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Through Languages, Education, and
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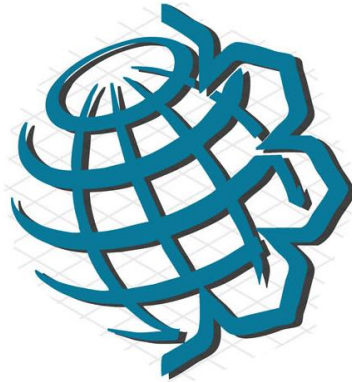
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SUSTAINING GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT GOALS
THROUGH
LANGUAGES, EDUCATION, AND TOURISM

**PROCEEDING OF ILTC 2019
(ENGLISH LANGUAGE)**

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THE PILLARS OF SCHOOL: A CASE STUDY OF MIDDLE LEADERS IN FOUR PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ISLAMABAD, PAKISTANS

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ABSTRACT

This study unveils the roles, responsibilities and challenges faced by middle leaders in private secondary schools in Pakistan. The study also focused on their contribution to schools in order to bring democratic changes in thinking, attitudes and behavior of school leadership system in a developing country. This was a case study which used interviews to collect data from four coordinators working in four different private schools in Islamabad. Four semi structured interviews were used as research instrument. The data revealed that coordinators work between senior management and teachers. Their role is multidimensional and multifunctional as teachers, mentors, monitors, administrators and managers. Their responsibilities were diversified in accordance to their roles. Carrying a significant set of responsibilities in relation with senior management, teachers, support staff, students and parents, middle leaders positively perform their duties by creating a culture of collaborative learning communities and fulfilling the trust of senior management. The study indicated that middle managers' perceptions of their diversity of roles within a hierarchal structure resulted in multiple challenges for them, for example unrealistic demands of senior management, teachers and parents, staff lacking seriousness and passion for work, and external pressures from stake holders. Conclusions were drawn that middle leaders exerted effective leadership through their hard work, vigour, motivation, creativity, positivity, flexibility and strong sense of commitment. They were involved in teaching, coordination, event management, decision making, knowledgeability and capacity building of staff, developing collegiality by shared vision for social cohesion, using their mediation and interpersonal skills for public satisfaction.

Keywords: Middle leaders; Roles; Responsibilities; Collaborative learning; challenges

1. INTRODUCTION

Effective leaders practice an indirect but significant and powerful influence on school effectiveness and students' achievement (Wallace, 2002, Leithwood and Jantzi, 2000). Middle leaders are teachers who hold middle-ranking positions in the hierarchical structure in a school. The middle position indicates dynamic roles and their direct influence on others. They secure better learning outcomes for students from their positive influence (Leask, 2007, Thomas, Sammons and Mortimore, 1997). They collaborate and build the capacity of teachers by creating strong professional learning communities. This leads to sustainable improvement where teachers can enquire and develop together (Harris and Jones 2010, Hopkins and Jackson 2002, Fullan, 2001). This research paper highlights the importance of middle management in the private school setting in Pakistan. It also discusses the multifunctional roles, responsibilities and problems in relation to middle leadership.

1.1 BACK GROUND OF STUDY

The international research emphasized on the importance of leadership. In recent years, the idea of leading from the middle has developed as a strategy: "That increases the capacity and internal coherence of the middle as it becomes a more effective partner upward to the state and downward to its schools and communities, in pursuit of greater system performance" (Harris and Jones, 2017, p.1). This concept indicates that leadership is not only restricted to principalship but a line of management that works between senior management and teachers, support staff and students. With vision and hard work, they actually uplift the standard of school (Glover et al., 1998). According to McKinney, McMahon and Walsh (2013, p.1): "Middle managers play a critical role in the ultimate ability of a company to achieve its strategic goals".

The researches indicated that middle leadership is a global phenomenon. Abbott et al., (2015) and Bush (2002) highlighted that the role of middle leaders is to teach, perform administrative tasks and manage people and resources. In the countries like England, Australia and New Zealand middle leaders performed similar roles. They are heads of departments, coordinators, subject specialists who are responsible for teachers' development through trainings (Bassett, 2016, Gur, 2013, Busher et al., 2007). In Pakistani public schools, the concept of middle leadership is vague as the principal is the main authority (Khaki, 2005).

Middle leaders carry diversified responsibilities. In England, middle leaders perform the responsibilities of the whole school: "there is evidence that responsibilities of middle leaders have grown significantly" (Brown et al., 2000, p. 249). In Australia, they work as mentor and coaches between principals and teachers. In New Zealand, they lead, teach and learn, develop linkage with stake holders, faculty and departmental management (Ministry of Education 2012). In Pakistan, middle leaders are involved in "Providing leadership, strategic planning and the overall responsibility for students' behavior" (Nooruddin and Baig, 2004, pg. 21). Simkins, Sisum and Memon (2010) discovered that in community based progressive schools, after the principal,

middle leaders' role is central: "Her role is seen, on the one hand, as a moral agent – a leader with high levels of commitment, patience, care and facilitative role, and on the other, an effective manager to run the affairs of school efficiently by fulfilling expectations of the stakeholders in a participatory approach" (Lizotte, 2013, p. 3). Khaki's study (2005, p. 2) labeled it as "prophetic model", which means a combination of managerial and humanitarian qualities.

Middle leaders face many challenges. For example, in England, middle leaders are "sandwiched" between conflicting senior management and the departmental colleagues (Bush, 2002). In Australia, high expectations from the school owners and senior management are challenging. In New Zealand: "Three main challenges are interpersonal relationships, collegiality and accountability; and a lack of allocated time" (Bassette, 2016, p. 100).

In South Asia especially in Malaysia, with respect to middle leaders' roles and challenges, Bush, Javaid and Ng (2017) highlighted the factors such as ambiguous and unsatisfactory roles relationships. Their study on the international schools also indicated the facts such as limited broad based leadership opportunities for middle leaders and teachers and less involvement in decision-making. Teaching and learning was found the most powerful and central component in schools.

In Pakistan, tensions are normally created by the senior management for the middle leaders to adopt assertive attitude which results in overall tensed working environment as Nazir (2010) mentioned: "Pakistan is characterized by authoritarian and hierarchal relationships" (p.2). Other challenges include high expectations from the stake holders and parents, lack of resources, lack of cooperation from senior managers and teachers (Simkins, Sisum and Memon, 2010).

1.3 CONTEXT OF STUDY

This research was a three dimensional study (as shown in figure 1), which looked into the roles, responsibilities and challenges of middle leaders in Pakistan.

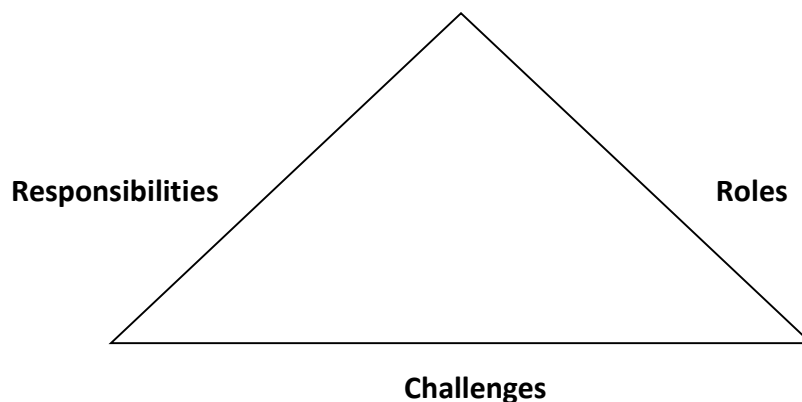


Figure 1: Three dimensional studies on middle leaders in school

This study was conducted to identify the roles of the middle leaders in secondary private schools in Islamabad. Simultaneously this research also looked into middle leaders' responsibilities and challenges that they encounter in their professional lives. As they delegate, coordinate, administer and manage work with a variety of public, therefore they encounter multiple problems and obstacles. Many times their efforts remain unnoticed or they do not get credit for their qualities; professionalism, devotion and commitment. Slowly and gradually, middle leaders become demotivated and they suffer from anxiety. According to McKinney, McMahon, and Walsh (2013, p.1): "Overburdened and undertrained, middle managers are on the verge of burning out".

1.4 Significance of Study

The role of middle leaders is under researched (Simkins, Sisum and Memon, 2010). Therefore, the researcher attempted to study the domain of middle leadership. There is limited information on middle leaders in schools. This study is an attempt to fill this gap by doing a research on middle leaders in school setting with a view to construct a profound and realistic knowledge-base, which could be used to improve both policies and practices regarding school middle leadership with strong impact on stake holders, principals, teachers, parents and students.

1.5 Problem Statement

The study looked into the roles, responsibilities and challenges faced by middle leaders in private secondary schools of Islamabad. The researcher chose the need to carry out this research and study because middle leaders are in the position to unveil their hidden identities and their contribution to schools in order to bring democratic changes in thinking, attitudes and behavior of school leadership system of a developing country of Pakistan.

1.6 Aims of Study

- To assess to what extent, middle leaders' roles influence teaching and learning in private schools.
- To investigate the duties of middle leaders that make them accountable to the senior managers.
- To explore the obstacles and tensions faced by middle leaders in carrying out their professional responsibilities.

1.7 Objective of Study

To assess the middle leadership with special focus on their roles, duties and problems that they encounter in their professional lives in the private secondary schools in Islamabad. To address the aims and the objective of study, this research was guided by the following research question.

1.8 Research Question

What are the roles, responsibilities and challenges of middle leaders in the private secondary schools?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of the global perspective in the literature on middle leaders indicated different theories. The theoretical framework served as base to investigate the key roles, responsibilities and challenges faced by middle leaders. Robinson (2007) derived five leadership dimensions from 13 core studies. These dimensions are educational direction, strategic alignment, learning community to improve students' success, constructive problem talk and smart teaching and learning tools.

2.1 Roles

The literature illuminated that Middle leaders' role is multidimensional, multifunctional and multi performance (Harris and Jones, 2017). They teach, coordinate, monitor and take crucial decisions (Hammerly-Fletcher and Brundrett, 2005). They facilitate and empower communities at various levels within the school just like "buffer and bridge" (Aubrey-Hopkins, 2013, p. 462). They directly influence students' learning progress as well (Leithwood, Hopkins, 2008, Harris and Jones, 2017). In his study, Busher (2005) indicated six roles of middle leaders; vision, managership, implementation with staff, coordination, mediating contexts and teachership. He labelled middle leaders "as agents for a school's senior management" who ensure that teachers in their classrooms are producing quality work (Busher, 2005, p.144).

2.2 Responsibilities

Literature review on responsibilities of middle leaders highlighted the responsibilities of middle leaders into four categories (Glover et al., 1998, Wise and Bush, 1999): academics, administrative and managerial responsibilities. Busher et al., (2007) also highlighted responsibilities such as representation of institution and liaison of colleagues, management and allocation of resources and collegiality. Infact the responsibilities of middle leaders extend to the whole school (Earley and Fletcher-Campbelle, 1989). In a study, Bennette, Woods, Wise and Newton (2007) highlighted the involvement of middle leaders in monitoring, mentoring and professional accountability. They built the capacity of teachers through trainings in a collaborative learning community leading towards sustainability.

2.1 Challenges

The literature review highlighted the challenges in the education sector. Hussain, (2015), Iqbal et al., (2013), Leithwood et al., (2007) identified problems in the education sector in Pakistan such as lack of proper planning, gender gap, social constraints, lack of funds, cost of education, war on terror and lack of technical education, political interference, lack of social recognition, absence of professional development programmes, lack of resources and monitoring. The middle leaders are 'fraught with difficulties' with never ending tensions targeting the 'nature and expectations of middle leadership' (Benette et al., 2007, p. 462). They take pressure from top and bottom (Fullan, 2010). Four main parameters of challenges were indicated by Busher and Harris (2017); firstly, structural configuration of a department, secondly social cohesion and collegiality within a department, thirdly status of a department in organization and fourthly power imbalance between leaders and followers. McKinney, McMahon and Walsh (2013) indicated: "These are the managers who are at risk of burning out and leaving your organization—unless you provide the proper support and development to perform their new responsibilities" (p.2).

3. METHODOLOGY

This section presents the research methodology. This study was exploratory and descriptive and was designed to give insights into the roles, responsibilities and challenges faced by middle leaders in four international schools in Islamabad, Pakistan. This study is an attempt to examine and probe the phenomenon studied rather than developing generalizations about middle leaders. The qualitative approach was used to investigate the roles, responsibilities and challenges faced by four middle leaders of four different schools in an interpretivistic manner (Creswell, 2007).

Interviews were found suitable for this study because such a method enabled the researcher to interact with the participants of the study in a natural setting, where the real world situations unfold naturally (Yin, 1984). It was "non-manipulative, unobtrusive, non-controlling" (Tuli, 2004, p.4). It made possible to study the central phenomenon as it happened and recorded the immediate reactions and attitudes of the participants (Robinson and Tuli, 2004). Considering a range of methodological choices, the case study method suited to this study. Infact only case study method allowed the study to be carried out with a small sample which is four coordinators or middle leaders of their respective schools. The data were collected by using semi-structured interviews. The four selected schools were among the best private schools of Islamabad. They catered to the educational needs of students belonging to the upper middle class and known for their quality teaching and learning. The selected participants were academic coordinators and administrators with two to five years of experience as middle leaders. In each school, one coordinator was chosen to be the sample. Purposive sampling was used because the selected coordinators were working as middle leaders in their schools as shown in table 1.

Table 1: *Sampling profile of the participants of the study.*

School Name	Names in data	Staff identities in data	Experience
Supernova school	School A	Coordinator and teacher A	5 years
International Grammar School System	School B	Coordinator and substitute teacher B	3 years
Scholanova School	School C	Coordinator C	5 years
City school	School D	Coordinator and teacher D	3 years

Data was collected through four interviews of four coordinators. A general interview guide was used which permitted the researcher to explore the roles, responsibilities and challenges faced by middle leaders. The semi structured interviews were conducted and recorded after fixing an appointment with the coordinators. The interview questions were pilot tested for suitability and accuracy before the real interviews were conducted. Data was inductively analyzed based on the predetermined three major themes: roles, responsibilities and challenges. Each theme had sub-themes. The major themes were predetermined themes and sub-themes as emergent themes that emerged from data. The transcriptions were coded using the Descriptive Coding method as highlighted by Saldana (2003, 2008). To ensure validity and reliability, each interview was transcribed. Similar questions were asked to four coordinators. Member checking was carried out where the transcripts were shown to the participants again to confirm the accuracy of the transcriptions (Creswell, 2007). Data collection only proceeded after ethics approval. The participants were given assurance about confidentiality of data in a password-secured computer with anonymous identity.

Limitation of Study

The limitation of study is a small number of participants; four participants and one from each school. This would restrict the generalizability of the findings of this study.

4. FINDINGS

The data analysis gave the following findings:

Roles

It was found that all coordinators had clarity of roles. Their main task was to carry out formal tasks which were assigned to them by the school heads or the ministry. The following sub themes

reflected the roles of middle leaders and broadly categorized as academic tasks and relationship building.

Academic Tasks

Academic tasks of middle leaders included teaching, coordination and monitoring.

Teaching

As teachers, coordinators A and D emphasized on integrating values in lessons. According to Coordinator A: "I like to inculcate values among students and to integrate values with syllabi." It was found that coordination was a series of tasks; curriculum planning, lessons plans checking, mentoring, monitoring, organizing extra-curricular activities, staff meetings, teachers' trainings, record keeping and coordination with support staff. Coordinator A mentioned: "...a part from teaching, coordination is additional job which includes checking planners, supervision of teachers at different levels, I conduct teachers' workshops....." It was noted that all coordinators monitored teachers in collegial environment. Coordinator B highlighted: "I go to different classes to inspect what students are learning and are teachers delivering according to work plans or not." It was observed that senior management involved coordinators in decision making. Coordinator A highlighted: "I am present when senior managers interviewed or took their demonstrations."

Relationship Building

It was found that coordinators as mentors helped teachers in learning new teaching methods. Coordinator B mentioned: "I developed a new syllabus and guided my teachers at every step....i share everything with them". It was discovered that middle leaders were satisfied with their senior managers. Coordinator A mentioned senior managers as "quite accommodating". Coordinator B reported that senior management preferred "team work" and "trusted" her. Coordinator C defined three parameters:" trust, annual appraisals and responsibilities". Coordinator D also showed satisfaction. Coordinators highlighted that it was vital to develop good relations with parents. Coordinator A: "If parents are not happy then you face a lot of problems." It was found that coordinators were encouraging leaders towards teachers. According to coordinator A: " You try to motivate the ones who are not too willing to work....i think it's a combination of reward and reprimand ".

Responsibilities

It was observed that all coordinators carried out their responsibilities positively with many extra duties.

Teaching

The findings indicated that teaching was a major responsibility followed by creativity, monitoring and teachers' training. It was found that coordinators liked to teach. Coordinator A considered it as "the best part of her career". Coordinator B mentioned: "I love teaching" and I substitute for my teachers as well". It was noted that coordinators encouraged creativity. Coordinator D reinforced that: "...pair work, group work, and multimedia. It should not be ordinary; so that students do not get bored, they have a feeling that they achieved something." All coordinators monitored teachers. Coordinator A: "I observe teachers annually in the presence of headmistress in classrooms." Coordinator B explained: " I go to classes to inspect what students are learning and what teachers are teaching". Coordinator C highlighted: "I check at what time are teachers coming and going ". Coordinator D indicated: "...to supervise teachers whether they are following syllabus breakdown and also if they are making use of correct teaching strategies." It was found that coordinators as mentors, created communities of learning for sustainable development. Coordinator A mentioned that she conducted workshops for learning and to "settle disputes among people".

Administration

Besides academics, middle leaders were involved in administrative and extra-curricular activities. Coordinator C mentioned: "I daily upload homework and syllabus for different classes on the school software." It was found that extra-curricular activities such as singings, dramatics were also as important as academics. Coordinator A indicated: "...extra-curricular we try to incorporate to curricular activities like group work". It was observed that all coordinators practiced team work by engaging teachers in planning and implementation of activities. Coordinator B highlighted: "I make activity calendar and show to my teachers and we plan together".

Challenges

Challenges were broadly categorized under the two sub themes: multi-tasking and relationship building.

Multitasking

Job dissatisfaction was observed among middle leaders as they were expected to be playful, clever and manipulative by senior management. Coordinator A shared her feelings: "The life of a coordinator is not easy. That's so because you do not have any friends, you have to report them to your heads, who are their heads as well and you are there as a spy." Monitoring was found as a threat to collegiality as it was disliked by teachers despite of collegial environment. Coordinator A: "...teachers know that you are a supervisor. Yet they hold back a few things, they do." It was found that extra duties were performed by middle leaders. Coordinator A complained "Early I

was only asked to check their planners later it included workshops....” Coordinator B pointed out: “Organizing events is not my duty but I am doing it.” Coordinator C expressed “I am doing a lot extra...sometimes we have to do much more than what is written.”

Relationship Building

Relationship building was found challenging considering the demands of senior management, parents and lack of teachers’ cooperation. Middle leaders, coordinators created collaborative and trustworthy environment but still teachers’ non cooperative behavior was a challenge. Coordinator A expressed: “Not every worker is a willing worker..... certain teachers consider teaching only a source to earn money.... getting work done by such people is the biggest challenge.”Senior managers were found powerful and demanding while neglecting the coordinators’ capacity. Coordinator A indicated: “Basically senior management wants you to work as a spy....you can’t please everyone all the time. They are happy as long as you are following their dictates.” It was found that parents created tensions with their unrealistic demands. Coordinator B mentioned: “If parents are not happy then you face a lot of problems.” Coordinator C criticized: “In a private school parents expect that school should do everything for the child and it is hard for us.”It was found that coordinators positively accepted their multiple responsibilities. They were satisfied that senior management was appreciative and trusted them. Coordinator A highlighted: “I wouldn’t have been given this job if I was outspoken kind of a person. I don’t raise my voice.” Under the roles, middle leaders actually perform tasks delegated by the principal. Their responsibilities are related to academics, administration and relationship building. Through effective leadership, they face challenges related to multitasking and relationships.

5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

From the study of middle leaders’ roles in school, the fact emerged that they worked in between their respective principals and teachers as mentioned by Bush and Saran (2013). They fulfilled the demands of their post through the implementation of school policy and smooth functioning by delegation and supervision (Glover et al., 1998). Besides teaching they performed leadership, managerial, administrative responsibilities; mentoring and monitoring (Harris and Jones, 2017). They worked in multiple capacities as echoed by Hammersley-Fletcher and Brundette (2005). As a result, they connected and protected their staff like “buffer and bridge” as described by Aubrey-Hopkins (2013). Middle leaders projected their potential through their roles within the school hierarchy which was geared towards improvement as indicated by Busher and Harris (1999).

Middle leaders’ responsibilities were designed in accordance to their multifunctional roles. They performed academic, administrative, managerial duties (Busher and Harris, 1999). Their responsibilities extended to the whole school as explained by Earley and Fletcher-campbelle (1989). They performed their duties timelessly and positively. Hence they transferred dynamism and motivation to their juniors while focusing on their capacity building with their knowledge, skills and years of experience as mentioned by Busher and Fletcher et al., (2007). Through their

effective leadership, middle leaders influenced teaching and learning by transforming into values based teaching as highlighted by Busher et al., (2007). They encouraged a culture of caring and sharing through learning communities as mentioned by Busher and Harris (2010). Considering their excellent mediation and interpersonal skills, middle leaders were also expert of building good relationships with their seniors and juniors.

Middle leaders encountered multiple challenges. Owing to their middle position, they took pressures from seniors and juniors while targeting the “nature and expectations of middle leadership” (Fullan, 2010 and Benette et al., 2007). Multitasking: Coordination, monitoring, relationship building, lack of cooperation from senior management and teachers were major challenges as highlighted by Javaid et al., (2017), Glover et al., (1998) and Wenger (1998).

6. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the roles, responsibilities and challenges of middle leaders in four private schools in Islamabad. Qualitative method and case study approach was used whereas semi structured interviews were conducted to study middle leaders. In the private school leadership system of Pakistan, middle leaders play a pivotal role in sustainable development through teachers’ capacity building and improved students’ learning outcomes. Using their knowledge and rich experience, they actually uplift the standards of schools, explore and tap the resources through social networking. Middle leaders evolve the traditional educational leadership of Pakistan by bringing change in thinking, attitude and behavior hence they are the PILLARS of schools, leading towards sustainable development.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Transformational leadership trainings are recommended for the stake holders, senior management and principals. The purpose is to transform the traditional leadership system by involving middle leaders in decision making and giving them a separate identity.
2. Sensitizational workshops are recommended for public.

For future implications, a national level, mixed method study may be conducted to explore in detail the middle leadership in educational institutions.

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