Educational Leadership in Higher Educational Institutions of Pakistan; challenges and Opportunities

Saif-Ul-Islam[*], Rahim Khan[†] and Sajjad Hussain[‡]

Abstract

The role of Educational Leadership is significant. The focus of this study was to investigate existing practices of educational leaders in Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs), the challenges they face while leading institutions, and the available opportunities they can utilize. The descriptive nature of this study has made it convenient to use a likert scale questionnaire for data collection from public sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Through cluster random sampling technique a total of 205 faculty members constituted the sample group for the study. Data were collected from the selected sample and were analyzed via SPSS. The results revealed that; educational leaders do concentrate on their organizational vision, adopt motivational techniques for faculty members, and follow highly centralized approach of leadership along with consultation with sectional heads and Deans. Further, the current financial crunches, political pressures, lack of educational facilities, increased employees' demands and lack of highly qualified faculty members in different departments were the identified challenges. Entrepreneurial activities from the platform of university, HEC faculty development programs, HEC and other projects granting agencies, and initiating MPhil, PhD and Postdoc programs are the available opportunities for the educational leaders of HEIs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Keywords: Educational Leadership, Training, Scholarships, Universities, Challenges, Opportunities

Introduction

Leadership is a systematic process of influencing group of individuals, mobilizing their skills and knowledge, enhancing their potential for the attainment of targeted organizational goals (Bryman, 2007). This process reflects the use of leader's knowledge and skills to motivate group of individuals to direct their energies and potentials towards a desired direction (Johnson, Becker, Cummins, Estrada, Freeman, & Hall, 2016). Further, leader's knowledge and skills are the most important characteristics that distinguish him/her from others and enable him/her to perform leadership role. Researchers in the field of leadership identified different dimensions of knowledge

[*]Saif-Ul-Islam, PhD Scholar, Qurtuba University of Science and Information Technology, Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan saif93@hotmail.com
[†]Dr. Rahim Khan, Factuly Member, Department of Teacher Education, Qurtuba University of Science & Information Technology, Peshawar
[‡]Dr. Sajjad Hussain, Lecturer, University of Swat, Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

and skills required for effective leadership. Some of these leadership skills and dimensions are having broad vision, ability to set good plans, critical in decision making, strong interpersonal and intra-personal communication skills, collaborative and cooperative skills to develop teams, investing powers in teams for the realization of organizational targets on one side and on the other side concentrate on the development of leadership skills among his own team members (Mendenhall, Osland, Bird, Oddou, Stevens, Maznevski, & Stahl, 2017).

Similarly, conflict resolution strategies, effective mechanisms for accountability and a comprehensive system of reward and punishment mechanism are another areas where a leader must be competent enough (Idris, Hussain, & Saeed, 2017). Such knowledge and skills enables the leader to lead institution towards the desired direction so as to attain the organizational goals. Different context demands varying skills, characteristics and knowledge from their respective leaders like in the field of politics, business, industries, social work, health and education. (Bashir, Mahmood, & Shafique, 2016).

Educational leadership is a unique phenomenon where the educational leaders are required different characteristics and qualities for the effective management of all educational activities in the right direction. According to Haider (2008) educational leadership is a systematic process of bringing together all the energies, knowledge and skills of teachers, students and parents to attain common educational aims of the educational institution. This process supports teachers for their professional development through advancing their qualifications, in-service trainings and the provision of instructional aides for effective teaching (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, &Orphanos, 2009). Further educational leadership enable students to enhance their learning through the process of facilitation by providing access to library books, co-curricular activities, formative assessment techniques and hands-on practices on different learning skills and concepts (Hussain, Kayani, Akhtar, 2018; Haider, 2004). Likewise, parents as key stakeholder are involved in the process of education so that they could play their due role at home so as to assist teachers to lead students towards the set outcomes.

In this process leader is playing pivotal role in coordinating and collaborating among the stakeholders for their respective roles. Educational leadership in public sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is leading these universities and Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs). They are the Vice Chancellors, Deans, Academic Heads and teaching faculty of these institutions which are leading the educational activities in universities for students. The National

Educational Policy 2017-2025 criticizes leadership of universities due to the prevailing low quality of education in these institutions. One of the most important indicators in this scenario is the not a single university of Pakistan in general and of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in particular has ranked in top 500 universities of the world. Furthermore, the HEC MPhil and PhD Review Committee has stopped some universities in the capital and other areas of the country to further enroll the students in certain subjects at the level of MPhil and PhD programs. The reasons behind that decision is the unavailability of relevant specialized teaching faculty, scarcity of appropriate instructional aids, laboratories and other educational facilities in these departments (Ministry of Federal Education& Professional Training, 2017; Hassan, 2017).

Additionally,- financial crunches in the country affected the role of university leaders in enhancing the quality of education in these institutions. They are facing scarcity of financial support for the ongoing projects. Even in some universities, these leaders of HEIs are in trouble in managing the salaries of their employees. All these situations have put the leadership of these universities into severe tension and they are struggling and striving to find way forward (Drew, 2010). These problems and issues of finances divert the focus of educational leadership from ensuring quality academic activities. Besides, in public sector universities the increasing political involvement and their pressurizing techniques further deteriorated the situation for the educational leadership of HEIs. Along with the challenges that the current educational leadership are facing there may be different opportunities that can be utilized to come-up with the emerging situations (Bodla, & Nawaz, 2010; Haider, 2008).

The establishment of universities is based on two fold objectives throughout the world. First, the construction of new knowledge in the form of research activities-projects, thesis, dissertations, periodicals, conferences, workshops and symposiums etc and second is, the preparation of leaders for all walks of life through teaching, management and learning skills. Furthermore, universities are closely linked with different industries, corporations and enterprises (Ministry of Federal Education& Professional Training, 2017). They acquire projects from corporate sector so as to satisfy their own financial needs but also required to support their graduates through financing their studies across different disciplines. In Pakistan the situation is worse as universities are dependent on recurrent grants, and fees collected from the students in different heads. HEIs in Pakistan, except a few are still unsuccessful to utilize the office of Research Innovation and Commercialization (ORIC) which can link the industry and academia for joint ventures of

entrepreneurship to support the finances of these institutions. The role of educational leadership to come up with these challenges is significant.

Statement of Research Problems

Based on the above discussion this study intends to investigate three dimensions of educational leadership in public sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. These are the prevailing practices of educational leaders, challenges faced by these leaders, and the available opportunities in the present scenario to these leaders.

Research Objectives

Keeping in view statement of the research problem, the following research objectives were formulated which might enable the researchers to investigate the research problem in its true sense.

1. To investigate the current practices of educational leaders in public sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
2. To identify the major challenges faced by the educational leadership of public sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
3. To pinpoint the available opportunities to the educational leadership of public sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Research Questions

To achieve study targets the researchers designed the following research questions which may guide the researchers to design the study in hand;

1. What are the current universities' leadership practices in public sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?
2. What are the major challenges that university leadership is facing in public sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?
3. What are the available opportunities that university leadership can utilize for overcoming the problems of public sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?

Beneficiaries of the study

This study benefits HEIs' leadership, Higher Education Commission (HEC), Higher Education Department (HED) and higher education itself in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as the study results may orient educational leaders about the common challenges and the available opportunities that may be utilized for the improvement of higher education. Further, the results may update HEC regarding the practices, challenges and available opportunities in these universities which may enable them to re-consider their guidelines and policies for universities. Likewise, at provincial level higher education is supervised by HED so the study results may clarify universities leadership scenarios to HED and they may concentrate on solutions

of their problems which may contribute positively for quality education in these universities.

Research Methodology

The study in hand was descriptive and survey in nature. The researchers adopted a quantitative research design to investigate the research problem for which the researchers used a likert scale questionnaire to collect data from the respondents of the study.

The population of the study was comprised all faculty members of public sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Through cluster random sampling techniques a group of 205 faculty members from three clusters were selected. These three clusters were;

1. Malakand Division
2. Peshawar, Mardan and Charcadda
3. And southern areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Furthermore the faculty members of five universities constituted the sample group of the study who were investigated through a research questionnaire through Google-Form, email, and personal contacts and meeting with the respondents by the researchers. The questionnaire was divided into four sections- 1st demographic information, 2nd statements regarding current leadership practices, 3rd challenges to university leadership and 4th the available opportunities for university leadership in the universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The questionnaire was first pilot tested through 35 faculty members of universities who were not the part of the actual sample. The reliability co-efficient α = .92 which illustrated that the questionnaire is reliable for data collection on the research problems from respondents of the study. Furthermore, validity of the questionnaire was estimated from currently available literature on educational leadership and no single statement was found out of literature. Likewise, after data collection the data were placed into SPSS version 16 and analyzed the descriptive mean scores and standard deviation and inferential statistics i.e. chi square which a test of significance.

Results and interpretations

Five options were given to each statement in the questionnaire. Therefore, the range of mean scores was from 5.00 to 4.51, 4.50 to 3.51, 3.50 to 2.51, 2.50 to 1.51 and 1.50 to 1.00. The standard deviation and chi square values were interpreted accordingly.

Table-1: Physical age and academic qualification of the respondents

Physical age	Frequency	Valid Percent	Qualificatio n	Frequency	Valid Percent
25 to 35	120	58.5	MA/MSc	28	13.7
36 to 45	64	31.2	MS/MPHIL	104	50.7

46 to 55	15	7.3	PHD	73	33.7
56 and above	6	2.9			
Total	205	100.0	Total	205	100.0

Physical age of the respondents ranges from 25 to 60 years. Majority of respondents 58% belonged to the age group of 25 to 35. Next highest percentage is 31 from age group of 36 to 45. Majority of the faculty members in targeted universities are MPhil / MS qualified in their respective field, as shown by the highest percentage i.e. 51%. Next highest qualification is PhD that is 34% of the total sample group. The results illustrated that majority of the respondents have the age group of 25 to 35 and majority of them were MS/MPhil from academic perspective.

TABLE -2: PRACTICES OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERS OF PUBLIC SECTOR UNIVERSITIES

S#	Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	df	χ^2	Sig
1	Head has a clear vision for university.	3.7756	1.19163			
2	Social reforms through Islamic values.	3.3805	1.32532			
3	Inspire others to seek the will of God	3.4293	1.33252			
4	Decentralization of authority is adopted	1.2780	.92316			
5	A Trustworthy and self-accountable	3.7268	1.09074	04	1.058	.452
6	Leader motivates through spiritual activities	2.5659	.82538			
7	Show patience and give corrective feedback	3.6780	1.08183			
8	Development through specialized trainings	3.4122	1.27422			
9	Team spirit and sense of collaboration	3.6829	1.25712			
10	Recognizes faculty/staff contribution	3.6732	1.18632			

The educational leadership of public sector universities has clear vision (mean = 3.77), a trustworthy and self-accountable (mean = 3.72), exhibits patience and give corrective feedback (mean = 3.67), the followers were made motivated, develop team spirit and enhance collaboration (mean = 3.68) among the employees and leaders in universities acknowledge the contributions (mean = 3.67) of faculty members through different approaches.

On the other hand the respondents disagreed that their leaders empowered the lower leaders (mean = 1.27) and sectional heads and that they have adopted a centralized approach of leadership. Furthermore, the respondents were found unaware about their leaders that whether their leaders inspires followers to seek the

Will (pleasure) of God, motivate followers through spiritual activities and capacity building of staff through specialized training. However the results of χ^2 1.058 which is not significant as the sig value is above .05 shows that these practices are not significant in the view of faculty members.

Table-3: Challenges to Educational Leadership of Public Sector Universities

S#	Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation	Df	χ^2	Sig
11	Extend support and guidance towards faculty	3.6000	1.04600			
12	Financial constraints for desired change	3.5122	1.02713			
13	Skilled human resources to attain desired targets	3.3854	1.10382	04	78.79	.000
14	Sustains Social and political pressure	3.5610	1.03963			
15	Launching of entrepreneurial activities	3.5024	1.06008			

Responses showed the presence of major challenges for the educational leadership in public sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa like support, acceptance, assistance and guidance of faculty (mean = 3.6), financial constraints while planning developmental activities (mean = 3.51), social and political pressure by the community and political organizations and government (mean = 3.56) and initiating entrepreneurial activities to support organizational activities and development (mean = 3.50). However respondents were unaware that skilled human resources (mean = 3.38) is also a major challenge in the attainment of desired targets. These results are significant as the χ^2 value 78.79 is significant and the identified challenges are the most important challenges for the educational leaders of public sector universities.

Table-4: Available Opportunities to Educational Leaders of Public Sector Universities

S#	Statement	Mean	Std Deviation	df	χ^2	Sig
16	Re-creational activities for faculty	3.9495	.88495			
17	Develop coordination with community	3.8384	.87723	04	122.82	.000
18	Consultation with stakeholders	3.7980	.96869			
19	Linkages with governmental officials	3.5500	1.15070			
20	Organizes training / workshops for staff	3.5024	1.30844			

Although challenges are many for the educational leaders in public sector universities, the impediment in the way of development, yet the presence opportunities cannot be ignored to be utilized and availed for the improvement of these institutions. Re-creational activities for the staff and faculty members (mean = 3.94), developing the coordination among the stakeholders and community members (mean = 3.83), developing consultation with key shareholders (mean = 3.79), the establishment of close linkage with concerned governmental officials (mean = 3.55) and provide opportunities of training and development, and offering training workshops for the capacity building of faculty and staff (mean = 3.50) of the university are some of the major opportunities for the educational leadership which can positively contribute towards the development of university. These opportunities can be easily utilized through adopting appropriate strategies and planning. All these results are significant as shown by the $\chi^2$122.82 at .000.

Conclusions

A considerable number of respondents belong to the age group of 25 to 35 years, represent young age. This is an opportunity for educational leaders in the universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to utilize this young age group for the attainment of desired objectives of the universities. Furthermore, these respondents have MS/MPhil and PhD qualification. The age and qualification illustrated that majority of the respondents were young, energetic and well qualified, working in public sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

University leadership has clear vision for the future of these institutions. Their sense of self-accountability confirms their reliability and trustworthiness. Feedback to employees on good performance is another major applied practice of leaders in universities. Further, the results concluded that they haven't been adopted the decentralized approach in their leadership practices, and that they are not inspiring the followers to seek the Will of Allah. Distribution of authority and power is the interactive concept of leadership as opposed to one man show. In a Muslim society leadership practices with spiritual approach is the best tool to inspire the followers and develop team spirit in them. In the present scenario, leaders are not doing their leadership role for the pleasure of Allah Almighty. In Quran (Chapter 10, Verse 26) Allah Almighty promised best reward for those who are doing good. Likewise, a huge number of Quranic verses and sayings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) on the relevant subject can be utilize in this connection. This incentive i.e doing for the pleasure of God can be used an effective tool for leadership role in any organization. Similarly respondents were unaware that whether their leaders in university are working for social reforms in the in the light of Islamic values.

Positive reinforcement of faculty, their personal and collective guidance in term of social welfare activities, financial crunches as impediments in the way of university progress, keep running the affairs of institution in smooth manner instead of social and political pressures and introducing and establishing entrepreneurial activities for the support of university are major identified challenges to the public sector universities' leadership. In the presence of decreased university grants by the government, ensuring quality education with market relevance as a demand of the pubic, encouraging and supporting employees' welfare activities are the real challenges to overcome for the leaders of universities. Sustain inside and outside political pressures is a big challenge for the university leader.

Although Educational Leaders are facing various issues, challenges and pressures in their institutions, there exists a large list of opportunities to be used for institutional development and welfare of faculty and other staff members. It was concluded by the respondents that heads of universities can plan and arrange recreational activities for the faculty. This type of activities can be used for the purpose of faculty motivation, retention and organizational engagement and organizational citizenship. It produces sense of ownership on the part of faculty and other staff of the university.

Another opportunity that is very important in literature and proved by researchers is also endorsed by the respondents is the position of stakeholder in any organization. The results concluded that coordination, consultation and developing linkages with stakeholders like community and government officials is an important opportunity for the head of university. This opportunity can be availed by the heads with proper planning and without any use of huge resources. Internal and external stakeholders of the institution can be used as an effective tool for the attainment of organizational objectives. Effective leadership role is not solely dependent on single person i.e. leader, rather it is a combined effort of all the stakeholders headed by a leader. Therefore, people involved in the business of university are important to be consulted and linked in the affairs of university.

Yet, another opportunity for the Educational Leader is training workshops for the staff and faculty. It was also endorsed by the faculty in their responses. Training sessions, workshops and other activities related to employees training can be planned and arranged by the leader of university with available, less and manageable resources within the campus. These activities don't need huge budget if arranged with proper planning. The benefit it give is far better what can we imagine. It improves faculty performance, knowledge, skills,

contribution and elevates their self-esteem, motivation, engagement and interest in job and on workplace.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that university leaderships may follow decentralized approach in leadership which is more effective and time saving and productive as compared to the centralized approaches.
2. Furthermore, to overcome the financial issues of universities they may concentrate on the formal functionalization of ORIC office to retrieve projects which may be helpful in reduce the financial debates of the universities and may also support the physical infrastructure of the universities.
3. The presence of young factulty members and having MPhil and PhD degree qualification reflects that majority of faculty are well trained in research. So they can be utilized for the advancement of university education and other aspects of development.
4. It was also recommendation that the world is going past and rapid change occurs in all fields of life therefore, for the professional development and capacity building the university leaderships may arrange workshops, seminars, conferences and symposiums for their faculty and administrative staff.
5. Furthermore, through consultation and involvement of universities sectional heads and close coordination with community members and governmental officials the proper implementation of university leadership's decisions and societal pressures may be tackled in more effective manner.
6. Similarly, the university leaderships are recommended to strengthen their own programs that faculty may enhance their qualifications. There is huge space of improvement in universities of Pakistan that they can launch MPhil, PhD and even Postdoc programs, which may enable the scholar of soil to take benefit of that.

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