



Successful leadership practices of head teachers for school improvement

Some evidence from Pakistan

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Abstract

Purpose – The main purpose of this study is to identify the successful leadership practices of head teachers for school improvement at secondary level in Pakistan.

Design/methodology/approach – The study was descriptive (survey type) in nature. It was conducted on a sample of 351 secondary school head teachers, 702 elementary and secondary school teachers working in the government secondary schools of Punjab province. Data were collected using a mixed-methods research design that included: review of related literature, documents indicating school achievements and student attainment, questionnaires and in-depth semi-structured interviews with different stakeholders including the head teachers, teachers, parents and students. The validity and reliability of the instruments was ensured through experts' opinions and pilot testing in mid-2007; the overall reliability was established at 0.923 alpha level.

Findings – The findings of the study revealed that the majority of the head teachers of successful schools developed a common and shared school vision and promoted a culture of collaboration, support and trust. They empowered others to lead and distributed leadership responsibilities throughout the school; involved different stakeholders in the process of decision making; developed and maintained good relationships among different personnel of school community. They emphasised the professional development of teachers as well as themselves, and involved parents and community in the process of school improvement.

Practical implications – The findings of this article may be useful for other countries of almost similar socio-economic status, to improve quality of teaching and learning at secondary level.

Originality/value – The paper shows that policy makers, administrators, managers and head teachers at secondary school level may improve school performance by adopting effective strategies for school improvement in Pakistan.

Keywords Successful leadership, Leadership practices, Principals, School improvement, Secondary schools, Empowerment, Pakistan

Paper type Research paper



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Introduction

The highest quality of education at all levels is, undoubtedly, a goal aspired to in all countries. The achievement of such is dependent on many factors including numerous personnel within each education system. In particular, leaders in educational institutions assume essential roles in achieving the measure of quality to which all aspire. Research on effective and successful schools, for example, has shown the importance of effective leadership. Hughes and Ubben (1989) have emphasised Edmonds' observation that "there may be some bad schools here and there with good head teachers but I have never seen an effective school that had a bad head teacher".

Importance of school leadership for school effectiveness and school improvement has been the subject of research throughout the countries. Different countries and education systems have introduced educational reforms from time to time and emphasised on the importance of leadership for school effectiveness and improvement. Researchers and practitioners from the international field of school effectiveness and improvement have constantly highlighted the important role of school leadership for school improvement (Gurr *et al.*, 2005; Hargreaves *et al.*, 1998; Van Velzen *et al.*, 1985; West *et al.*, 2000). Different researchers have identified strong leadership as one of the most important factors of effective and successful schools (Bell *et al.*, 2003; Dinham, 2005; Fullan, 2001; Mortimore, 1993; Townsend, 2007). Day *et al.* (2006) found the quality of school leadership as one of the major factors which affected teachers' commitment and their motivation to remain at or leave a school. Hopkins (2001) and Sammons (1999) argued that quality of leadership positively enhances teaching and learning. Wallace (2002) stated that school leadership has a significant impact upon school effectiveness and school improvement.

Similarly, there is a plethora of research that indicates the significant effect of school leadership on students' outcomes (Bishop, 2004; Leithwood *et al.*, 2006; Leithwood *et al.*, 2004; Marzano *et al.*, 2005; Mulford, 2003; Mulford and Silins, 2003). Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) argued that effective leaders employed an indirect but powerful influence on school effectiveness and students' achievement. Caldwell (1998) demonstrated that head teachers played a key strategic and empowering role in linking structural aspect of reform to teaching learning process and students' outcomes. Ainley *et al.* (2005, p. 12) also noted that principals play a key role in establishing cultures that are professionally stimulating for teachers which increase their sense of efficacy and beliefs that have the capacity to make a difference to students' learning. Looking into literature, an agreement seems among researchers that leadership is one of the significant factors for school effectiveness and successful schools are associated with the activities of effective leadership.

Despite the importance of leadership for school effectiveness and school improvement, a key question always remains in the mind of researchers that what are effective leadership and what type of leadership contributes more effectively towards school improvement (Leithwood and Riehl, 2003). The researchers studied this phenomenon from different angles and presented different models and approaches of leadership for school effectiveness and improvement (Bush and Glover, 2003). In the early, the emphasis of school leadership research was focused on the activities of individuals (Bridges, 1982) and successful leadership practices were associated with these individuals (Leithwood, 2005). But with the increase of educational reforms like site-based management, career ladders for teachers and mentor teacher programmes, the focus of school leadership research has been changed and researchers started to focus not only on the leadership activities of school heads, but also on the leadership employed by other stakeholders of school community (Weiss and Cambone, 1994).

In view of the above literature review, it is evident that effective and successful schools are associated with the activities of effective leadership of head teachers. It is needed to identify the successful and effective leadership practices of head teachers in different context. The researcher, therefore, intended to identify the leadership practices of head teachers of successful schools at secondary level in Pakistan. The primary aim of this study is to contribute to the knowledge and understanding of successful leadership practices in schools through literature review and evidence obtained by this study. To achieve the objective of the study "to identify the successful

leadership practices of head teachers of secondary schools in Pakistan”, following core research questions were formulated which are addressed in this study:

RQ1. What type of leadership practices are employed by the head teachers of successful schools Pakistan?

RQ2. Is there any similarity among leadership practices of head teachers of these schools?

RQ3. Is there any difference between the opinions of head teachers and their subordinates regarding their leadership practices?

Method and procedure

Selection of sample for survey

There were 4,545 government secondary schools in 35 districts of the Punjab province with the break-up of two-third in rural and one-third in urban areas (Government of Punjab, 2007). Estimated teachers in these schools were 84,486 (Government of Pakistan, 2007). A sample of 351 head teachers and 702 teachers was drawn by using stratified and simple random sampling techniques. After doing necessary stratification, in the first step, one-third (12) districts were selected at random. In second step, from each district, 20 percent secondary schools from both rural and urban sector were selected through proportionate stratified and simple random sampling techniques. In this way, 351 secondary schools were selected for conducting of this study. In third step, the sample of head teachers and teachers was drawn in the way that from each selected secondary school, the head teacher, one secondary and one elementary school teachers were selected by using simple random sampling technique. In this way, the total sample comprised of 351 head teachers and 702 teachers.

Selection of successful schools

Successful schools were identified on the basis of reputation of the schools, recognized success of the head teachers by peers and evidence of improved students' outcomes over time (Gurr *et al.*, 2005). These outcomes were measured on the basis of annual examination results of grade 10th conducted by the various Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISEs) of Punjab province in 2005 to 2007, through positive school review reports and other data such as: staff opinions; students' participation, engagement and satisfaction; and students' attendance retention (Gurr *et al.*, 2005). Of 351 secondary schools, 105 schools were identified as successful schools. From these schools data were collected to explore the successful leadership practices of head teachers.

Instrumentation and data collection

Data were collected using a mixed-methods research design that includes: review of related literature, documents indicating school achievements and students' attainment, questionnaire and in-depth semi-structured interviews with different stakeholders including the head teachers, teachers, parents and students. The main purpose of using mixed-methods research design was to make the research findings more reliable and valid, and to reduce the level of inherent bias by comparing sets of data, i.e. “data triangulation” (Gurr *et al.*, 2005; Harris, 2004; Osseo-Asare *et al.*, 2005).

The study was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, a descriptive survey was conducted in 351 secondary schools to identify the successful schools. A total of 1,053 questionnaires were administered to head teachers and teachers of selected schools in 12 districts of Punjab province. The data were collected either personally or through mail with necessary follow up through personal visits and on telephone. The overall response rate from head teachers and teachers was 84 percent, from 294 sampled secondary schools. In addition, a wide range of documentary and contextual data, where available, was also collected. Successful schools were identified and selected for second phase of the study.

In the second phase of the study, data were collected from successful schools by using a questionnaire followed by semi-structured interviews to obtain descriptive accounts of best leadership practices. The questionnaire contained three parts:

- (1) demographic information;
- (2) 62-items, each at five-point rating scale (Likert Scale), related to leadership practices of head teachers ranging from “1” indicating never to “5” indicating always in terms of how frequently they practiced each of them; and
- (3) four open-ended questions to invite the opinions of participants for deep reflection.

The validity and reliability of the instrument were ensured through experts’ opinions and pilot testing in the field in mid-2007. The overall reliability of the questionnaire was established at 0.923 Alpha, which was acceptable to launch the study at large scale (Gay, 2002).

A total of 315 questionnaires were administered to 105 head teachers and 210 teachers of secondary schools. The response rate was 92 percent that was encouraging. This was followed by semi-structured interviews with 12 head teachers, 24 teachers, 24 parents and 120 students. The head teachers, teachers and parents were interviewed individually but students were interviewed in peer group. Clear sets of ethical and practical guidelines were agreed with interviewees in the early stages of the study. About 72 interviews were conducted in total. All interviews were tape-recorded and these were fully transcribed prior to inductive analysis. In addition, a wide range of documentary and contextual data were also collected at each school.

Data presentation and analysis

The responses to the questionnaires were presented and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 14 for Windows. The opinions of interviewees were transcribed from tape recordings and analyzed using NVivo software. The internal documents submitted as evidence of practices were also analyzed. This analysis led to the emergence of a number of common themes and key findings. These findings from quantitative survey are reported along with illustrative qualitative responses from open-ended items and interview protocols which are outlined in the next section.

Discussion of results

Demographical feature of participants

The descriptive statistics revealed three major demographic features:

- (1) response rate;
- (2) academic and professional qualifications; and
- (3) teaching and administrative experience of the respondents.

Of the total 290 respondents, 102 (35 percent) were urban and 188 (65 percent) were rural; 139 (48 percent) were female and 151 (52 percent) were male. Similarly, against the total sample of 105 head teachers and 210 teachers, 95 (90 percent) head teachers and 195 (93 percent) teachers responded to the questionnaire. The second demographic feature studied was respondents' qualifications: both academic and professional. It was found that a little less than two-thirds of the respondents held academic qualification as master degree in any subject or content area. The academic qualification ranked at second was BA or BSc. A few (3 percent) of the respondents held a MPhil. Hence, a marked majority of the respondents held a university degree, which is now a pre-requisite qualification to teach at primary level in the Punjab province. With regard to professional qualification, the highest percentage (45 percent) was those holding MEd or MA Education. Those who held BEd or CT were equal in proportion – all these comprised of 55 percent of the total. The third demographic feature was teaching and administrative experience of respondents. Analysis reveals that about two-third of the respondents held teaching experience more than five years. A little less than half of them held an experience of more than ten years. Two of the ten respondents held teaching experience of more than 15 years. With regard to administrative experience, two of the ten respondents held administrative experience five or less than five years; about half of them held an administrative experience of 6-15 years while about a quarter of the respondents held administrative experience of more than 15 years.

Leadership practices of successful schools' heads

Part-II of the questionnaire contained 62 items, each at five-point rating scale. A factor analysis on Likert-type survey items was used as a data reduction tool. The analysis involved Varimax rotation and Kaiser normalization, which helped to determine the eight factors of head teachers' successful leadership practices. With the Varimax rotation, the factors were orthogonal (uncorrelated) and independent from one another even if some variables loaded on more than one factor (Kim and Mueller, 1982; Khan *et al.*, 2009). With a sample size greater than 100, loadings of at least 0.40 were considered important and were used to determine which variables were included in a factor (Hair *et al.*, 1998; Khan *et al.*, 2009). Extracted factors were examined and named based on an analysis of the instrument items which loaded on each one. The factor analysis produced eight conceptual factors i.e. shared school vision, collaborative school culture, distribution of leadership responsibilities, consultation and involvement of staff, instructional and mentoring support, interpersonal relationships, professional development and parental and community involvement.

Besides the item-wise analysis, factor-wise analysis was also done to view the picture of the items on each major aspect as a whole. Both item-wise and factor-wise analysis was made in terms of mean, standard deviation and sig. 2-tailed *t*-test. Analysis indicates that the mean scores of all the eight major aspects of head teachers' successful leadership practices met the criterion mean score of 3.0. The ranking on the basis of mean score shows that respondents had more positive opinions about the aspect of "consultation and involvement of staff" and the least positive in regard to "professional development". The other aspects were lying somewhere in the middle (see Table I):

- distribution of leadership responsibilities at rank 2;
- promotion of interpersonal relationships at rank 3;

- promotion of collaborative school culture at rank 4;
- development of shared school vision at rank 5;
- instructional and mentoring support at rank 6; and
- parents and community involvement at rank 7.

One of the key concerns of the study was to investigate the difference in the perceptions and opinions of head teachers and their subordinates in regard to the eight major aspects of head teachers' leadership practices. Independent sample *t*-test was used to observe the significant difference at 0.05 level of significance. Table II displays that the mean score of head teachers about all the aspects of successful leadership practices was greater than teachers mean score. It seems that head teachers had relatively over-estimated their contribution as compared to teachers. It is interesting to note that previous researches (McCall *et al.*, 2001; Mulford, 2007; Mulford and Hogan, 1999; Mulford *et al.*, 2001; Mulford *et al.*, 2007; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007) had also mentioned that head teachers can over-estimate their contribution as compared to their teachers.

| Head leadership practices subscale | Items | Mean | SD | Rank | Cronbach's alpha |
|--|-------|------|------|------|------------------|
| Developing school vision | 1-6 | 3.72 | 1.01 | 5 | 0.901 |
| Promotion of collaborative school culture | 7-15 | 3.74 | 1.07 | 4 | 0.914 |
| Distribution of leadership responsibilities | 16-26 | 3.79 | 1.00 | 2 | 0.892 |
| Involvement and consultation with staff | 27-33 | 3.84 | 1.15 | 1 | 0.938 |
| Establishment of interpersonal relationships | 34-41 | 3.78 | 1.14 | 3 | 0.907 |
| Instructional and mentoring support | 42-49 | 3.68 | 1.16 | 6 | 0.934 |
| Professional development | 50-56 | 3.57 | 1.09 | 8 | 0.912 |
| Parental and community involvement | 57-62 | 3.67 | 1.05 | 7 | 0.901 |
| Overall | 62 | 3.72 | 0.77 | | 0.923 |

Note: Criterion mean = 3; *n* = 290

Table I. Information on eight major aspects of successful schools leadership practices of heads based on Likert type items

| Major aspects of head teachers' leadership practices | Head teachers (<i>n</i> = 95) | | Teachers (<i>n</i> = 195) | | <i>t</i> | <i>t</i> -test Sig.* (two-tail) |
|--|--------------------------------|------|----------------------------|------|----------|---------------------------------|
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | | |
| Developing school vision | 4.03 | 0.56 | 3.41 | 0.87 | 2.364 | 0.001 |
| Promotion of collaborative school culture | 3.94 | 0.78 | 3.54 | 0.71 | -5.527 | 0.000 |
| Distribution of leadership responsibilities | 4.17 | 0.63 | 3.41 | 0.82 | -2.18 | 0.011 |
| Involvement and consultation with staff | 4.42 | 1.16 | 3.26 | 0.89 | -1.67 | 0.010 |
| Establishment of interpersonal relationship | 3.93 | 0.94 | 3.63 | 1.07 | -3.632 | 0.000 |
| Instructional and mentoring support | 3.89 | 0.79 | 3.47 | 0.84 | -4.038 | 0.016 |
| Professional development | 3.84 | 0.62 | 3.30 | 0.75 | -4.86 | 0.000 |
| Parental and community involvement | 3.88 | 0.66 | 3.46 | 0.77 | -5.06 | 0.000 |

Notes: **p* < 0.05; *df* = 134

Table II. Comparison of the teachers' and head teachers' perceptions about the eight major aspects of successful leadership practices of heads using *t*-test

The main purpose of the study is to identify the leadership practices of head teachers of successful secondary schools. The results from the quantitative data followed by illustrative qualitative responses of the participants are discussed next.

Development of shared school vision

The first major aspect of head teachers' leadership practices was development of collective and shared school vision. Analysis of the items related to this aspect reveals that about two-third (65 percent) of the head teachers always or mostly developed a common and shared school vision while about a quarter (23 percent) of the head teachers rarely or sometimes developed a common and shared school vision. Findings indicate that about seven of the ten (71 percent) head teachers frequently consulted and involved staff members in developing the school vision while six of the ten (59 percent) head teachers provided clear expectations for students, staff and parents about teaching and learning. A little more than half (52 percent) of the head teachers always or mostly determined school priorities through detailed discussions with different stakeholders. A little less than three-quarters (73 percent) of the head teachers worked towards consensus in establishing priorities for school goals/vision while about two-thirds (68 percent) of the heads communicated their vision through relationships with staff, students and other personnel of the school community, as can be seen in Table III.

It is interesting to note that these findings are in line with the previous research studies as Gurr *et al.* (2005), Mulford and Edmunds (2009) and Mulford *et al.* (2009) found that heads of successful schools developed collective and shared vision and this vision was articulated and reinforced on a regular basis. Leithwood (2005) reviewed successful leadership practices of head teachers identified in the seven countries reports and found that all successful leaders developed a shared vision of the future, built consensus about relevant short-term goals and demonstrated high expectations for colleagues' work.

Promotion of collaborative school culture

The second main aspect of heads' leadership practices was development and promotion of collaborative school culture. Overall analysis indicates that two-thirds (66

| Items | Extent of practices % | | | Mean | SD |
|---|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------|------|------|
| | Never | Rarely/ sometimes | Mostly/ always | | |
| <i>Head teacher:</i> | | | | | |
| Develops a common and shared school vision | 10 | 19 | 71 | 4.07 | 0.91 |
| Consults and involves staff in developing the school vision | 9 | 20 | 71 | 3.79 | 0.83 |
| Provides clear expectations for students, staff and parents about teaching and learning | 13 | 28 | 59 | 3.30 | 0.92 |
| Determines school priorities through detailed discussions with all stakeholders | 15 | 33 | 51 | 3.49 | 1.02 |
| Works towards consensus in establishing priorities for school goals/vision | 11 | 16 | 73 | 3.97 | 1.17 |
| Communicates school vision through relationships with all stakeholders | 11 | 21 | 68 | 3.72 | 1.23 |
| Overall | 12 | 23 | 65 | 3.72 | 1.01 |

Table III.
Participants' opinions about "development of shared school vision"

| Items | Extent of practices % | | | Mean | SD |
|--|-----------------------|-------------------|----------------|------|------|
| | Never | Rarely/ sometimes | Mostly/ always | | |
| <i>Head teacher</i> | | | | | |
| Develops a positive, caring and supportive school culture | 10 | 22 | 68 | 3.86 | 1.14 |
| Builds collaborative structures for working together | 7 | 21 | 72 | 3.76 | 0.87 |
| Develops confidence, respect, trust and encouragement among staff | 11 | 29 | 60 | 3.58 | 1.09 |
| Makes decision by collaborative, co-operative and consultative practices | 12 | 16 | 72 | 3.75 | 1.05 |
| Creates a climate of teamwork and commitment to work collectively | 7 | 15 | 78 | 4.00 | 1.12 |
| Encourages and promotes teamwork | 12 | 28 | 60 | 3.54 | 0.94 |
| Works with and through teams as well as individuals | 10 | 16 | 74 | 3.90 | 1.15 |
| Trusts others and required trust from others | 14 | 21 | 65 | 3.77 | 1.19 |
| Acknowledges good work of others | 10 | 31 | 59 | 3.50 | 1.15 |
| Overall | 10 | 22 | 68 | 3.74 | 1.07 |

Table IV.
Participants' opinions about "promotion of collaborative school culture"

percent) of the head teachers always or mostly promoted a collaborative and supportive school culture (Table IV). Findings display that about two-thirds (68 percent) of the head teachers frequently developed a positive, caring and supportive school culture while six of the ten (60 percent) head teachers developed confidence, respect, trust and encouragement among staff members. A little more than seven of the ten (72 percent) heads built collaborative structures for working together and made decision by collaborative and consultative practices. A little less than eight of the ten (78 percent) heads created a climate of teamwork and commitment to work collectively while about three-quarters (74 percent) worked with and through teams, as well as individuals. About two-thirds (65 percent) of the heads trusted their staff and required trust from others, while six of the ten promoted team work and acknowledged the good work of their staff members. In this regard, see the comments of a head teacher:

The staff in our school work really hard and I acknowledge and recognise their contribution to every level.

Another participant gave his comments in these words:

Our head teacher has changed the culture of the school by having an understanding of what a school is meant to achieve and having high expectations of students and staff. His leadership, his openness to listen and his sense of humour contribute a lot in school success. We can be frank with him.

Looking into the above findings it can be concluded that the majority of the head teachers of successful schools promoted a culture of collaboration, support and trust. Previous researches support this key finding as Gurr *et al.* (2005), Mulford and Edmunds (2009) and Mulford *et al.* (2009) identified successful leadership practices and found that the leaders of successful schools promoted a culture of collegiality, collaboration, support and trust, and that this culture is firmly rooted in their democratic and social justice values and beliefs. Bell *et al.* (2007) found a positive relationship between increased teachers' collaboration – both within and across schools – and organizational

development. Harris and Muijs (2004) also found that where teachers work collectively, teachers' expectations, morale and confidence are significantly enhanced and a higher degree of satisfaction expressed among teachers for their work.

Distribution of leadership responsibilities

One of the significant aspects of leadership practices of head teachers was distribution of leadership responsibilities among different personnel of school community. The findings of the study display that the majority of the head teachers of successful schools empowered others to lead and distributed leadership responsibilities throughout the school. Table V indicates that a little more than three-quarters (77 percent) of the heads of successful schools always or mostly distributed leadership responsibility among staff members while about two-thirds (68 percent) shared their authority and promoted mutual respect. About seven of the ten empowered and encouraged others to participate in decision-making process while 55 percent of the heads fostered shared decision making to motivate and empower others. One of the interviewee asserted his remarks in these words:

"Yes" our head teacher distributes his authority and power within staff members. He distributes leadership responsibilities throughout the school community and empowers teachers in the areas of their importance.

Findings also reveal that about three-quarters (76 percent) of the heads provided support for distributed leadership practices and worked with and through others to improve their schools. About two-thirds of the heads supported and encouraged others to undertake leadership roles and recognized expertise of staff rather than formal position within groups. They also assigned task and duties to teachers according to their abilities; supported and monitored the efforts of whom task assigned and kept coordination among different assigned tasks. See the comments of a teacher:

| Items | Extent of practices % | | | Mean | SD |
|---|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------|------|------|
| | Never | Rarely/ sometimes | Mostly/ always | | |
| <i>Head teacher</i> | | | | | |
| Distributes leadership responsibility among staff members | 9 | 14 | 77 | 3.98 | 0.87 |
| Shares authority and promotes mutual respect | 11 | 21 | 68 | 3.81 | 0.99 |
| Fosters shared decision making to motivate and empower others | 12 | 33 | 55 | 3.44 | 1.15 |
| Empowers staff to participate in decision-making process | 12 | 16 | 72 | 4.00 | 1.02 |
| Provides support for distributed leadership processes and practices | 9 | 15 | 76 | 4.03 | 1.14 |
| Supports/encourages others to undertake leadership roles | 12 | 23 | 65 | 3.66 | 1.15 |
| Works with and through others to improve his/her school | 8 | 16 | 76 | 3.93 | 1.19 |
| Recognizes expertise of staff rather than formal position within groups | 11 | 22 | 67 | 3.78 | 0.77 |
| Assigns task and duties to teachers according to their abilities | 12 | 13 | 65 | 3.71 | 1.10 |
| Supports and monitors the efforts of whom task assigned | 16 | 24 | 60 | 3.52 | 0.91 |
| Keeps coordination among different assigned tasks | 11 | 22 | 67 | 3.85 | 0.67 |
| Overall | 11 | 21 | 68 | 3.79 | 1.00 |

Table V.
Participants' opinions
about "distribution of
leadership
responsibilities"

Our school provides a lot of opportunities for staff members to take particular responsibility for different aspects of school and everyone is encouraged to become involved.

The above findings of the study show that the main focus of heads of the successful schools was on distribution of leadership responsibilities among other personnel of school community. Previous research studies (Harris and Lambert, 2003; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2000; Silins and Mulford, 2002a support these findings. Mulford and Edmunds (2009) and Mulford *et al.*'s (2009) findings also revealed that successful leaders fostered shared decision making to motivate and empower others. They also found that distribution of leadership and empowerment of others within school community was the central to successful schools.

Consultation and involvement of staff

The most highlighted aspect of leadership practices of head teachers was the consultation and involvement of staff members in the process of decision making and school improvement activities. Findings indicate that the majority of the heads of successful schools frequently involved different stakeholders in the process of decision making and school activities and gave them professional autonomy. Table VI shows that about three-quarters (76 percent) of the heads always or mostly consulted and involved staff members in the process of decision making and other activities of school and utilized the skills and experiences of staff members. About two-thirds (67 percent) engaged people to express their views at staff meeting without any fear, while 72 percent of the heads listened to staff opinions and respected them. A little more than half (53 percent) of the heads encouraged participants to share their views on different matters, and respected their views and ideas, while about two-thirds (65 percent) arranged meetings with teachers, students and parents to share teachers and students' problems and to solve them with the cooperation of staff members. See the comments of a head teacher:

I consult and negotiate with different stakeholders. I provide an open form for discussion, listen patiently and make changes in my opinions where necessary. I follow an open door policy in the real sense and believe in shared vision and shared decision-making.

| Items | Extent of practices % | | | Mean | SD |
|---|-----------------------|-------------------|----------------|------|------|
| | Never | Rarely/ sometimes | Mostly/ always | | |
| <i>Head teacher</i> | | | | | |
| Consults and involves staff members in the process of decision making | 11 | 13 | 76 | 4.00 | 1.06 |
| Engages people to express their views at staff meeting without any fear | 14 | 19 | 67 | 3.80 | 1.10 |
| Encourages participants to share their views on different matters | 11 | 36 | 53 | 3.39 | 1.04 |
| Listens staff opinions and respects them | 9 | 19 | 72 | 3.99 | 1.33 |
| Involves teachers actively in the core work of the school | 9 | 15 | 76 | 4.01 | 1.14 |
| Solves the problems with the cooperation of staff members | 14 | 21 | 65 | 3.71 | 1.22 |
| Utilizes the skills and experiences of school staff | 7 | 17 | 76 | 3.99 | 1.16 |
| Overall | 11 | 20 | 69 | 3.84 | 1.15 |

Table VI. Participants' opinions about "involvement and consultation with staff"

Another participant (female teacher) gave comments as:

Our head teacher involves staff members in decision-making process. She ensures that different stakeholders are fully involved in the school planning. She spreads leadership responsibility by building teams throughout the personnel of school community.

Overall results reveal that the majority of the head teachers of successful schools frequently involved and consulted staff members in the process of decision making and school improvement activities. This key finding is also in line with the previous researches as Harris and Chapman (2002), Gurr *et al.* (2005) and Moller *et al.* (2005) identified successful school leadership practices and concluded that improvements in the schools' performance were achieved through the head teachers working through teams and involving a wide range of stakeholders in decision making. Harris and Muijs (2004) explored the relationship between teachers' involvement in decision making within school and a range of students' outcomes and found positive relationships between the degree of teachers' involvement in decision making and students' motivation and self-efficacy.

Establishment of interpersonal relationships

Another important aspect of leadership practices of head teachers was the establishment of relationships among different personnel of school community. Analysis indicates that the majority of the head teachers of successful schools frequently developed and maintained good relationships among different personnel of school community. It is evident from findings that about seven of the ten (72 percent) heads always or mostly built positive and trusting relationships with staff and community while 70 percent cared for well-being and development of students and staff members and maintained good relationships among different personnel of school community. About three-quarters (74 percent) of the heads gave respect to their subordinates while 75 percent provided opportunities for negotiation and dialogue. Two-thirds (67 percent) of the heads promoted respectful relationships between students and teachers and listened subordinates' personal problems and try to remove them with full efforts, as can be seen in Table VII. It means that the majority of the head teachers mostly gave much importance to generate positive relationships among different personnel of school community and to foster a view of school as being part of rather than apart from the community.

It is interesting to mention that previous researchers also emphasised on this issue. Thomson and Harris (2004, p. 3) found that successful principals of schools in high-poverty communities invest primarily in relationship building despite the fact that systemic pressures were for individual rather than collective performance. Cavanagh and Dellar (2001) recommended that mutual empowerment, caring, collaboration and genuine partnerships amongst staff should be used as the vehicles for effecting school improvement.

Instructional and mentoring support

Another important finding revealed from this study is that the majority of the heads of successful schools provided instructional and mentoring support to their subordinates. Table VIII indicates that 63 percent of the heads always or mostly managed the instructional programmes and provided instructional support to their subordinates. A little more than half (53 percent) of the heads visited classes regularly and helped teachers in improving their teaching while 62 percent provided proper feedback to

| Items | Extent of practices % | | | Mean | SD |
|--|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------|------|------|
| | Never | Rarely/ sometimes | Mostly/ always | | |
| <i>Head teacher</i> | | | | | |
| Builds positive and trusting relationships with staff and community | 10 | 18 | 72 | 3.84 | 1.22 |
| Cares for well-being and development of students and staff members | 11 | 19 | 70 | 3.79 | 1.11 |
| Communicates properly with students and teachers | 9 | 30 | 61 | 3.57 | 1.03 |
| Gives respect to his/her subordinates | 13 | 13 | 74 | 3.97 | 0.91 |
| Listens subordinates' personal problems and try to remove them | 13 | 20 | 67 | 3.63 | 1.21 |
| Maintains good relationships among different personnel of school community | 11 | 19 | 70 | 3.82 | 1.72 |
| Promotes respectful relationships between students and teachers | 12 | 21 | 67 | 3.77 | 1.10 |
| Provides opportunities for negotiation and dialogue | 9 | 16 | 75 | 3.82 | 0.83 |
| Overall | 11 | 19 | 70 | 3.78 | 1.14 |

Table VII.
Participants' opinions about "promotion of interpersonal relationships"

| Items | Extent of practices % | | | Mean | SD |
|---|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------|------|------|
| | Never | Rarely/ sometimes | Mostly/ always | | |
| <i>Head teacher</i> | | | | | |
| Manages the instructional programs and provides instructional support to teachers | 11 | 26 | 63 | 3.73 | 1.11 |
| Visits classes and helps teachers in improving their teaching | 14 | 33 | 53 | 3.42 | 1.33 |
| Provides proper feedback to the teachers | 9 | 29 | 62 | 3.52 | 1.04 |
| Encourages teachers to use new teaching techniques/ methods | 13 | 21 | 66 | 3.67 | 1.19 |
| Provides academic guidance to the teachers as and when needed | 11 | 28 | 61 | 3.65 | 1.09 |
| Supervises and evaluates instruction | 7 | 17 | 76 | 3.93 | 1.20 |
| Supports staff members in their instructional works | 11 | 19 | 70 | 3.81 | 1.31 |
| Give incentives for the motivation of teachers to improve their performance | 10 | 32 | 58 | 3.73 | 0.99 |
| Overall | 11 | 25 | 64 | 3.68 | 1.16 |

Table VIII.
Participants' opinions about "instructional and mentoring support"

teachers. About six of the ten (61 percent) heads provided academic guidance to teachers as and when needed while about two-thirds (66 percent) encouraged teachers to use new teaching techniques and methods to improve their instruction. About three-quarters (76 percent) of the heads supervised and evaluated instruction while seven of the ten heads supported staff members in their academic works. A little less than six of the ten (58 percent) gave incentives for motivation of teachers to improve their performance. It means that the majority of the heads' emphasis was on knowing the strengths and weaknesses of teachers and provision of feedback for instructional

improvement because they thought that provision of proper feedback to teachers can improve their instruction. This can be illustrated from the comments of a participant:

When you know the strengths and weaknesses of teachers and build on their strengths and weaknesses and give them support and proper feedback, then teachers work much better to improve their instruction.

It is also highlighted in the previous research studies as Zapeda (2003) recommended that school leaders should provide opportunities for teachers to work together on the basis of needs linked to what is observed by school leaders in classroom observations. On the basis of observations, school leaders can identify strengths and weaknesses of teachers, which lead to which teachers can serve as mentors and which teachers need mentoring. Hayes *et al.* (2004) found that improved students' outcomes occur when pedagogies are a priority of the school within a culture of care. Hallinger (2005) suggests that instructional leadership seeks to influence first-order variables in the change process, conditions that directly impact the quality of instruction delivered to students in classrooms.

Professional development

Findings of the study also reveal that the majority of the head teachers of successful schools always gave much importance to professional development of themselves as well as teachers. Analysis indicates that about six of the ten (59 percent) head teachers always or mostly developed programmes for staff/faculty development while a little less than two-thirds (64 percent) of the heads joined professional organizations and participated in such activities that improve their personal knowledge and management skills. A little more than two-thirds (68 percent) of the heads arranged ongoing professional development programmes for staff while 57 percent of the heads encouraged staff to actively participate in the professional development programmes. Seven of the ten (70 percent) provided both personal and professional support to individuals while 56 percent of the heads fostered and supported professional learning for groups, as can be seen in Table IX. It means that the majority of the head teachers

| Items | Extent of practices % | | | Mean | SD |
|--|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------|------|------|
| | Never | Rarely/ sometimes | Mostly/ always | | |
| <i>Head teacher</i> | | | | | |
| Develops programs for staff/faculty development | 14 | 27 | 59 | 3.58 | 1.06 |
| Encourages staff to actively participate in professional development programs | 10 | 33 | 57 | 3.54 | 0.77 |
| Participates in activities to improve the personal knowledge and management skills | 15 | 21 | 64 | 3.59 | 1.17 |
| Joins professional organizations | 14 | 22 | 64 | 3.49 | 0.92 |
| Arranges ongoing professional development programs for all staff | 9 | 23 | 68 | 3.63 | 1.19 |
| Fosters and supports professional learning for groups | 11 | 33 | 56 | 3.47 | 1.41 |
| Provides both personal and professional support to individuals | 11 | 19 | 70 | 3.72 | 1.14 |
| Overall | 12 | 25 | 63 | 3.57 | 1.09 |

Table IX.
Participants' opinions about "professional development"

mostly emphasised on the personal as well as staff professional development because they thought that professional development of head teacher and staff members can effectively contribute towards school improvement. See the comments of a head teacher:

Professional development improves teachers' performance within the subject areas. Teachers' discussion and exchange of subject teaching methods improves teaching quality and consequently students' learning and staff development increase the teacher's effectiveness.

This key finding is also in line with the previous research studies (Gurr *et al.*, 2005; Mulford and Edmunds, 2009; Mulford *et al.*, 2009) Gurr *et al.* (2003, p. 18) developed a research based model and identified capacity building as a Level 2 impact on students' achievement because of its potential impact on teaching and learning. Jones (2009) stated that it should be the responsibility of school leader to provide authentic professional development and other resources for teachers and staff, and create new learning opportunities for staff members.

Parents and community involvement

One of the significant aspects of leadership practices of heads was parental and community involvement in the process of school improvement. Findings of the study indicate that heads of the successful schools frequently involved parents and community in schools' activities and gave patient hearing to them. Table X shows that about two-third (68 percent) of the heads always or mostly developed positive relationships with parents and community; 66 percent ensured the participation of parents and community in the process of school improvement; 65 percent gave patient hearing to parents and community and 66 percent communicated parents regularly about students' successes and progress. A little less than six of the ten (57 percent) arranged meetings with parents to know students' problems while 60 percent supported public participation and coordinated the efforts of community organizations. It means that their main emphasis was upon people rather than systems and they invited others to lead. They thought that the involvement of parents and local community may benefit for school improvement, as a head teacher commented that:

| Items | Extent of practices % | | | Mean | SD |
|---|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------|------|------|
| | Never | Rarely/ sometimes | Mostly/ always | | |
| <i>Head teacher</i> | | | | | |
| Develops positive relationships with parents and community | 11 | 21 | 68 | 3.75 | 0.79 |
| Ensures the participation of parents and community in the process of school improvement | 9 | 25 | 66 | 3.77 | 1.12 |
| Arranges meetings with parents to know students' problems | 13 | 30 | 57 | 3.54 | 0.97 |
| Gives patient hearing to the parents/community | 15 | 20 | 65 | 3.68 | 1.10 |
| Communicates parents regularly about students' successes and progress | 8 | 26 | 66 | 3.67 | 0.81 |
| Supports public participation and coordinates the efforts of community organizations | 14 | 26 | 60 | 3.62 | 1.48 |
| Overall | 12 | 24 | 64 | 3.67 | 1.05 |

Table X. Participants' opinions about "parental and community involvement"

Head teacher should involve parents, local community and others who may be able to help the school in the process of school improvement. He must ensure the participation of local community in school activities because high level of local community involvement may benefit for school improvement.

It is also a fact that family, school and community relationships directly affect students' outcomes. Research and fieldwork show that parent-school-partnerships improve schools, strengthen families, build community support and increase students' achievement and success (Epstein and Salinas, 1992). Coleman (1998) stated that partnerships between teachers, students and parents are essential for the attainment of educational outcomes. Epstein (1995) agreed that when parents get involved in education, children try harder and achieve more at school. Henderson and Mapp (2002) also considered community support of the educational process as one of the characteristics common to high-performing schools.

Conclusions and recommendations

The main purpose of this study was to identify the leadership practices of successful schools at secondary level in Pakistan. Findings of the study revealed that the head teachers of successful schools empowered teachers and gave responsibilities to others to move school forward. Their leadership practices pointed towards an emerging model of leadership that was less concerned with individual capabilities, skills and talents and more preoccupied with creating collective responsibility for leadership action and activity. The focus was less upon the characteristics of the leader and more upon creating shared contexts for learning and developing leadership capacity. A link was made between distributed and democratic leadership practices and school improvement in the majority of the schools. Their emphasis was upon the development and establishment of relationship among teachers, students, parents and other personnel of school community. Similarly, professional development of staff as well as leaders was also the paramount in these successful schools. Gurr *et al.* (2003) also found that head of the institution impacts indirectly on students' outcomes by working with and through others and using a range of interventions in terms of individual and school capacity building, as well as teaching and learning. The extent of organizational learning was found to be linked to the leadership practices of successful heads that included the provision of individual support, development of a trusting culture, shared decision making and distributed leadership, development of shared goals and vision, and high expectations of students (Leithwood and Hallinger, 2002; Mulford *et al.* 2004; Mulford *et al.*, 2007; Mulford and Silins, 2003; Silins and Mulford, 2002b).

Keeping in view the results and conclusions, following recommendations are made by the researcher:

- Head of the institution must share authority and distribute leadership activities to their subordinates and involve other personnel of school community in the process of decision making and school improvement.
- The leadership activities should be distributed to those who have, or can develop, the knowledge or expertise required to carry out the leadership tasks expected of them. The initiatives of those to whom leadership is distributed must be coordinated in some planned way.

- Different committees should be organized to perform different functions of schools. In these committees senior and experienced teachers and community representatives should be included.
- Public participation must be ensured in the process of school improvement. Parents of students and community representative should be involved in different school activities.
- An atmosphere of trust, collegiality and cooperation must be created in schools.
- Further research should be conducted on a national level sample so as to make proper decisions before policy formulation and execution in the field.

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