stages of recruitment. These challenges come about as the new principals attempt to reform the school to bring about improvements in reshaping the school culture (Jerdborg, S. 2023). The range of challenges faced by the new principals include their inability to make decisions of establishing a more progressive school culture, their experiences of professional isolation, having to deal with a heavy administrative workload, an ineffective school staff, negative attitudes of parents, teachers and supportive staff as well students (Theoharis, G. 2024). Novice Principals need to perform as change agents and create a positive school culture that promotes classroom inclusion, school innovation, students learning acquisition based on their cognitive aspirations, engagement and support for all students (Karunanayake, S. 2024). In addressing the important role that the novice principal need to play in ensuring improvement in school culture that support teaching and learning, each principal must assume the role of a cultural leader. School principal should develop collaborative school culture, student learning and the development of trust between teachers, students and all supportive school staff. Those principals who are interested in school culture improvement will guide their schools in teaching and learning practices that will prepare students for achieving sustainable development goals of attaining quality education (Simon, M. 2023). The quality of schools is mostly associated with the effectiveness of principal's administrative practices which impact the school culture (Tamadoni, A., 2024). Inculcating novice principals sophisticated leadership traits will definitely help to improve the quality of teaching learning process,

classroom management, student centered teaching, teacher training, critical thinking, students problem solving competencies and creativity. This view lends support to the principal's improvement efforts in transforming a more cultivated school that focus on relationship building and staff development as essential aspects for enhancing school culture.

New principals often have a tough time, especially in their transition of initial stages of leadership. They are also challenged with having to deal with teachers of diverse background and beliefs. These diversities often create conflict among staff. However, the researcher is not confident that this is the case. Teacher training institutes need to empower and license novice principal's capabilities, skills and professional development in order to cultivate a safe and effective classroom culture for students. Consequently, this research was conducted to explore the experiences and beliefs of newly appointed principals of how to promote a more cultured school to nurture school environment with high expectations, effectively engaged students and staff, commitment to lifelong learning, students Meta cognition and a sense of responsibility in students as well school staff (Scallon, A. M., Bristol, 2023). A positive school culture always inculcates school staff in attaining school goals. Therefore, it is essential for schools to have the social and emotional aspirations necessary for school principals, student and teacher effectiveness (Nande, S. 2023). Every domain of a school i.e. students' learning motivation, teachers' commitment for constructivist instructional practices, task satisfaction, mutual collaboration and building higher aspirations are simulated by a positive and a progressive school culture (Kilag, O. K., 2024). According to Grunert and Valentine (1998), an effective and a cultivated school culture may be recognized by six factors namely that is:

1. Collaborative school leadership
2. Professional development of both school principal and school staff
3. Unity of purpose for a progressive school culture
4. Collegial support for joint cause of attaining quality education

1.2 Research Question
This study was guided by research question:
How do novice principals find the challenge in reshaping the school culture?

2. Review of the Related Literature
2.1 Novice Principals challenges of adjusting to school culture
During the early phases of principal's career development, their administrative practices gradually stimulate and motivate teachers to enhance, improve and advances their own pedagogical practices and uplift the school culture where teachers enjoy intrinsic enjoyment and motivation and utilize their energy and efforts for enhancement of students cognitive, affective and psychomotor learning competencies (Ekinci, Kırkgoz, Y. 2023). Novice principals professional encouragement is self-constructed, but also may be guided and enforced by other aspects that all principal necessarily need to oversee for smooth school culture, including: scheduling of routine Classes, administering and division of the curriculum among teachers, assessing and regularly evaluating teacher classroom performance, managing and maintaining the school budget, organizing school disciplining, ability to lead the staff, ability to launch innovative strategies for school improvement, Possess the knowledge and confident with the latest technology skills, appropriate way of communication with students, parents and staff members, decisive ability to lead the school, abrupt problem solving skills, Prioritize the most critical issues (Browder, Y. T. 2023). An effective school leader will manage, direct and guide their teachers to modify their current naive experiences and remolds and rebuild the teaching paradigm into more, meaningful that render and facilitate student's aspirations and positive feelings regarding their learning process (Balona, 2024).

School principal's professional development must be transformed to the teaching process after integrating leadership development and in doing so novice principal's professional development will be embedded in classroom instruction. This contemporary study will help to explore the influence of novice principal's leadership traits with respect guiding and nurturing the school culture. New principal's experience varied challenges and barriers during their early days of induction (Ayyildiz, 2023). The obstacles originate as the novice principals attempt to bring about reform and revision to shift the school culture from traditional and positivist conceptions into more advanced and school where to bring about improvements in teaching and learning. After recruitment of novice principals in Pakistan education system there is no direct training for transformation of professional leadership development or certification for the position of an administrative position is their only induction. Similarly based on seniority there is a gradual upward promotion as teachers grow in seniority and become eligible
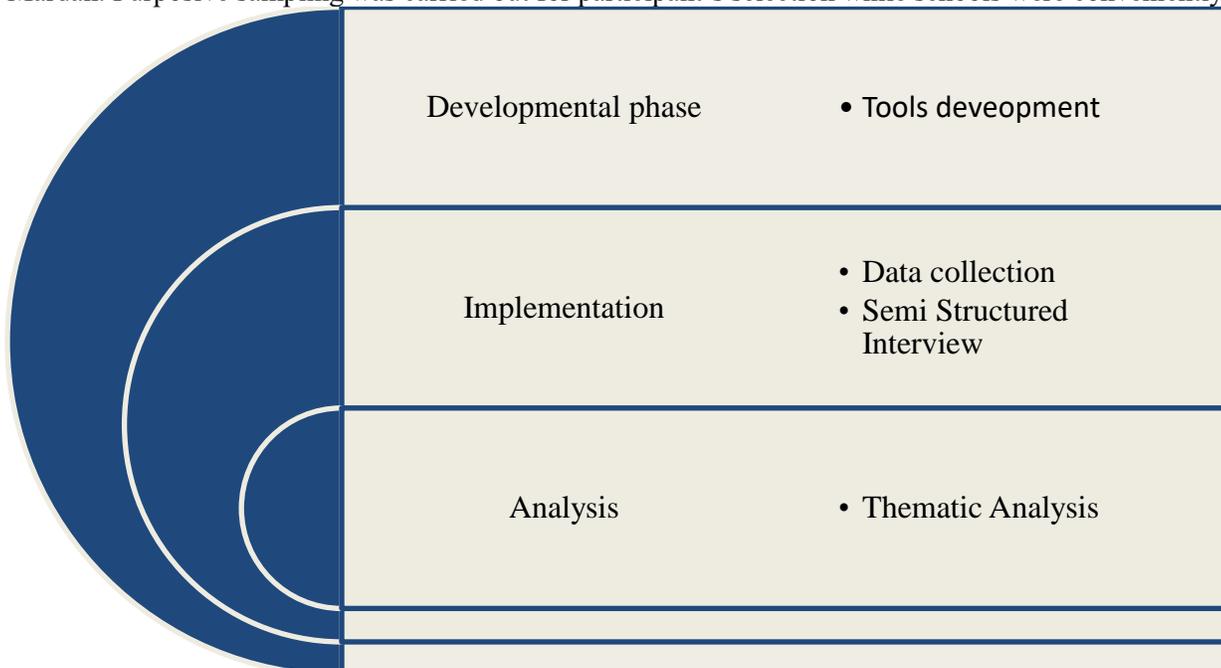
for promotion into principal position. This practice of transition from a teacher into administrative position enables them to receive much needed knowledge, skills and experience in school leadership and administrative practices. Even though the transition from a senior teacher to leader, fresh appointed principals seem struggling to face the challenges to cope with improving school culture (Ahmed, A. 2023).

2.2 Challenges face by novice principals
1. Teachers and parents' negative attitudes
2. Managing students social and emotional distress
3. Professional development for teachers
4. Students and staff security concerns
5. Diverse student's needs
6. Maintaining school curriculum
7. Student's attendance maintenance
8. Misconduct and proper restorative practices
9. Budget constraints
10. Community engagement and collaboration
11. Digital integration of instructional practices
12. Overload administrative functions

3. Research Design
Research design framed in this research study was a qualitative multiple case study that unraveled the challenges faced by novice school principals in reshaping the school culture. This research study was conducted by employing open and semi-structured interviews which helped to strengthen and enrich quantitative results. Te research question that guided this study was how do novice principals find the challenge in reshaping the school culture? After completing interviews, data were transcribed, read, re-read and were scrutinized. Data was collected and analyzed following key patterns and then the emergence of themes. Participants of this research study were comprised of the Head Masters/principals and teachers of public secondary and higher secondary schools in District Mardan. Data collection for conducting this research was carried out in six high/higher secondary in districts Mardan. Purposive sampling was carried out for participant's selection while schools were conveniently selected.

Developmental phase	• Tools deveopment
Implementation	• Data collection • Semi Structured Interview
Analysis	• Thematic Analysis

Research Design Model

4. Data analysis of novice principals and teacher's interview
This study incorporates and constitutes qualitative data analysis and results as directed in the light of research

question. Data was collected and analyzed from novice school principals and teacher interviews and their findings were presented. The categories were broad enough to overcome the challenges of novice principal's leadership in improving school culture.

4.1 Themes extracted include
Theme 1: Challenges faced in strengthening school culture
Theme 2: Influence of internal environment on the school culture
Theme 3: Influence of external environment on principals leadership practices

4.1.1 Theme 1: Challenges faced in strengthening school culture
Principals and teachers expressed their opinions about various constraints that effect school culture.
Challenges include:
1. Students of low cognitive skills
2. Lack in effectiveness of teachers teaching practices
3. Poor parental involvement
4. Political interference a barrier in school activities
5. Inadequate funding and resources restrict access to essential materials, technology, and professional development needed to enhance learning
6. Resistance to Change in policies, staff and students may resist new changes, hindering progress in creating a learning-focused environment
7. Insufficient support and training for teachers in adopting new methods or technologies can affect their ability to foster a culture of continuous learning
8. Teachers assumed that there are principals who are so dedicated with school to offer extra time to students but in some cases it creates problems in the school. Due to socio-economic barriers some students are reluctant to take extra classes.

4.2 Theme 2: Influence of internal environment on the school culture
4.2.1 What Works
1. Positive Interactions

Strong relationships among staff and students create a supportive and collaborative culture
2. Well-Maintained Facilities

Clean, organized, and welcoming spaces contribute to a positive atmosphere and a sense of belonging.
3. Resource Availability

Access to necessary materials and technology enhances teaching effectiveness and supports a culture of academic excellence.
4. Open Communication

Effective and inclusive communication fosters engagement and ensures that all voices are heard and valued.
5. Inclusivity

Inclusivity ensures that all voices are heard and valued, fostering a culture of engagement, respect, and shared responsibility.

4.2.2 What Is Missing
1. Lack of cooperation on the part of parents and community

Policy regarding the curriculum, many numbers of books with huge volume and medium of instruction has created difficulties in the way of learning/educations.
2. Recruitment criteria

Teachers having no professional degree or certificate were recruited in the near past which had badly affected education system.
3. Lack of Professional Development

Insufficient ongoing training for teachers can hinder their ability to implement effective teaching practices and adapt to new methods.
4. Cultural and Emotional Support

Insufficient emphasis on emotional well-being and cultural inclusivity may limit the development of a nurturing and inclusive school environment.

4.2.3 Missing (Teachers Response)
Teachers responded that due to shortage of faculty in school, there are several teaching positions which are vacant for the last few years. It has created a lot of work load over other staff members.

4.3 Theme 3: Influence of external environment on principals leadership practices
Educational policies and regulations set by government bodies dictate the frameworks which leaders must operate, impacting decision-making and strategic planning. Educational policies at local, regional, and national levels shape curriculum standards, funding, and accountability measures, directly affecting the quality and delivery of education. Community involvement, including local businesses and organizations, provides additional resources, real-world learning opportunities, and support, enriching the educational experience. External funding and resources influences leaders' ability to implement programs and innovations, shaping their capacity to drive improvement and achieve educational goals.

4.4 Findings of the study
The purpose of the current study was to explore how school principal's leadership was influenced by various challenges affecting school culture. Based on the results of the data analysis, findings indicated sophisticated school leaders can reorganize and reshape that prevailed positive school culture and enhances school effectiveness. Based on principals and teachers data analyses following findings were deduced: Students of low cognitive skills, Lack in effectiveness of teachers teaching practices, Poor parental involvement, Inadequate funding and resources restrict access to essential materials, technology, and professional development needed to enhance learning, existence to Change in policies, staff and students may resist new changes, hindering progress in creating a learning-focused environment, insufficient support and training for teachers in adopting new methods or technologies can affect their ability to foster a culture of continuous learning, Teachers assumed that there are principals who are so dedicated with school to offer extra time to students but in some cases it creates problems in the school. Due to socio-economic barriers some students are reluctant to take extra classes. Some positive aspects of school culture were found as: Strong relationships among staff and students create a supportive and collaborative culture. Clean, organized, and welcoming spaces contribute to a positive atmosphere and a sense of belonging. Access to necessary materials and technology enhances teaching effectiveness and supports a culture of academic excellence. Effective and inclusive communication fosters engagement and ensures that all voices are heard and valued. Inclusivity ensures that all voices are heard and valued, fostering a culture of engagement, respect, and shared responsibility. There were also some aspects that were missing in establishing a progressive school culture such as: Policy regarding the curriculum, many numbers of books with huge volume and medium of instruction has created difficulties in the way of learning/educations. Teachers having no professional degree or certificate were recruited in the near past which had badly affected education system. Insufficient emphasis on emotional well-being and cultural inclusivity may limit the development of a nurturing and inclusive school environment.

5. Conclusions
Leadership was often a point of discourse in the research studies of organizational managerial behavior and recently, educational leadership is a hot debate among educational researchers (Malott, 2010). Participants were emphasizing on the crucial and essential role of the school leaders and their influence on the overall improvement and success of the school leadership on school culture. Findings revealed that effective and the leadership full of professional development can motivate and lead the whole school staff both the teaching and supportive staff as well the students to revolutionize and put the school culture on the track towards the progress and platform of sustainable and quality education. Findings also depicted that a supportive school principal role establish harmonious relationships with school staff and students, school safety and the formulation of a conducive environment for learning. Development of school cultures through effective and consistent leadership renders a positive impact on school achievements.

It was concluded based Participant's opinions that internal environment Influence school culture i.e. Teachers having no professional degree or certificate were recruited in the near past which had badly affected education system, insufficient ongoing training for teachers can hinder their ability to implement effective teaching practices

and adapt to new methods. Teacher's responses conclude that due to shortage of faculty in school, there are several teaching positions which are vacant for the last few years. It has created a lot of work load over other staff members. Participants believes that external environment Influence principal's leadership practices i.e. Active and supportive parental involvement enhances student motivation and engagement by reinforcing learning at home, participating in school activities, and collaborating with teachers. District education official, Director and Secretary oversees the implementation of educational policies these administrative leaders provide strategic direction and manage the implementation of educational initiatives, influencing the operational efficiency and effectiveness of schools. Teachers emphasized that Principal should be an ambassador of equality, equity, justice, inclusion and fairness in school.

5.1 Recommendations

Based on the results of findings, following recommendations are furnished for school principals, training institutes, policy makers and other stakeholders:

1. An in-service Continuous Professional development program for school principals and teachers is recommended to reshape and reorganize the school culture.
2. School principal should be free in formulation of rules and regulations for admission, examinations and scheme of studies.
3. It was found in this research study that there is lack of parental involvement in their children academics. Parents need to give more attention to their children schooling and maintain a proper communication with school principals. At the time of admission agreement may be signed with the parents that they have to visit at least once in a month to know the progress of their child.
4. Principals need to encourage collaboration between school staff, in order to ensure that best practices are shared for attaining common goal of transforming quality education.

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