

Article

School Leadership and Management in Sindh Pakistan: Examining Headteachers' Evolving Roles, Contemporary Challenges, and Adaptive Strategies

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Abstract: This research investigates headteachers' leadership and management roles and challenges in leading government secondary schools in Sindh, Pakistan. Employing a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenology methodology, forty semi-structured interviews were conducted with twenty headteachers. The thematic analysis of the data explored that headteachers were performing several academic and administrative-focused responsibilities, although their involvement was more administrative than academic and entailed more management than leadership. However, headteachers faced enormous challenges in leading and managing their schools. Some critical challenges were a lack of basics in terms of clean water, reliable electricity, and sufficient school furniture. Others included a lack of funds, a shortage of teachers, managing professionally weak teachers, teacher union issues and a lack of authority. Nevertheless, some headteachers were making admirable efforts to address these challenges. This research may open a window to understanding the roles and challenges of headteachers and inform policymakers of how-to better support headteachers in leading their schools successfully in the 21st century.

Keywords: school leadership; school management; principals; headteachers; leadership role; leadership challenges; Sindh; Pakistan



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1. Introduction

This paper explores the leadership and management roles and the challenges in leading government secondary schools for headteachers in Sindh, Pakistan. It reports on a qualitative study involving interviews with 20 headteachers.

School leadership has been shown to be one of the most important factors in student and school success. Indeed, there is now a widely held belief that, of school-controlled factors, 'leadership is second only to classroom instruction as an influence on student learning' [1] (p. 3). Principals have the most opportunity and responsibility for exercising leadership, and their role is of vital importance to schools [2,3].

The time principals spend working is long, with many reports of 60 or more hours per week, and the nature of their work is changing [4–9]. Many are commenting on work intensification and increased stress [8,10], with both increasing during and after the pandemic [6]. In the 2022 *Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey* [6], the top five sources of stress were:

1. Sheer quantity of work,
2. Lack of time to focus on teaching and learning,
3. Teacher shortages,
4. Mental health issues of students, and
5. Mental health issues of staff.

We also know from time-use studies that much of a principal's work is managerial in nature. Based on an analysis of a 2013 survey of Ontario principals, it was reported 'that principals spent their time in four major areas: school management (29.2%), instructional leadership (9.5%), student affairs (8.0%), and professional development (PD) (6.8%)' [5] (p. 98). In a study of principal work practices in the USA, Spillane, Camburn and Pareja [11] found that time was split amongst administrative tasks (63.4%), instruction and curriculum (22.2%), professional growth (5.8%), and fostering relationships (8.7%). Bristow, Ireson and Coleman [12] found that 34 English headteachers spent time on administration (24%), meeting the demands of external stakeholders (17%), management (15%), meeting the demands of internal stakeholders (9%), continuous professional development (9%), strategic leadership (7%) and personal issues (4%), with 14% of time spent on various other tasks. When the administration and management tasks in the study of Bristow, Ireson and Coleman [12] are combined, this equates to 39% of their time.

In the 1990s, there was considerable interest in the difference between leadership and management, and differing conceptions developed. For Kotter [13], leadership and management were separate but complementary concepts, with leadership including setting direction, aligning people, motivating and inspiring, and management tasks, including planning and budgeting, organizing and staffing, and controlling and problem-solving. Bennis et al. [14] viewed management and leadership as different but equally important concepts, with leaders focused on direction, vision, goals, objectives, effectiveness and purpose, while managers focused on day-to-day and short-term efficiency. In education, Leithwood [15] had a contrasting perspective that viewed leadership and management as being opposite ends of a continuum and related to transformational and transactional leadership, respectively. Whilst there has not been similar interest in distinguishing between leadership and management in recent times, as noted above, the time use studies reveal that principals still spend considerable time on the managerial side of work.

Despite the challenges to leadership, there are leadership styles that are important for school success. There is an interdependent relationship between instructional and transformational leadership styles [16], and when school principals adopt these leadership styles, they positively impact student achievement and overall school improvement [17,18]). The literature indicates that transformational and instructional leadership styles complement each other. For example, transformational leadership creates a supportive context for teacher work that allows for a better focus on instructional leadership which seeks to improve teaching and learning [16,17]. Further to this, there is a growing body of literature that connects distributed leadership with transformational and instructional leadership for school success [19,20].

Daniëls et al. [20] explain the connections between the three leadership styles. They report that instructional leadership focuses on the core education process, i.e., instructional programs—teaching and learning, the school's mission, learning climate and organisational conditions. Transformational leadership focuses on setting vision and goals and creating staff, teacher, and student motivation to achieve goals for school improvement by employing a bottom-up leadership approach [20]. At the same time, distributed leadership emphasises that leadership is no longer the responsibility of a single school principal, and the school leadership and management responsibilities should be distributed to teachers and other school staff members [20].

2. The Role of a School Leader in Pakistan

In Pakistan, teachers are appointed as school headteachers based on their seniority rather than academic qualifications and professional capabilities in school leadership and management [21–23]. For example, in the Sindh province, 40% of places for the initial or direct appointment of secondary school headteachers are allocated to the Sindh Public Service Commission (SPSC). The SPSC is a provincial-level commission that selects candidates for different department positions [24]. The remaining 60% of places are reserved for the appointment of headteachers through promotion from the existing pool of secondary

school teachers based on seniority [25]. However, it is also worth noting that the SPSC does not recruit headteachers annually—there are two-to-five-year intervals between one recruitment process and the next. Consequently, many secondary schools have vacant headship positions and are run by senior high school teachers who are appointed as in-charge headteachers.

Memon [22] suggests it is a prevailing belief in the Pakistani education system that any experienced teacher can become the headteacher of a school. This belief holds that anybody can be a headteacher, and there is no need for any qualifications, experience, professional knowledge, skills or dispositions to lead and manage schools successfully [26]. Bush [27] cautions against this approach and argues that teaching qualifications and experience prepares teachers to teach effectively rather than lead schools effectively. Bush [27] suggests the headteacher role is too demanding and different from teaching to only rely on teacher experience and development as a suitable pathway to principalship [27].

Many Pakistani headteachers are also not provided clear job descriptions [26], and these school leaders seldom have an opportunity to learn about school leadership and management practices in any pre-induction professional development program. As a result, many headteachers in Pakistan are unprepared for their work in leading and managing schools [23].

Whilst the literature in Pakistan and elsewhere is encouraging school systems to have empowered and innovative school leaders [1,7,17,27–30], the centralised and hierarchical bureaucratic educational system that prevails in Pakistan’s government schools [28–30] poses challenges. Headteachers describe having a lack of authority and power in hiring and firing, transfer and deployment, maintaining punctuality of staff, dealing with senior faculty, maintaining the security of the school and getting staff to work as per their responsibilities [28]. Pakistani headteachers have been characterised as implementers of decrees from those in higher positions [30], predominantly performing administrative roles such as maintaining school discipline, completing required administrative work, coordinating, and responding to those in higher positions, and other similar tasks. In the Sindh province, Dahri’s [28] research described how urban and rural headteachers lacked power and authority in a range of human resource areas, such as staff hiring, firing, transfer and deployment, maintaining punctuality of staff, dealing with senior faculty, maintaining the security of the school and getting staff to work as per their responsibilities.

Despite the challenges identified above, headteachers in Pakistan have not lost hope of enhancing students’ achievements and improving schools. Dahri [28] reports that headteachers have adopted different strategies to face the bureaucratic and political challenges and centre their focus on school improvement. Pakistani headteachers believe that their confidence, courage, work with teachers and engagement in teaching and learning practices help them to focus on school improvement as administrative and instructional leaders [28].

More research is needed to understand the role of headteachers in Pakistan and how they address the many challenges they face, and especially in relation to how they develop as headteachers. The research reported here is the first doctoral research to explore such matters in the Sindh province of Pakistan. The following research questions guided the current study:

1. How do the headteachers view their role as school leaders?
2. What challenges do they face, and how do they cope with these challenges?

3. Methodology

3.1. Purpose Statement

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to explore the leadership and management roles of government secondary school headteachers in Sindh, Pakistan, to understand their responsibilities and challenges. There are government and non-government (private) secondary school headteachers in Sindh, Pakistan; however, the current study only focused on government headteachers because there are more government headteachers than non-government headteachers in Sindh, Pakistan.

3.2. Research Design

Van Manen [31] explains the interaction between questions and research design and how the purpose and research questions generally guide selecting the appropriate research design. Keeping in view the purpose and research questions of the current study, the researchers chose the hermeneutic phenomenological design of the qualitative research [31] because it centres on those persons who have experienced a particular phenomenon to develop a composite description of the essence of an experience [32]. Van Manen [31] terms this approach hermeneutic phenomenology because of the focus on gaining insights about the lived experience (phenomenology) and interpreting that lived experience (hermeneutic) [31].

This approach of hermeneutic phenomenology was the focus of the current study, as the data were collected from research participants about their roles and challenges and then interpreted to make sense of the essence of their experiences. “Phenomenology describes how one orients to lived experience, hermeneutics describes how one interprets the “texts” of life” [31] (p. 4). Moreover, a hermeneutic approach involves the art of reading a text to gain a full understanding of the intention and meaning [32]. In this process of description and interpretation, the usage of semiotics helps to develop a practical writing approach for the hermeneutic phenomenology method—it is fundamentally a writing activity where research and writing have a close connection [31].

A hermeneutic phenomenological study systematically attempts to uncover, describe and interpret the lived experiences of individuals [31]. The nature and meaning of an experience are at the heart of hermeneutic phenomenology. Thus, it does not offer a theory to control the world, but the possibility of acceptable understanding, to be in direct contact with the human world [31]. The human world is the area of interest and investigation for hermeneutic phenomenology—it investigates human beings who are engaged with and experiencing their worlds, and attempts to understand their lived experiences through description and interpretation [31].

3.3. Sample

There were 1719 secondary schools (6 to grade 10) in Sindh, Pakistan at the time of this study. Participants included twenty headteachers of government secondary schools in seven of the twenty-nine districts of Sindh, Pakistan. Key considerations were given to selecting research participants from different genders (male and female), geographical areas (rural and urban and different districts of Sindh, Pakistan) and differently gendered schools (boys, girls and mixed). The researchers accessed a list of secondary school headteachers with their active phone numbers and contacted them via phone. The researchers informed them about the purpose of the study, requesting volunteer participation. The demographic details of headteachers who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Headteacher characteristics.

Headteacher Number [HTs]	Gender	Academic Qualifications	Professional Qualifications	Sch Type	Sch Location	Headship Exp (Years)	Teaching Exp (Years)	Headship Exp_ Current School (Years)	Teaching Exp_ Current School (Years)
1	Male	MA (English)-M.Phil (Edu) Cont.	B.Ed *-M.Ed **	Co-Education/Mix	Urban	7	8–9	2	0
2	Male	MA (Political Science)	B.Ed–M.Ed	Boys	Rural	8	19	1.5	0
3	Male	MA (Sindhi)-M.Phil (Edu)	B.Ed–M.Ed	Boys	Urban	8–9	22	4 (months)	0 year
4	Female	MA (English)-MA (Political Science)	B.Ed–M.Ed	Girls	Urban	8	15	2	0
5	Male	MA (Eco)	B.Ed–M.Ed	Co-Education/Mix	Rural	3	33	3	0

Table 1. Cont.

Headteacher Number [HTs]	Gender	Academic Qualifications	Professional Qualifications	Sch Type	Sch Location	Headship Exp (Years)	Teaching Exp (Years)	Headship Exp_ Current School (Years)	Teaching Exp_ Current School (Years)
6	Male	MA (Eco)	B.Ed–M.Ed	Co-Education/Mix	Rural	3	25	3	0
7	Female	M.Sc (Maths)	B.Ed–M.Ed	Co-Education/Mix	Urban	5.3	2	3–4 (month)	0
8	Male	MA (English)-MA (Political Science)	PTC ***–B.Ed–M.Ed	Boys	Rural	5	34	5	0
9	Male	MA (Eco)	B.Ed–M.Ed	Boys	Rural	10	27	10	11
10	Female	MA (Sindhi)	B.Ed–M.Ed	Girls	Rural	10	10	10 (months)	1
11	Male	MA (Sindhi)	B.Ed–M.Ed	Co-Education/Mix	Urban	5	15	5	0
12	Female	M.Phil (Edu)	B.Ed–M.Ed	Girls	Urban	8	21	2	0
13	Female	B.Sc	B.Ed–M.Ed	Girls	Urban	8	20	1.3	0
14	Female	M.Phil (Edu)	B.Ed–M.Ed	Boys	Urban	8	21	1	0
15	Male	MA (Sindhi)	B.Ed–M.Ed	Boys	Urban	1	16	1	16
16	Female	MA (Eco)-MBA (HRM)-MS (HRM)	B.Ed–M.Ed	Co-Education/Mix	Urban	4	0	4	0
17	Male	MA (Islamic Culture)	B.Ed–M.Ed	Co-Education/Mix	Urban	15	15	1	10
18	Female	MA (English)	B.Ed–M.Ed	Girls	Urban	3	0	2	0
19	Female	M.Sc (Zoology)	B.Ed–M.Ed	Girls	Urban	7	5	2.5	0
20	Female	M.Sc (Maths)-MBA (Finance)	B.Ed–M.Ed	Boys	Urban	8	0	2	0

* Bachelor of Education. ** Master of Education. *** Primary Teaching Certificate.

3.4. Data Collection and Ethical Considerations

The data were collected by conducting forty semi-structured phone interviews—two with each of the 20 headteachers. Phone interviews were used as the research was conducted during COVID restrictions, and phones were the most reliable and safe communication means. Each interview lasted for up to 60 min. All interviews were conducted in the first language of the research participants (Sindhi, 67%; Urdu, 33%). Translation procedures, including back translation (<https://med.und.edu/research/genacis/back-translation-guidelines.html> accessed 8 March 2022) (Sindhi/Urdu to English and vice-versa) and the translation of findings from two experts having a similar first language, were adopted to ensure translation accuracy. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, then checked by participants. The interview questions focused on exploring the headteachers' roles, the challenges they face as school leaders and strategies they adopt to address them. The second interview with the headteachers was conducted within three to seven days of the first interview to fill the gaps that had emerged from the first interview. Strategies for promoting rigour, trustworthiness and transferability included: triangulation of views by using 20 headteachers with different personal and career characteristics and from different school districts within the Sindh province; participant checking of interview transcripts; review and audit of the research through discussions between the researcher, supervisors and advisory panel; provision of detailed description of the research methodology with examples of analysis; and, rich descriptions of participant views and researcher interpretations.

Ethical Considerations

Before starting the data collection of this study, ethics approval was obtained from the University of Melbourne's Human Ethics Advisory Group. Informed consent from the school system and headteachers were gained before interviews were conducted. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured through the use of pseudonyms for headteachers and

schools, and minimal collection of personal and professional information. For example, headteachers are only denoted by numbers, from HM 1 to HM 20.

3.5. Data Analysis

Data were analysed using a modification of the Stevick–Colaizzi–Keen method of data analysis [32]. This involved thoroughly reading interview transcripts to develop a list of significant statements and inductively assigning codes to them, the review of codes/significant statements and the merging of refined codes into different categories; coding categories were merged into themes, which led to the emergence of the major themes of this study. The data were managed, organised and analysed using NVivo 12 software. Figure 1 shows the data analysis process of this study.

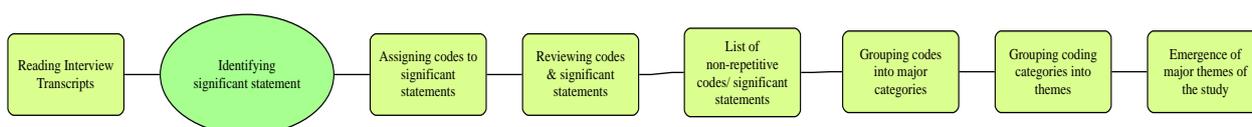


Figure 1. Mind map: data analysis process of the current study.

It is important to note that, due to the nature of the current study (hermeneutic phenomenology), a theoretical framework was not adopted to analyse the data, but rather, the data are analysed in a grounded manner, which is truer to the intention of hermeneutic phenomenology.

4. Findings and Discussion

This section reports on themes that emerged in consideration to the headteachers' views about their role, their responsibilities and their challenges and the strategies they used to address them.

4.1. Role of a Headteacher

The headteachers viewed their role as central to the school, explaining this by using metaphors such as backbone, captain, elder or head of the family. For example, headteacher 7 described their role like this:

He is like a backbone, such as an elder at home...everything wholly solely depends on him... Like at home, there are different types of family members: some are humble, some are rude, and it is similar in schools too... Some [teachers] agree to your point of view, some disagree. (HT 7)

The professional role of a headteacher was considered broadly and described variously as a being a leader, administrator, planner, monitor, counsellor, guide and supervisor. Headteacher 1 explained the multifaceted nature of his work:

Head[ship] is a multidimensional task. [A headteacher] is not only responsible for academics, [but] he has to look into managerial matters and issues and resolve them. [He] has to make decisions: [and] this requires competence. (HT 1)

This complex view has been noted in other research, such as that of Qutoshi and Khaki [33], who described Pakistani headteacher roles as including being a school manager, a community mobiliser, a liaison officer to develop linkages between school and community, a resource mobiliser to identify and arrange teaching and learning resources at school, a reporter to inform and motivate parents and provide school information to superiors and other relevant stakeholders, and an instructional leader investing in the capacity building of teachers.

The roles reported by the headteachers can be categorised into academic and administrative responsibilities, and these are explored next.

4.1.1. Academic Responsibilities

Sixty percent of the participants referred to critical academic responsibilities, mainly in curriculum and pedagogy matters. For example, typical responsibilities were preparing the course syllabi, checking teachers' lesson plans, assisting teachers in assessments, monitoring classes through classroom observations and randomly checking students' homework and subject journals. These findings are similar to those of Riaz and Sultan [34], who report that Pakistani headteachers spend 70 percent of their daily time monitoring instructional activities. These activities include taking rounds of classes to check teacher presence and the nature of the classroom environment and discipline; checking students' homework to ensure that it is given and properly checked by teachers; ensuring substitution arrangements for absent teachers by arranging alternate teachers and checking that teachers conduct agreed co-curricular activities.

Many of these responsibilities are focused on maintaining the daily instruction program, so they are best described as management focused. There is very little sense of leadership focus, such as setting new directions, planning for the future, developing staff, improving the school organisation, or improving teaching and learning—the type of activities usually associated with educational leadership [1,17]. The research of Mansoor and Akhtar [35] supports these observations, as the headteachers in their study were conscious of their multiple roles, but their approach remained conventional and overemphasised administrative work.

Some headteachers did focus on developing their teachers, such as providing organised short training for their teachers on leadership, student behaviour and attitude, class norms and communication. Although not evident in this research, Qutoshi and Khaki [33] describe the mentoring work of a Pakistani headteacher. Headteachers in this research, as confirmed in other studies on Pakistani headteachers [34], want to provide systematic school-based PD to their teachers but find it difficult due to time constraints and heavy workloads.

4.1.2. Administrative Responsibilities

The current study supports the assertion that Pakistani headteachers emphasise administration more than other roles, like having an instructional/academic focus [34,35].

The headteachers in this study reported that they were busy performing many administrative tasks at their schools. Seventy percent of the headteachers referred to primary duties that included arranging and managing co-curricular activities like sports, quiz competitions and scouting camps. Headteacher 4 elaborated:

...we celebrated sports week [an emphasized different matches... like cricket, netball, throw ball, races [running]... the children were very active and participated with [enthusiasm].

The headteachers also organized celebrations for important historical events at their schools, including Independence Day, Defense Day, Cultural Day, Quaid-i-Azam (Quaid-i-Azam means great leader, title for the founder of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah) Day and Iqbal (Dr Allama Mohammad Iqbal was a poet, philosopher and a prominent figure in Pakistan history) Day

Headteachers were engaged in many managerial tasks, including managing interpersonal conflicts among teachers, correspondence with system administrators, conducting meetings, overseeing school discipline, preparing timetables, structuring the school management committee (SMC), coordinating with the community and monitoring school cleanliness, water, sanitation, health, hygiene, safety and security. In a context similar to Pakistan's, Kirui and Osman [36] reported that Kenyan principals spent most of their time dealing with managerial issues and little time on leadership work. The authors explained that, although the role of a principal as an instructional leader is emphasised in the literature and systems, in practice, principals are not spending time on this [36].

Lastly, there were concerns about the type of information the system required, how it collected this information and what it did with it. For example, the system often requires school information about the total number of students and teachers and about basic school facilities on an urgent basis. The urgent nature of these requests affects the headteacher's planning, as supplying this information is time-consuming. Although the system frequently requires information about school needs, it seems unable to use this information to improve schools, as mentioned below.

4.2. Challenges and Response Strategies

Headteachers faced several challenges, from a lack of basic facilities and funds to a shortage of teachers, having professionally weak teachers, teacher union issues and a lack of headteacher authority. Although these challenges were impeding factors, some headteachers adopted effective strategies to address them and thus were trying to manage their schools successfully, as described below.

4.2.1. Lack of Basic Facilities

Sixty percent of the headteachers described three critical challenges: electricity load-shedding, furniture shortage and non-availability of drinking water in schools. This is similar to schools in Kenya, for which, in a survey conducted in 2012, Moyi [37] reported that '57% of rural schools did not have clean water, 76% had no electricity, 27% had no girls' bathrooms, and 75% had no library' (p. 206).

Electricity Load-Shedding

Electricity load-shedding was one of the critical challenges for many of the headteachers, as the monthly average temperature is often 40 degrees Celsius in the areas where their schools were situated. The situation became more critical because the classes were overcrowded in some schools—having 100 or more students in a class. Although there is a two-month summer vacation in June and July, schools are open for five hot months each year. One participant (HT 6) reported the following:

This [electricity load-shedding] is one of the biggest issues. . . our area is hot [so] here we need fan[s] for eight months, and we have a lot of [student] enrolment: . . .in every class, we have more than 100 students. . . [But] you see there is such an energy crisis, and the important thing is. . . in our working time there is no electricity [and] in this environment [a] teacher cannot work. (HT 6)

This portrays an unhappy case of affairs in many government schools in Sindh, Pakistan. However, some headteachers tried to cope with this challenge by arranging solar panels and solar fans with the help of the local community, but this was only a partial solution. The headteachers recommended that the government support schools in arranging and using renewable energy resources.

Shortage of Furniture

The headteachers reported another challenge, related to the shortage of student desks in many schools. Generally, three students share a wooden desk in a typical government school in Sindh, Pakistan, which is an efficient usage of this basic level of furniture. However, the government has been unable to provide the required desks to schools. For example, findings reported 36 desks for 360 students in a school (HT 2) and 281 desks for an enrolment of 2000-plus students in another school (HT 9). This raised concerns related to how to accommodate all students and how to get the system to provide this basic resource. Responding to these concerns, the headteachers had to take action. For example, one headteacher arranged for the delivery of old desks from another school, had them repaired and provided them to students; others obtained help from the community and friends, with spare desks being donated to the school. The headteachers reported that the system was deaf to these issues—headteachers conveyed the problem to their District

Education Officer (DEO), Director and even the Secretary of Education, but were met with no response.

Non-Availability of Drinking Water

A lack of clean drinking water was another issue in several schools. The underground water quality, with a low pH level, was unsafe for students and staff to drink. Some headteachers responded innovatively to this challenge by hiring a taxi car or rickshaw to fetch clean drinking water from a surrounding place six to eight kilometres away from the school site. Headteacher 2 reported:

...the main issue I am facing is drinking water, which I arrange from six kilometres away by a rickshaw. I book a rickshaw... [to arrange water] for three hundred students daily. (HT 2)

In a similar fashion, Hussain and Sajjad [38] also reported on the lack of basic facilities in another province of Pakistan: Punjab. The authors reported that female secondary school headteachers faced many problems promoting quality education in their schools due to insufficient infrastructure. For example, all of the female headteachers reported problems due to a lack of instructional materials, including simple and modern audio-visual aids, laboratory items for science experiments and books in the library. Ninety-three percent of the headteachers described problems due to inadequate classrooms and washroom facilities for students according to their strengths. There was no proper library room and boundary wall in 86.66% and 67% of the headteachers' schools, respectively, and 73.33% of the headteachers reported problems due to a lack of information technology equipment and facilities for students and teachers [38].

In summary, these stories of a lack of basic facilities such as electricity, furniture and clean drinking water portray a dismal situation in the participants' schools. A lack of basic facilities with an overcrowded student population at some schools made it very difficult for headteachers to successfully lead and manage their schools. Nevertheless, the headteachers in this study showed great moral purpose and ingenuity in doing their best to overcome these challenges and provide these basic facilities.

4.2.2. Lack of Funds

Fifty-five percent of the headteachers described an acute shortage of funds, so running their schools was challenging. Most headteachers referred to the school management committee (SMC) fund, which is PKR 100,000 in value and allocated by the system in each financial year to manage school expenses, but is done so regardless of the school's size. This irrational approach to funding distribution has created a sense of discontent and feelings of injustice, especially among the headteachers of large schools. '...and where there are two thousand students, your funding is not even ten thousand rupees per month' (HT 11). Due to this uniformity in school financing, some schools remain disadvantaged because of their size [39]. This is further explained well by headteacher 3:

We receive SMC funds [at schools]. A fixed [amount] of SMC [funding] is allocated from the high office for all schools. But every school has its own needs... If [a big school] where enrolment is six thousand students... and [a small school] where enrolment is 200 students have same funding [PKR 100,000], then it is like injustice. (HT 3)

Further findings sketch a desperate scenario that is even more disheartening, as 30% of headteachers reported the non-allocation of this minimal SMC fund in 2019 and 2020. When asked about the reasons for this discrepancy, headteacher 14 explained that the Government of Sindh does not provide SMC funds to schools from its budget, but instead borrows it from the World Bank. She further elaborated:

So, the World Bank stopped giving funds for the last two years... The reason is that when the World Bank team came to Karachi, Pakistan, they visited schools and noted that physically schools were in very bad shape. [The point is] you

will find some very good schools [with having all the required facilities] and in every town you will find two good schools out of fifteen. The remaining thirteen schools would [lack basic facilities]: without water, electricity, fans [and] having damaged [student] desks. So, when the World Bank [team] undertook the survey [of schools], they said we are giving so much amount [for schools' physical betterment], but where is it going? [Because] your schools [are in bad shape]. (HT 14)

Headteachers reported that corruption was one of the reasons for the poor physical conditions of many schools. For example, some headteachers suggested that the district office illegally took 50% of the allocated SMC funds (HTs—2, 4, 8). Riaz and Sultan [34] reported that headteachers in Sindh were very vocal on the corruption issue and they described how the department deprived them of resources and how the system officers often asked for bribes. The SMC fund was already the minimum of what was needed, and so a 50% cut by the district office made it almost impossible to improve the physical conditions of schools. Headteacher 14 strongly advocated for a higher SMC, arguing that PKR 100,000 was not enough to adequately address school maintenance needs. In many cases, headteachers, as subordinates to the district office, were left with no other option than to fulfil the undue demands of the district office.

The way many headteachers coped was to generate their own funds. They did this through their own donations to the school (as did some of their teachers). For example, some headteachers, from each month's salary, would buy one thing school needed and some headteachers hired out the school space on Sundays to testing organisations (HTs—4, 11, 14).

Similarly, Hussain and Sajjad [38] reported several financial and budgetary problems identified by female secondary school headteachers in Punjab, Pakistan. These problems included having an insufficient non-salary budget, delays in release of the funding and the complicated budget administration. Overall, nine in ten of the headteachers reported that these problems hindered them from providing quality education at their schools [38].

In summary, the participants of this study reported a lack of funding, which created many challenges for them to manage their schools smoothly. Participants were unhappy about the amount of SMC funds and their distribution: the amount was seen as low compared to the needs of schools, and the equal distribution of funds, whether the school was small or large, was seen as an injustice. In addition, the principals seemed angry about the level of corruption which meant that the full amount of funds available did not reach the schools. Nevertheless, some participants applied innovative alternatives to address these challenges by contributing themselves and outsourcing the school's space to testing organisations. There is clearly a moral foundation to these altruistic strategies of headteachers to provide basic education to students.

4.2.3. Shortage of Teachers and Professionally Weak Teachers

Forty-five percent of the headteachers reported a shortage of teaching staff, especially science teachers. Two reasons were identified as being responsible for this: (1) the system providing teachers to schools slowly, and (2) the government banning the new recruitment of teachers due to a lack of financial resources. Studies have noted that teacher shortages in Pakistan schools were not uniform across the country [35,39]. One of the reasons for this disparity is teachers' resistance to going into areas away from their hometowns. Due to these issues, the student-teacher ratio (STR) in many government schools in Pakistan almost went over 70:1 (it is 100:1 in this study), while the official STR is 35:1 [35].

Despite this, that some headteachers in this research adopted strategies to resolve this issue by arranging for volunteer teachers and appointing some urgently needed teachers. For these additional teachers, the headteachers covered their salaries through community support and self-generated school funds. However, there is no official mechanism allowing headteachers to hire teachers based on need [39], and so principals doing this are demonstrating innovation and expanded purpose.

Besides an acute shortage of teachers, some headteachers were concerned about the professional quality of some of the teachers at their schools. For example, 25% of the headteachers questioned the capabilities of some of their teachers, who were selected on a political basis rather than on merit. To politicians, the faithfulness of their workers counts more than their ability to be a teacher [35]. There was hope, however, as some headteachers reported that in the recent past, about 10–15% teachers were selected on merit through reputable testing agencies in Sindh, Pakistan; ‘No doubt they are performing a wonderful job’ (HT 1). Nonetheless, headteacher 1 questioned, ‘what about the rest, 85%? This is the actual problem’ (HT 1). He explained that he was not saying that all of these 85% are incompetent; some could be competent, but the majority were not qualified to be teachers (HT 1).

Moreover, it is worth noting that 55% of the headteachers maintained that they were trying to help these unqualified teachers. These headteachers reported several strategies for helping their teachers, such as mentoring, offering short-term school-based training, engaging in syllabi writing and assisting in lesson planning and student assessment. However, headteacher 1 was very critical about the proficiencies of some of the teachers. He elaborated:

...but there are some [teachers] who are untrainable; what will you do to them?
 ...If someone is trainable, then he can be trained. (HT 1)

Metaphorically, explaining the point of ‘untrainable teachers’, he continued:

...A person cannot sit on the driving seat; he does not know that this is steering, this is auto-gear, this is ... [accelerator], this is brake, he does not have [an] awareness of these things. ...we make him sit on the driving seat and tell him to drive this car at a speed of 200 [kilometres per hour]. Then, he will himself die as well as kill those who will be with him [in the car], and there is [also] a possibility to kill those who are either in front or behind [his car]. (HT 1)

Similarly, Mansoor and Akhtar [35] report that in the Pakistani education system, teachers’ competence, their reluctance to adopt student-centred teaching and learning strategies, and exam-centric teaching are some of the most critical issues.

4.2.4. Teacher Union Issues

The current study’s findings revealed that 30% of the headteachers reported a range of challenges posed by teacher unions. Headteachers 7, 16 and 18 believed that although these teacher unions claim that their motive is to work for the betterment of education, as is written in their manifestos, in reality, their only focus and concern is to obtain personal benefits. These personal benefits include leave from work and financial benefits through an additional allowance in salary or promotion to the next scale. Providing and enhancing the quality of education was neither their focus nor a concern. Headteacher 16 further explained:

In [the last] four years, I have noted that unions have never worked to improve academics—neither for that particular teacher [member of the association] nor the overall school. (HT 16)

Similarly, Mehmood and Farooqi [40] reported that whilst there are important elements in the manifestos of teacher unions, like protection of teachers’ rights, reforms in the curriculum and overall education system, improvement of infrastructure at schools and so on, 99% of the unions’ work and efforts are dedicated only to the rights of teachers. There appears to be an inability to raise a voice for all the educational problems, which is seen as a failure of these unions [40].

Interestingly, Mehmood and Farooqi [40] also justify the existence of teacher unions, noting that teacher unions exist all over the world. They claim that they work not only for the rights of teachers but for the reform, policymaking, and overall improvement of the education system because their teachers are obtaining their rights without protests.

Conversely, in Pakistan, teacher unions struggle to secure fundamental rights for their teachers [40]. They can play a more significant role if teachers obtain all their rights without any struggle or involvement of the unions. Then, teacher unions can significantly contribute to resolving other educational problems, such as curriculum reforms, policymaking, improving infrastructure in schools and other similar issues [40].

4.2.5. Lack of Authority

Thirty percent of the headteachers reported challenges, due to a lack of authority, in successfully managing their schools. Centralisation was identified as one of the critical challenges, limiting headteachers' powers and authority in the crucial matters of teacher hiring and firing and in their academic, administrative and financial powers. The headteachers believed that disseminating these powers from the provincial central education office to local schools would enable headteachers to manage their schools successfully and save time and effort, improving headteachers' efficacy in managing their schools locally rather than looking to the central office directions for school management. Headteacher 2 concluded by giving a clearer conception of decentralisation and advised that those academic, administrative and financial powers given to an officer at the educational secretariat [provincial central office of educational management] should be devolved and given to headteachers. This would enable headteachers to manage their school smoothly by exercising their powers locally rather than looking to the system, and will save time and effort and improve efficacy (HT 2).

The results of several research studies [28–30] are consistent with the findings of the current study. Researchers agreed that a centralised and hierarchical bureaucratic educational system prevails in Pakistan's government schools [28–30]. The bureaucratic system is a hurdle and a disabling factor for headteachers, who must be empowered to work independently and effectively as school leaders [28,29].

In summary, the headteachers want to have more say in the running of their schools. They want the system to expect and allow them to take charge of their schools and be provided with the means to run their schools better. Currently, the lack of primary resources (power, furniture and water), finances, supply of quality teachers and actions of teacher unions hamper these principals' work. They have shown that they can be innovative in addressing these challenges and act with a vital moral purpose to do right by their students. They argue that they could run their schools more successfully if they had more authority.

5. Conclusions and Implications

This study found that whilst the headteachers' roles were central and critical to school improvement, they were more engaged in administrative than academic tasks, which impeded them from working as instructional leaders in their schools [26,35]. Drysdale, Gurr and Goode [41] describe a work-role conceptual framework, the *Total Role Concept*, that helps understand school leaders' management and leadership roles. It has a series of concentric circles, as shown in Figure 2.

The inner circle is the central core, which is usually a formal job description indicating the role's core functions, such as planning and budgeting, organising and staffing, controlling and problem-solving; these tend to have a management focus. The next circle has the expected roles, which are often not formally described but nevertheless expected, such as attendance at social and sporting functions. The next circle is focused on the augmented level; the things a leader brings to the role and the aspects that they think are important and would like to do (for example, getting teachers to work collaboratively in professional learning communities). The final circle is the role's potential and includes the role's creative, innovative and entrepreneurial aspects. The inner roles are considered to be more managerial and focused on efficient operation, and the outer roles are more leadership-based and focused on innovation and change. The findings from this study, and particularly from Section 4.1, indicate that headteachers in Pakistan are focused almost exclusively on their core and expected roles with little opportunity to be creative, innovative

or entrepreneurial. Not only are they focused more on managerial than leadership roles, but the core and expected roles seem limited and perhaps more constrained than those found in other jurisdictions.

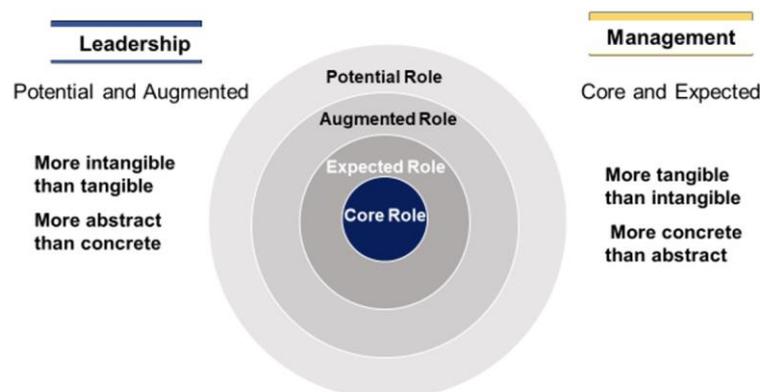


Figure 2. Total role concept.

These findings show that principals in developing countries like Pakistan face enormous challenges. Their responsibilities span multiple roles within the school and beyond. Because of their nature, size and context, secondary schools are confronted with additional challenges. Headteachers are charged with leading the academic program by ensuring teacher quality, developing and implementing improvement strategies, building the capacity of staff through professional development and supervision, acting as an instructional leader so that students have a viable and appropriate curriculum and ensuring learning takes place in a secure and safe environment. At the same time, these headteachers are hampered by a myriad of administrative tasks and duties that take precedence over academic priorities. All this is carried out in the context of inadequate funding, insufficient resources, underdeveloped facilities and poor infrastructure. These findings show that these headteachers are required to be self-reliant, resilient, innovative and resourceful. They could be described as ‘heroic’ leaders because of their selfless service to students and the community with little financial reward or recognition. Of concern is how this will be sustainable in the long term without policy change and adequate support and resources. The challenge is to move to a more distributed model of leadership where tasks and responsibilities are shared; however, ample resources and training are required if this is to be successful. In developing countries, international agencies such as the World Bank, UNICEF, USAID and others are needed to provide the appropriate amount of investment in both resources and human capital. Further research that explores the issues of wellbeing, resilience and sustainability of headteachers would be helpful to researchers, practitioners and policymakers to create change and improvement in both the short and long term.

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