Perceptions of Head Teachers about Whole School Development Plan in the Province of Punjab

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ARTICLE DETAILS

ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to check the perception of head teachers about the whole school development plan in the province of Punjab. The research design was qualitative in nature and the main objectives of the study were; to know the perceptions of head teachers of the whole school development plan, to find out the role of head teachers in implementing of whole school development plan, to identify the factors affecting the implementation of whole school development plan and to find out the impact of school development plan on quality education. The population of the study was all the head teachers of high and higher secondary schools in Punjab. The sample was randomly selected and consisted of ten (10) head teachers. An interview schedule was developed by the researchers following the three sections i.e. planning process, implementation and evaluation. Data were collected by the researchers through face-to-face interviews with the head teachers. Data were analyzed by interpreting the results in schematic form. The main finding of the study was that the Whole School Development Plan (WSDP) was designed for 2-3 years on the basis of the need assessment of the school and by setting priorities in order to achieve the set targets. The WSDP was implemented under the leadership of the head teacher with community engagement and proved to be a very effective activity in order to meet the quality of education.

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1. Introduction

The purpose of schools is to bring a positive change in society as school is called mini society it is a training ground for the young to prepare for the next life. All schools arrange education setups for transmitting education from one generation to another. Schools can only achieve this goal by focusing on specific strategies to create differences among other schools.
The definite objective of adopting any process is to improve the levels of student achievement by enhancing the delivery mechanism by creating a positive learning environment. The involvement of parents is also necessary to increase productivity which gains through the educational process, and by increasing the degree to which parents are involved in their children's learning at school and at home. There are many other aspects that support the education process.

For the achievement of all educational and non-educational activities school made a plan through which it tries what he needed and required. SDP is a road map that sets out the changes a school needs to make to improve the level of student achievement, and shows how and when these changes will be made: this plan helps principals, teachers, and school councils answer the questions “What will we focus on now?” and “What will we leave until later?” They inspire staff and help parents to observe the levels of student achievement and identify the focus areas of academics. It is also helpful in a positive and healthy school environment, that influences student success.

Schools may be able to enhance the ability of teachers and help them through training and support for the improvement students are performing. A school development plan is also a mechanism through which all stakeholders of schools can hold accountable for student success and quality education and all administrative issues. All stakeholders’ councils, parents’ teachers and other community members work together for the improvement of the school. It is a big task for the School head and teacher to analyze the improvement areas and defined priorities and then work accordingly. As the plan is implemented, schools continue to gather this kind of data. By comparing the new data to the initial information on which the plan was based, the school and the community can measure the success of their development plans. Real change takes time. It is important that all partners understand this as they enter into the school development planning process. Incremental developments are significant, and they should be celebrated, but they do not constitute lasting change. School development plans are therefore best designed as three-year plans according to the following criteria:

- Year 1 is taken up with the planning process.
- Year 2 is the first year of implementation.
- Year 3 is the year in which implementation continues.

During the first reflections, or over time, schools may wish to extend their plans for additional years to ensure that they maintain their focus and reach their goals. In any case, working documents on school development plans should be considered as schools monitor their progress over time and review them as necessary to ensure that plans are implemented. The process is in progress. In developing their school development plan, principals, staff, school councils, parents, and other community members work through a variety of activities focused on three areas of different priorities: curriculum delivery, school environment, and parent involvement.

For school development planning to be successful, it must involve all school partners, i.e. the entire school community; the head teacher is responsible for administering the school and for providing instructional leadership and is ultimately responsible for development planning. But the entire school community should be actively involved in all stages of the process: planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating progress.

2. Literature Review

There are some difficulties with the school improvement plan and the role of head teachers in this context. We can, possibly learn a great deal from these lessons. However, in the background of
developing countries, especially in Pakistan, this area is not sufficiently explored (Khaki & Safdar, 2010). Only a few studies help us to find the role of head teachers in community schools. Khaki (2005) explored the effective head teachers of three types of schools in Pakistan: Public, Community (Qutoshi, 2006), and individually owned schools. One of the respondents in both the studies of Kakhi (2005) and Qutoshi (2006) was a community school head teacher that gives some insights about the way community school head teachers’ effective school management is seen by the stakeholders.

The studies show that public school head teachers work under, tough management in organizations within their own institutional context, financial constraints, parental pressures, communal conflicts, and sectarianism, which often lead to armed conflicts (Moos, 2013). The head teacher, as a school leader, is seen as a central person in a particular socio-cultural context (Sullivan, 2013). The head teacher's leadership role in the process of a school improvement plan may seem in many forms. He is the responsible person to transform the schools to the highest levels and overcome the challenges.

According to Bryk (2010), there are five essential supports for school improvement: a coherent instructional guidance system, the professional capacity of its faculty, strong parent-community school ties, a student-centered learning climate, and leadership that drives change. If a head teacher in any school system receives this kind of support in all these five commonly prioritized areas for improvement one can expect and even claim to school improvement (Coea, 2009). The supervisory role of the headmaster as perceived by the students in secondary schools is guided by the following objectives: promoting personal development in helpers; creating a positive influence on the emotional climate in the school environment; providing a bridge between troubled peers and friends: by listening rather than necessarily giving advice; offering basic skills in supporting the other peers who might need psychological support, for example, the bereaved, alienated and drug users; enabling the individual to meet personal needs in order to be more fully functional and take control of his/her life in different settings; reducing the amount of bullying in school by supporting those involved; acting as an additional service to that provided by staff, that is complementing rather than competing with it” (Okutu, Chumba, Shadrack & Kurgat, 2011).

The School Development Plan (SDP) process that commences with assessment is part of auditing society to identify opportunities, challenges, and constraints within and outside the school environment (Power, 1997). The school audit is conducted regularly using a variety of approaches: interviews, discussions, staff meetings, and surveys focus on three key elements: the environment, internal resources, and the culture and values of the school (Fidler, 1996). These elements guide the school to identify priorities, and targets, and design the development plan that is implemented, monitored, and evaluated regularly by key stakeholders. The time scale of development plans is determined by school priorities, resource availability, and national and local education policies. The time scale for school plans ranges from 1 to 15 years reflecting aspects of operational planning (1-2 years), strategic planning (3-5 years), and future thinking (5-15 years) (Davies and Ellison, 2003). Whereas the contents of development plans vary according to the school context, it is important to be realistic and focus on three or four manageable priorities (Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1991). The advantages of a few priorities include easy monitoring; a high level of involvement of stakeholders; and clearly focused objectives, targets and outcomes (Stoll & Fink, 1996).

There appears a general consensus that priorities do not differ considerably across schools within a given context. For example, a study of development plans of 185 primary schools in England and Wales found that the priorities included: school management and leadership, finance, premises,
school community links, curriculum, and staffing (Broadhead et al., 1999). It should be noted that resources play a key role in the SDP process. Research shows that SDP promotes the effective utilization of resources to achieve educational goals such as improved teaching and learning and basic facilities (Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1994).

The literature on school effectiveness in developing countries overwhelmingly indicates the significance of resources in school improvement strategies (Scheerens, 2000, Ward et al., 2006). In many developing countries resources determine the contents of the development plans. Literature suggests that the lack of the most basic facilities in many third-world schools causes depression among teachers and students and ineffective teaching and learning (Vulliamy, 1987). Research shows that a school’s resources level in itself is not what is important, rather the ways schools transform their available resources into staffing, structures, and organizational cultures is what matters’ (Oakes, 1989:187). However, many researchers argue that resources at least in developing countries remain a significant factor in school improvement. A recent study of the perceptions of stakeholders in Namibia confirms that the quality of education can only be improved through the provision of adequate resources such as desks, libraries, classrooms, furniture, trained teachers, and instructional materials (Barrow et al., 2006). Similarly, studies in Uganda show that investment in teacher training, classrooms and textbooks is effective in improving the quality of education (IOB, 2008).

The participation of stakeholders in the SDP is critical because the most effective means of improving the quality of education in schools is to offer stakeholders the responsibility for reviewing their own performance and implementing reforms (Turner & Clift, 1987). The successful implementation of the SDP is underpinned by the continuous support and commitment of the stakeholders (e.g. head teachers and teachers) manifested by interest, accessibility and networking (Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1991). However, implementation place schools at the center of internal and external pressure toward the attainment of set targets. The pressure emanates from three related factors: characteristics of change, local characteristics, and external factors (Fullan, 1991). These factors are experienced at four interactive levels in development planning: school, community, district and national level.

The SDP serves a variety of purposes in a decentralized education system. The development plan is a mechanism by which the public can hold schools accountable and assess the degree of improvement. Monitoring the plan helps the school to identify opportunities and emerging threats and devise appropriate strategies to overcome them. However, few studies have been undertaken in developed countries to evaluate the impact of development planning in primary schools (Cuckle & Broadhead, 2003, Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1994).

Several studies have also identified the key players in development planning (Cuckle & Broadhead, 2003, Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1994, Xaba, 2006,). However, few studies have examined how and why stakeholders are involved in development planning. In addition, some studies have failed to determine the contribution of local stakeholders (namely head teachers and teachers) towards school improvement even in countries that have implemented universal schooling. For example, recent research shows inadequate involvement of stakeholders in education activities at all levels of education limits the extent to which schools can improve universal primary education (UPE) (Moes, 2007).

Studies reported that SDP serves as a means of increasing parents’ participation in school management and schools’ capacity to manage change in partnership with stakeholders (Xaba, 2006, IOB, 2008). However, research provides divergent views about the involvement of stakeholders and
their level of involvement. Rogers (1994) suggests that teaching and non-teaching staff, parents and children should be involved; while Skelton et al (1991) advocate for everybody but at different levels. The participation of key stakeholders notably the head teachers and teachers in the planning process makes the school leadership not only accountable to the community but also to the government. This explains why in Uganda primary school head teachers sign performance contracts with the government at the beginning of each academic year. Research in other areas such as total quality management in the business sector reveals that the involvement of stakeholders promotes teamwork and motivation leading to better outcomes (Chiu, 1999). Therefore, the quality of the plan and level of implementation is affected by the degree of participation of stakeholders.

3. Objectives of the study
   1. To know the perceptions of head teachers of the whole school development plan.
   2. To find out the role of head teachers in implementing of whole school development plan.
   3. To identify the factors affecting the implementation of the whole school development plan.
   4. To find out the impact of school development plan on quality education

4. Data and Methodology
   The current study is an interpretive study, adopting a qualitative research design. The perceptions of head teachers about whole school development plan in the province of Punjab were carried out through research interviews.

   Head teachers working in high and higher secondary schools in the province of Punjab were the participants of the present study. For the selection of the participants, a list of the headteachers who got training on whole school development plan from Quaid-e-Azam Academy Lahore was obtained. Ten of these trainees were contacted via mobile phone. It was kept in mind that the participants should have been posted in different parts of the province.

   An interview protocol was developed keeping in view main variables associated with whole school plan i.e., Planning process, Implementation, and Evaluation. The interview questions were semi-structured and headteachers were led to describe their own experiences in the planning, implementation and evaluation process of the whole school plan. The interview was tried out on two of the headteachers and minor corrections were made.

   Interviews were conducted with ten head teachers on the telephone. With due permission of the participants, the interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed and translated. Almost 15-20 minutes were spent on interview from each individual. Interpretive data analysis technique was applied to analyze the data.

5. Results
   This section is comprised of a description of the data analysis and interpretation of the results. The purpose of the study was to find out the perception of Headteachers of the School Development Plan.

   Most of the head teachers were of the view that SDP designed for 2-3 years worked effectively. The participants perceived that 2-3 years of SDP works more effectively in order to reach our set objectives. In this way starting from the planning stage, and going through the whole process, they might get sufficient time to evaluate their performance toward the achievement of their targets.
Most of the head teachers identified the following priorities:

- Teaching and learning
- Instructional materials
- Pupils' assessment
- Community participation
- Teachers’ training and professionalism
- and pupils’ behavior and discipline

It was identified that teaching and learning were the top priority. The students’ assessment and achievement were first, community participation as the second and third priority respectively while teachers’ training and professional development were also the key priority.

Most of the head teachers were of the opinion that heads are considered to be in an advantageous position from which they know what is going on in their school. School improvement, followed by planned changes in school policies and practices, is not possible without a clear vision for the future. Vision is central to any school-based development. However, tensions may arise when the head of the school has a clear vision for the school’s future which may not in the first instance be shared by the staff members. This is where the Head Teacher has to have other skills such as the ability to take the lead and actively push things forward because he/she remains the chief instigator, promoter, and guardian of that vision.

Most of the head teachers were of the view that involvement of stakeholders, teamwork and collaboration, a flexible plan to accommodate changes, regular view of the progress, strong leadership of head teacher, and focus on improvement in teaching and learning in the classroom were the main affecting factors while implementing SDP.

The responses provided by the head teachers showed that teamwork and collaboration, involvement of stakeholders, and strong leadership of the head teacher were the more important factors as the visionary approach of the head teacher incorporating all factors might lead the plan to the heights of completion whereas the regular view of the progress, and focus on improvement in teaching and learning in the classroom were also considered important and a flexible plan to accommodates changes was observed as less important compared to other factors. It was also found that these entire factors might affect the SDP process in both ways; positively and vice versa.

The majority of the head teachers reported that the participation of stakeholders in development planning created a sense of unity; ownership of school programs, property & assets and collaboration in implementing school activities. The responses of the participants showed that the school development plan provides a systematic plan for carrying out all activities and needs in order to attain certain targets set by the school. From the very start point, planning to evaluation, with the collaboration of all stakeholders along with feedback from them school development plan improves the overall performance of the school.

6. Discussion

The SDP process that commences with assessment is part of auditing society to identify opportunities, challenges, and constraints within and outside the school environment (Power, 1997). The school focuses on three key elements the environment, internal resources, and the culture and values of the school these elements guide the school to identifying priorities, and targets, and design the development plan that is implemented, monitored, and evaluated regularly by key stakeholders. The
time scale of development plans is determined by school priorities, resource availability, and national and local education policies.

The time scale for school plans reflects aspects of operational planning, strategic planning, and future thinking. Whereas the contents of development plans vary according to the school context, it is important to be realistic and focus on three or four manageable priorities. The advantages of a few priorities include: easy monitoring; a high level of involvement of stakeholders, and clear focused objectives, targets, and outcomes.

It should be noted that resources play a key role in the SDP process. The major resources for schools include time, personnel, equipment, instructional materials, and funds. Variations in resource availability and utilization have a bearing both on the outcomes and impact of development plans. SDP promotes the effective utilization of resources to achieve educational goals such as improved teaching and learning.

The roles of head teachers and teachers in the development planning process are determined by school management structures. The structures determine the supervision, monitoring, and reporting mechanism. The head teacher serves as a technical advisor in school management and governance, financial management, and implementing the development plan.

The school’s capacity to implement development plans is strengthened through local initiatives, and collaboration with parents, community, local leaders, NGOs, and government. The involvement of stakeholders has created a sense of unity, and ownership of school property. Networking with stakeholders at different administrative and management levels improved cooperation among stakeholders, support supervision, and time management (Bryk, 2010).

The key priority of school plans is to improve the quality of teaching and learning through a wide range of activities at classroom, school, and community levels. For example, teachers were involved in implementing school plans through several activities: time management, remedial teaching, continuous assessment, and making instructional materials, and head teachers were involved in school management. Such activities assisted schools to achieve the objective of improving the quality of teaching (Silins & Mulford, 2002).

7. Conclusion
Views of most of the head teachers showed that school priorities provide a sound base for effective SDP. Headteachers are the key element in the process of SDP as they integrate the whole activity as a lead person. The majority of the head teachers were of the view that SDP has a great impact to enhance quality education regarding professional development and creating a collaborative environment. Community engagement and participation is the major aspect of the implementation of SDP.

8. Recommendations
• It is recommended that head-teachers may plan SDP for the effectiveness and betterment of the school.
• It is recommended to head teachers plan SDP for 2-3 years.
• Training institutes may conduct one-week sessions on SDP for head teachers to develop a better understanding.
• Newly recruited head teachers may get some ideas regarding priorities while the development of the school plan
• Headteachers may get benefited while implementing their school development
• The present study may help future researchers to evaluate the implementation of SDP.

References


