

Secondary School Teachers' Perceptions of their Principals' Leadership Behaviors and their Academic Performance at Secondary School Level

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Abstract

A number of factors contribute to the academic performance of the teachers and teachers' perceptions of their principals' leadership behaviors are one of them. To raise the academic performance of teachers, every progressive country invests expansive resources and huge budget on teachers' professional development programs all over the world. Nevertheless, the situation is yet not that improved as in UK where 90% of participant teachers in such programs consider these programs not very effective. Thus, it is suggested that the teachers' education programs should undergo a paradigm shift from the conventional framework merely focusing on the imparting skills to the issues perceived by the teachers. This was a quantitative study conducted to see the relationship between teachers' perceptions about their principals' leadership behaviors and their academic performance. A sample of 2350 teachers of public and private secondary schools was selected from 235 schools of three districts (Lahore, Kasoor, Sheikhpura) through stratified random sampling. Teachers' perceptions were identified through Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire – 5x Rater Form, developed by Bass and Avolio in 1995 and revised in 2004. Teachers' perceptions came out as one of the most important determining factor of their academic performance. Therefore the study suggests that the teachers' perceptions of leadership behaviors must be taken into account while designing any training program for their professional development to make them more effective.

Keywords: Teachers' perceptions, performance determinants, leadership behaviors

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Introduction

The academic performance of schools has become the most important criteria of school-principals' performance (Frederickson, 2008; Eren, 2014; Grisson, 2014). Principals try to achieve this hallmark mainly by improving the performance of their teachers through better communication, motivation, building up their confidence and providing them resources (PISSETH, 2011). In view of that, the principals can present themselves as effective leaders only when they are good at getting the best out of their teachers and build their capacities so as to prepare them for the tough challenges present in their academic performances (Andreas, 2012). For this, the principals are required to prepare themselves with leadership practices which improve teachers' academic performance (Orphanos & Orr, 2014) because teachers' perceptions of their principals' leadership behaviors not only have an impact on their performance at the school but also in their professional learning. (Liang, Liu, Wu, & Chao, 2015).

Secondary school level is a crucial stage in the career choice of young adults all over the world. Therefore, leaders of the secondary schools, regardless of being in the public or private sectors, are under a constant pressure of accountability for providing good results not only in Pakistan but in many developed and developing countries. Keeping in view the significance of this level, it is necessary to investigate the different dimensions of the link between the teachers' perceptions of their school principals and their performance in diverse cultural learning and teaching contexts to improve the academic performance of the teachers.

Statement of the Problem

Principals implement their vision by empowering their teachers (Blase, 2001) for an effective academic performance (Ross & Gray, 2006). Therefore they try hard to retain and train good teachers. Research informs that many factors have also been found to be relevant with teachers' academic performance, however, teachers' perceptions of their principals' leadership behaviors have yet to attract their right share of attention from the academicians. The present study seeks to address this gap to inform the field in a different teaching and learning context of Pakistan.

Review of the Related Literature

There are contrasting statements about whether teachers' perceptions of leadership behaviors are an important predictor of their academic performance or not. In this regard, Hardman (2011) maintains that school leaders can only present good results when they have positively perceived relationship with their teachers. However, Gutierrez (2013) disapproves the evidence that the teachers' perceptions of leadership behaviors were an important predictor of their academic performance. In line with this discussion, teachers' perceptions of school leadership behaviors was found positively correlated with several other factors like; teachers' turn-over, retention, job satisfaction, effectiveness etc. (Ladd, 2011; Waddel, 2010; Johnson, Akraft, Papay, 2012). Teachers who perceived their principals' leadership behaviors as transformational and transactional were found more responsible towards and satisfied with their jobs (Biggerstaff, 2012).

The success of a leader in achieving the goals of an organization greatly depends upon the manners in which this relationship is established and developed (Childress, 2009). For the last few decades, various leadership theories and models have been considered as indicators of a leader's effectiveness. In terms of academic excellence, one model worth mentioning is "Full Range of Leadership Model" which comprises transformational, transactional and passive avoidant leadership behaviors (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

Transformational leadership is described as a process of inspiring, encouraging, motivating and influencing the followers to think innovatively and critically to achieve the organizational goals beyond expectations (Northouse, 2007). Four major behaviors of transformational leader are: Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation and Individual Consideration (Bass, 1999).

Transformational Leadership Behaviors and Employees' Performance

Transformational leadership behaviors were found positively correlated with teachers' positive perceptions, motivation, trust, conviction, collaboration, innovation, self-esteem and performance (Odumeru & Ogbonna, 2013). Leaders, who practice the qualities of Idealized Influence, Intellectual Stimulation, Inspirational Motivation and Individual Consideration, become successful in engaging their subordinates in making the extra efforts (Balyer, 2012). The performance of the employees also reflects their commitment which is found to be positively correlated with Intellectual Stimulation, Individual Consideration and Contingent Reward behavior of the leaders (Brown, 2003).

Transactional Leadership Behaviors and Employees' Performance

Transactional leadership is a process of exchange of transactions between the leaders and the followers (Northouse, 2007). The exchange is often in a form of material or tangible rewards like bonuses, salaries and other incentives (Hukpati, 2009). Identifying the needs of the followers is considered one of the best traits of a transactional leader to improve their performance. Two transactional behaviors were identified by Bass 1995: Contingent Reward and Management by Exception Active. Contingent Reward is a transactional leadership behavior based on different transactions according to the needs of the employees while Management by Exception Active is based on the constant supervision and monitoring of the leader to take necessary measures when mistakes occur (Avolio, Bass 1995).

Passive Avoidant Leadership Behaviors and Employees' Performance

Passive Avoidant is the least operative leadership style. It represents a lack of leadership qualities. A passive avoidant leader is least concerned with the success of the organization, and the performance of the employees because he avoids taking any responsibilities or making timely decisions (Northouse, 2007). There are two behaviors of passive avoidant leadership: Management by Exception Passive and Laissez Faire leadership behaviors (Bass, 1987). Passive Avoidant leadership style is fruitful when team members are proficient, trained and independent workers while it becomes successful in case the team is highly senior and competent. (www.ehow.com/info_7750810_laissezfaire-leadership-styles).

Perceived Leadership Behaviors and Employees' Performance

Transformational & transactional leadership behaviors are very effective in developing positive perceptions among the employees, like job satisfaction and motivation (Callaghan & Coldwell, 2014). These are positively correlated with the employees' performance (Imran, Iqra, Sadaf, & Azeem, 2014). Principals cast a positive impact on teachers by making an allowance for their emotional expressions e.g. respect, communication, trust, collaboration, intellectual stimulation (Sun & Leithwood, 2015) which can also have a good effect on their academic performance (Ali, Jan, Ali, & Tariq, 2014).

Significance of the Research

Countries all over the world are facing challenges in improving their schools and maintaining the standards of quality teaching and learning against the backdrop of ineffective school leadership and low performing teachers. A study conducted by the Department of Education in UK reported that “more than 1,500 schools with tens and hundreds of students, are being catered with substandard education especially at secondary school level” (www.gov.uk). The National College of School Leadership in 2003 reported several challenges for school leadership; one of them was establishing a positive relationship between the leader and the staff as well as among the staff members (Haris, A, 2002).

In the USA, about 843 schools with 594, 000 students have been declared as low performing schools (Sara, 2012). There may be a variation in the reasons and causes with regard to the under-performing schools in the whole world, however there is not much difference in the opinions about the role an ineffective leadership plays in the decline of the quality of teaching and learning.

This study not only provides a cross country comparison in the above mentioned areas of school life but also authenticates the existing research findings. The study can be very helpful in the following academic and professional areas;

- developing effective teachers’ training programs
- preparing for school leaders’ training
- setting remedial measures for the improvement of schools’ academic achievements

Research Hypotheses

This study mainly focuses on secondary school leadership styles to see if there is any relationship between teachers’ perceptions of their leadership behaviors and the teachers’ academic performance in secondary schools. To answer this question, the researcher formulated the following hypotheses:

1. There is no relationship between teachers' age and their perceptions of principals' leadership behaviors.
2. There is no relationship between teachers' experience and their perceptions of principals' leadership behaviors.
3. There is no relationship between teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership behaviors and their academic performance in the public and private secondary schools.
4. There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the public and private sector teachers' academic performance at secondary school level.

Methodology

Quantitative research method was adopted to test the hypotheses. A sample of 2350 participant teachers was taken from 235 public and private secondary schools of three districts (Lahore, Sheikhpura, Kasoor) of Pakistan. A list of all the private and public secondary schools in the form of their annual Secondary School Certificate Exams Result Gazette was taken from the office of the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE), Lahore. All the teachers of the grade 10 with at least three year regular external results (2010-2012) were decided to be the potential participants. The revised version of Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, 5x rater form, developed by Bass and Avolio in 1995, was selected to assess the teachers' perceptions about their school leaders' leadership behaviors. The questionnaire comprised two sections. Section I consisted of demographic (age, experience and education) details of the secondary school teachers while section II comprised 45 items of which 36 were related to the leadership behaviors and nine were allocated to the outcome factors of leadership behaviors (three items for teachers' Extra Effort, four items for teachers' Effectiveness and two items for teachers' Satisfaction).

Results

H₀₁: There is no relationship between teachers' age and their perceptions of principals' leadership behaviors.

Table 1

Relationship between teachers' demographics (age) and their perceptions of their principals' leadership behaviors

Leadership Behaviours	Age
IIA	.067**
IIB	.029
IM	-.004
IS	-.008
IC	.042*
CR	.012
MBEA	.025
MBEP	-.002
LF	.023
EE	.014
EFF	.019
SAT	.036

*p<.05, **p<.01

Age was found positively correlated with Idealized Influence Attribute (IIA) (p<.01) and Individual Consideration (IC) (P<.05) (p<.01) leadership behaviors.

H₀₂. There is no relationship between teachers' experience and their perceptions of principals' leadership behaviors.

Table 2

Relationship between teachers' experience and their perception of principals' leadership behaviors

Leadership Behaviors	Experience
IIA	.066*
IIB	.058**
IM	.039
IS	.035
IC	.062**
CR	.065**
MBEA	.055*
MBEP	.027
LF	.031
EE	.043
EFF	.045*
SAT	.071**

*p<.05, **p<.01

Teachers' experience was also found positively correlated with teachers' perception of Idealized Influence Behavior (IIB) ($p < .01$) Contingent Reward (CR) ($p < .01$), Individual Consideration (IC) ($p < .05$) and Management by Exception Active (MBEA) ($p < .05$). Teachers' experience and their perception was also found significant positively correlated with the perception of two outcome variables of leadership behaviors; effectiveness (EEF) ($p < .05$) and satisfaction (SAT) ($p < .01$).

H₀₃: There is no relationship between teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership behaviors and their academic performance in public and private secondary schools.

Table 3

Relationship between teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership behaviors and teachers' academic performance at secondary school level

Leadership Behaviors	Public Teachers' Academic Achievement		Private Teachers' Academic Achievement	
	<i>r</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
IIA	-0.039	0.312	0.015	0.556
IIB	-.085(*)	0.025	<.000**	0.996
IM	-.142(**)	<.000	-0.001	0.982
IS	-0.05	0.193	-0.021	0.428
IC	-.109(**)	0.004	0.055*	0.034
CR.	-0.061	0.112	-0.096	<.000
MBEA	-0.06	0.116	-0.049	0.058
MBEP	.092(*)	0.015	-0.072*	0.006
LF	0.048	0.209	-0.125*	<.000
EE	-0.009	0.818	-0.125*	<.000
EFF	0.047	0.219	-0.046	0.079
SAT	-.158(**)	<.000	0.047	0.071

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Teachers' negative perception of principals' leadership behaviors (Idealized Influence Behavior (IIB) ($p < .05$), Inspirational Motivation (IM) ($p < .01$) Individual Consideration (IC) ($p < .05$), Contingent Reward (CR) ($p < .01$) Management by Exception Passive (MBEP) ($p < .05$) and Satisfaction ($p < .01$) were found negatively correlated with their academic performance in the public secondary schools. While in the private secondary schools, teachers' positive perceptions of Idealized Influence Behavior (IIB) ($p < .000$) and Individual Consideration (IC) ($p < .05$) were found positively correlated with their academic performance. Teachers' negative perceptions of Management by Exception (MBEP) ($p < .05$), Laissez Fair (LF) ($p < .05$) and one outcome factor of leadership behavior extra effort, ($p < .05$) were found negatively correlated with their academic performance.

Step wise regression analysis was done to see the predictor of teachers' perceptions in relation with their academic performance in the public secondary schools.

Table 4
Stepwise Regression Analysis Summary

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
(Constant)	2.293	.112		20.500	.000
Satisfaction (SAT)	-.111	.030	-.158	-3.742**	<.000
Effectiveness (EFF)	.104	.033	.125	3.134**	.002
Inspirational Motivation (IM)	-.095	.036	-.108	-2.648**	.008

**<. Inspirational Motivation 01, R2=.046

The results demonstrate that teachers' perceptions of Satisfaction, Effectiveness and Inspirational Motivation (IM) about leadership behaviors affect their academic performance in the public secondary schools.

Step wise regression analysis was done to see the predictor of teachers' perceptions in relation with their academic performance in the private secondary schools.

Table 5
Stepwise Regression Analysis Summary

Leadership Behaviors	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
Constant	3.439	.119		28.900	<.000
EE	-.147	.035	-.117	-4.233	<.000
LF	-.064	.021	-.083	-3.072	.002
IC	.101	.039	.079	2.607	.009
CR	-.142	.040	-.111	-3.540	<.000
SAT	.063	.028	.068	2.229	.026

R2=.043

Teachers' perceptions of Effectiveness (EFF), Laissez Fair (LF), Individual Consideration (IC), Contingent Reward (CR) and Satisfaction (SAT) about leadership behaviors affect their academic performance in the private secondary schools.

H₀₄: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the public and private teachers' academic performances at secondary school level.

Table 6
ANOVA of public and private teachers' academic performance

Public School Teachers' Performance		Private School Teachers' Performance		<i>F</i> value	<i>df</i>	<i>P</i> value
Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
1.97	.529	3.02	.816	55.62	1	<.01**

** $P < .01$

Post hoc analysis was done to see the difference in the mean scores of the public and private teachers' academic performance of the teachers. The results show that the mean scores of the private school teachers' performance is higher than that of the public school teachers' performance. So, the hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the mean scores of public and private teachers' academic performance is rejected.

Discussion

The study is unique for the following three reasons;

Firstly, the results indicate that the teachers' perceptions are one of the most important indicators of their academic performance. Although few research studies are available to substantiate the claim but the data available is not being effectively utilized by the professionals or principals. There is no research evidence in the literature that the teachers' professional development is planned according to their perceptions or that the school principals are being trained to adapt according to the teachers' focused leadership practices.

Secondly, teachers' demographic variables (age, experience) and their perceptions of leadership behaviors (Idealized Influence Attribute and Individual Consideration, Contingent Reward, Management by Exception Active and Satisfaction) were found to be positively correlated. These findings reflect that teachers with increased age and experience desire an influenced relationship of trust, shared vision, responsibility, commitment and perseverance from their principals as leaders. Moreover, they perceive their principals' leadership behaviors effective and satisfactory. They desire to be appreciated with rewards and recognition on achieving various performance targets. These findings are not consistent with the study conducted by Biggerstaff, (2012) who found no relationship between teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership behaviors with the demographic variable of "age". Nonetheless experience was found to be positively correlated with the outcome of leadership behaviors (satisfaction) by Callaghan, & Coldwell (2014).

The study also validates the existing findings that when teachers' perceptions of leadership behaviors were low on moral conduct, less visionary, not communicating high expectations, not considering employees' individual needs, not offering rewards and incentives and showing a lack of trust on their abilities, the teachers' academic performance got affected (Johnson, Akraft, Papay, 2012; Biggerstaff, 2012; Odumeru & Ogbonna, 2013). Teachers with such perceptions do not articulate satisfaction and become less motivated to reach the performance targets.

Thirdly, the passive avoidant leadership behaviors emerged as significant leadership behaviors of teachers' academic performance. The study shows that in private secondary schools, teachers' negative perceptions of leadership, Laissez Fair behaviors and Extra Effort were found to be the most significant predictors of teachers' academic performance. These findings are not consistent with the findings of the existing studies. Limited literature is available about the effectiveness of Laissez-faire when the employees are competent, experienced, and self-motivated and when clear performance standards are available. (www.ehow.com/info_7750810_laissezfaire-leadership-styles)

The academic performance of the public secondary school teachers was lower than that of the private secondary schools. It was observed that private secondary school leaders are empowered to make policies, develop standards of performance, and to offer performance incentives, rewards and promotions to the teachers. They are more open in empowering teachers and looking after their individual needs. These findings validate the research conducted by Biggerstaff in 2012 who found the transformational leadership behaviors more successful in raising teachers' effectiveness.

While in the public secondary schools, school leaders are not empowered. They are bound to follow the central directives. They can't offer performance based incentives to their teachers. Teachers receive only a fixed amount of salary without any consideration for the differences among their performance. They are not even granted promotion on the basis of performance. They get promotions on the basis of the duration of their service, no matter they are capable of school leadership or not. Consequently, such school leadership cannot express Inspirational Motivation, Individual Consideration, Contingent Reward and Management by Exception Active behaviors to motivate their teachers for making the extra effort to achieve the performance targets. The performance of public schools across the world is low in comparison to that of the private schools. A study conducted by OECD in 2007 in 65 countries reported that private schools are better in academic performance than public schools.

Recommendations for the Professional Development of the Principals

In the light of the findings of this study, the researcher recommends that the principals must be trained for specific leadership behaviors as stated below, before they assume duties as principals:

- School principals should be trained in the leadership practices keeping in view the teachers' perceptions about a school's principal as an effective leader.
- School leaders should give value to the older and more experienced teachers by giving them autonomy, and trust and delegating them greater responsibilities to gain their commitment.
- School principals are required to be more transformational and transactional in their leadership practices to instill positive perceptions among their teachers.
- School leaders should be well trained to adopt Passive Avoidant leadership behaviors with the competent, self-motivated and experienced teachers. In this way, teachers would enjoy a sense of autonomy to work in their own way to benefit the schools. This will also develop among them a sense of ownership and responsibility to work.
- School principals are required to develop positive perceptions of the teachers with the help of a blended content of transformational, transactional and passive avoidant leadership behaviors.
- School principals should be trained to express a high moral conduct, and high expectations to their teachers, so as to gain their conviction to work effectively.
- An effective system of rewards and incentives should be established by the principals.
- School principals of the public sector should be given autonomy in their work and should be trained with transformational and transactional leadership behaviors.

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