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An Analysis of School Heads' Instructional Leadership in Communicating Educational Goals: A Cross-cultural Perspective

Asif Iqbal¹, Dr. Malik Amer Atta^{*2}, Syed Ahmad Raza Shah Gillani³

Original Article

1. Ph.D. Scholar, Institute of Education & Research, Gomal University, Dera Ismail Khan.
2. Assistant Professor, Institute of Education & Research, Gomal University, Dera Ismail Khan.
Email: malikamiratta@gmail.com
3. Ph.D. Scholar, Institute of Education & Research, Gomal University, Dera Ismail Khan.

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Abstract

School heads play a crucial leadership role within educational institutions, particularly at the secondary level in Pakistan, where the focus is on preparing a workforce and providing pathways to higher education. This study aims to evaluate the role of secondary school heads as instructional leaders, specifically concerning their communication of school goals. It further examines whether their involvement in this role varies based on the locality of the school and the gender of the heads. Employing a quantitative research approach, the study used a survey design targeting public secondary school heads, teachers, and District Education Officers in the districts of Bhakkar and Mianwali in Punjab. A multi-stage stratified sampling technique was used to select a manageable and representative sample. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire with 62 items on a 5-point Likert scale. The analysis was conducted with the latest statistical tools: categorical data was examined through descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage), while inferential data was analyzed using t-tests for comparisons. The findings revealed that female school heads were more likely to exhibit instructional leadership than their male counterparts and that heads of urban schools demonstrated higher levels of instructional leadership compared to those in rural schools. Future research could benefit from employing qualitative methods, including a larger sample size and incorporating private schools into the study.

Introduction

Instructional Leadership

The concept of Instructional Leadership emerged from a movement in the United States aimed at enhancing educational effectiveness. This movement emphasized the crucial role of the principal or head teacher in shaping secondary education (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Key elements of instructional leadership encompass curriculum management, monitoring lesson plans, effective resource utilization, and ongoing teacher evaluation. Instructional leaders are primarily tasked with enhancing student learning and overseeing the overall management of the educational institution (Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2011).

In educational discourse, leadership remains a central topic (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). An instructional leader, often the principal or head of the school, plays a vital role in not only managing daily operations but also in advancing educational quality. At the school level, the instructional

leader addresses and resolves various issues that arise within the educational system. This role involves immediate problem-solving and deep familiarity with the institution's ongoing challenges (Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2011).

The role of a principal or head teacher is multifaceted, requiring them to adapt to various tasks based on environmental demands. The contributions of instructional leaders, both inside and outside the classroom, are crucial for the benefit of society, educators, and students (Hallinger, 2005).

Historically, school leaders and principals often underestimated their responsibilities, focusing primarily on their role as instructors. Initially, teaching was viewed as a less demanding position compared to the leadership role, which was perceived as primarily overseeing team performance. Over time, as educational trends evolved, principals and head teachers began to engage more actively in school activities, recognizing their duty to improve student outcomes (Hallinger, 2005).

An Effective instructional leader does more than delegate tasks and distance themselves from the teaching process. Instead, they are actively involved in the educational process, collaborating with team members, addressing stakeholder concerns, and sharing responsibility for both the successes and challenges of the educational endeavor (Timperley, 2011).

This study is grounded in the instructional leadership theory proposed by Hallinger and Murphy (2013), which outlines three key dimensions of instructional leadership related to various tasks and activities. This framework also underpins subsequent theories by Weber (2006) and Murphy (2013). The research focuses on District Bhakkar and District Mianwali in Punjab, Pakistan, utilizing Hallinger and Murphy's (2013) theoretical framework to guide the investigation.

Communicating School Goals

One of the significant tasks an instructional leader, performing the role of a principal, must accomplish is to communicate the goals of the school. Although goal setting is strategic, effective dissemination of the same goals to the whole school and making sure that everyone comprehends and endorses them is strategic. Proper dissemination of information on the goals and objectives of the school is important to ensure that everyone invested in the process has a common understanding of what is expected of him or her. The use of multiple modes, tools, and approaches enables an instructional leader to effectively and conveniently disseminate and assess the school's aims and responses.

Effective and inclusive communication of school goals is one critical way through which everybody in the school assumes responsibility for the school's vision, learners, teachers, parents, and other actors in the learning process (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2004). Involvement of the school community in the communication process is very vital to ensure that the goals set are achieved and a concerted effort is developed.

Scientific studies show that the process of propagating the school's goals and objectives leads to their accomplishment. Another study by Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu (2015) also revealed that commitment and clarity were more achievable by the instructional leaders whenever they engaged stakeholders in the process of arriving at a consensus on how and when to disseminate the goals of the school. In the same manner, if teachers are involved in the decision-making and or setting of goals, they are more likely to contribute towards working towards the fulfillment of objectives and upholding high standards of performance.

It is also equally important to spread the goals of a school using different media and communication tools. In their paper, Kruse and Grey (2018) believe that both official and unofficial communication channels should be used to enhance the awareness of the overall goals of the school. Some of the methods that an educational leader can use to share goals and foster

teamwork are staff meetings, individual staff conferences, and written staff communications through newsletters among others. Also, technology can improve the goal communication process to a greater extent.

In the same vein, Fullan (2016) notes that it is necessary to use websites that are social media and, various other communication technologies to effectively spread out the goals of the school to other stakeholders, and therefore increase support.

This means that communication of the school goals should not only be done at a given point in time but should rather be done regularly with follow-up being done as well. Some of the essential elements include: providing frequent updates on progress, acknowledging the individual/team achievements, and valuing the people's input. Praise and regular comment stimulate constitutionality in the representation of school goals, and promote the team to be able to work towards its achievement (Spillane et al., 2004).

Communicating School Goals Regarding Gender

Davis (2016) showed that in the process of presenting school goals to the community, male school administrators tend to be more direct and work-oriented. They often tend to communicate these goals straightforwardly and often in terms of results. Smith, DeJoy, and Dyal (2020) have established that male instructional leaders are strategic and purposeful when engaging in communication and often use behavior that supports the school to achieve its goals and objectives. They always give their teams feedback to achieve the intended objectives.

On the other hand, female school leaders tend to use relationship-oriented as well as collaborative communication styles when relaying school goals (Davis, 2016). They prefer to be involved in discussions that enable them to source opinions from the stakeholders to align on goals. In their paper titled *Instructional Leadership Compared Between Female and Male Principals: A Review of the Literature*, Smith, DeJoy, and Dyal (2020) presented the views of female instructional leaders in deciding with parents, teachers, and students with emphasis on their participation to support the school's goal in achieving congruence with everyone's goals.

Communicating School Goals Regarding Locality

Unfortunately, one of the major tasks of executing school goals and objectives is often overlooked and that is the task of frequently reminding the community about such goals and objectives. This is because certain cultural differences between the rural / country and urban / city zones may impact the communication strategies to be used. It is therefore important for the school administrators to weigh the expectations as well as the challenges that are inherent in each of the settings. People's communication patterns and ways to involve them are quite different in urban environments compared to rural ones.

If the relationship is to be effective, then trust and communication becomes very important in both settings. School administrators should necessarily try engaging stakeholders from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds using the following communication means. Often in schools, how teachers and students communicate their goals and plans is instrumental in the creation of an effective school culture as well as the attainment of these goals.

Indeed, some dilemmas are unique to rural school contexts: School leaders must deal with methods of communicating with dispersed stakeholders. According to Johnson and Smith (2018), it is crucial to adopt as many media as possible to reach a diverse audience. Local Radio, events, and social media are important in disseminating school goals and creating awareness to the masses (Donaldson et al., 2019).

There is evidence-based research about the advantages of using people in the community as key senders of communication messages. School heads can involve parents, community leaders, and other key personnel in the enhancement of stakeholder consciousness and accountability for school-related objectives as stated by Ross and Jenson (2018). This approach fosters unity of purpose between the rural community and the school to ensure that the goals of the school are realized (Koerner, Thornton & Klerkx, 2022).

In urban areas, school leaders experience some other factors, such as a requirement to deal with various linguistic and cultural features (Smith et al., 2020). In this context, diversity must be managed by the city administrators using multilingualism, community feedback mechanisms, and technology for communication (Dumas et al., 2020).

Meta-analysis of the findings in large urban settings reveals that the family's guardians' role in the discussion of the goals is crucial. The involvement of parents and guardians with their wards in school is vital and that is why should ensure that they have good relations with the parents and guardians (Kim, 2019). It can be done directly through newsletters, parent-teacher meetings, posts on social media accounts, and other communication mediums to the people in question (Lopez, 2020).

Nonetheless, both the rural and the urban areas have similarities as to the factors that affect instructional leadership. In these two contexts, good and effective communication plays an important role in the process of development and delivery of information and its effective understanding by the concerned stakeholders (Covella et al., 2017). In a micro lesson demonstration, teachers can enhance the lesson delivery using simple language wrapped up in the context of PowerPoint to enhance the understanding of the community (Liu, Hallinger & Feng, 2016).

In strengthening stakeholder relationships, it is important in both environments to be geared towards establishing trust with the stakeholders. Having communication lines, soliciting information and feedback, and listening to the stakeholders are crucial in ensuring that people feel that the school's goals are owned. It ensures that everybody pulls towards the realization of school goals regardless of whether the given community is undersized or not (Johnson & Thompson, 2021).

Problem Statement

The problem under study was, *"an analysis of school heads' instructional leadership in communicating educational goals: a cross-cultural perspective"*

Research Objectives

The primary objectives of the study were to examine and compare the involvement of public secondary school heads in communicating school goals as instructional leaders, with a focus on gender and locality.

Significance of the study

The principal, as the leader of the school, plays a critical role in ensuring the institution operates efficiently and effectively. Leveraging their leadership skills, principals aim to enhance the educational system's overall performance. This study examines whether principals and head teachers in public secondary schools in the districts of Bhakkar and Mianwali in Punjab, Pakistan, adhere to the instructional leadership style and how their gender and location influence this approach. By exploring the impact of cultural differences on the instructional leadership styles of male and female principals, the study aims to contribute valuable insights to the existing body of educational literature.

Research Methodology

This study is categorized as a descriptive survey, as it aims to depict the current state of involvement among three groups of secondary school heads in their roles as instructional leaders within the teaching and learning process. Descriptive research as defined by Sidhu (2000) aims at describing or analyzing the characteristics of a given situation or phenomenon.

Population of the Study

The target population of the current research focuses on the public secondary schools which are in the villages of Bhakkar and Mianwali Districts in Punjab. It was as follows, the distribution of this population is as shown in the table below.

Table: Description of Population

Districts	Schools		Stakeholders													
			Heads				Teachers				Administrators (DEOs)					
	M		F		M		F		M		F		M		F	
	U	R	U	R	U	R	U	R	U	R	U	R	M	F	M	F
Bhakkar	10	74	6	44	10	74	6	44	179	1249	105	731	1	1		
Mianwali	12	82	7	52	12	82	7	52	215	1501	127	891	1	1		
Total (Locality)	32	156	13	96	32	156	13	96	394	2750	232	1622	2	2		
Total (Gender)	188		109		188		109		3144		1854		4			
Overall	297				297				4998							

U=Urban, R=Rural, M=Male, F=Female Source: Annual School Census 2020-21Punjab

Sampling Techniques

For the study, the researcher adopted a multi-stage stratification sampling system for sample selection as well as data collection. The process was carried out in the following stages: The process was carried out in the following stages:

First Stage: Listing down all the public secondary schools in the selected districts of Bhakkar and Mianwali.

Second Stage: This process involved the enrolment of both male and female principals from the mentioned identified public secondary schools per district.

Third Stage: The choice of schools from both the rural and urban settings within the districts to have a sample that would capture all the settings in the districts.

This strategy was useful in developing a sample of respondents which was as diverse as possible for the study.

Table: Sample Distribution

Districts	Stakeholders													
	Schools				Heads				Teachers				Administrators	
	M		F		M		F		M		F		DEOs	
	U	R	U	R	U	R	U	R	U	R	U	R	M	F
Bhakkar	6	38	4	22	6	38	4	22	15	100	7	54	1	1
Mianwali	7	42	4	27	7	42	4	27	18	134	10	62	1	1
Total (Locality)	13	80	8	49	13	80	8	49	33	234	17	116	2	2
Total (Gender)	93		57		93		57		267		133		4	
Overall	150				150				400					

Note: U=Urban, R=Rural, M=Male, F=Female

Research Instrument

To obtain information from the target sample of respondents, a questionnaire was constructed with the assistance of subject matter specialists and was borrowed, where appropriate, from the questionnaires used in previous studies. The questionnaire was developed using a five-point Likert scale that comprised opinions that ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Work was also done to determine the reliability of the instrument which stood at 0.804, with an average similarity percentage of 80.4, which shows an improved consistency in the answers.

Data Collection

Instructional Leadership questionnaires were filled and answered on a 5-point Likert Scale. The study involved three types of respondents from District Bhakkar and District Mianwali: DEOs, Principals, and teachers.

DEOs: Structured questionnaires were administered to 4 District Education Officers (Secondary) during site visits.

Principals: The sample included 93 male principals and 57 female principals, both from secondary schools.

Teachers: Data was collected from 267 male teachers and 133 female teachers, all from secondary schools.

Data Analysis

In conducting the study, the researcher utilized both descriptive and inferential statistics for measurement.

Descriptive Statistics: To summarize and present the data, measures such as arithmetic mean, variance, standard deviation, and coefficient of variation were employed. These statistics helped in drawing concrete conclusions from the data.

Inferential Statistics: To make broader inferences and validate findings, independent sample t-tests and ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) were used. These tests facilitated the drawing of valid conclusions regarding differences and relationships within the data.

Table: Responses of stakeholders about Instructional Leadership regarding Communicating School Goals.

Stakeholders	School	Gender	Communicating School Goals										Total Respondents
			SA		A		UD		DA		SDA		
			F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Heads	Rural	F	73	27	75	28	38	14	48	18	36	13	45
		M	88	20	65	14	68	15	75	17	154	34	75
	Urban	F	3	8	10	28	9	25	6	17	8	22	6
		M	7	11	11	17	23	34	13	20	12	18	11
Teachers	Rural	F	182	27	186	28	95	14	120	18	89	13	112
		M	264	19	195	14	204	15	227	17	472	35	227
	Urban	F	7	8	25	28	22	24	15	17	21	23	15
		M	19	11	31	17	65	36	29	16	36	20	30
DEOs	F	6	50	3	25	1	8	1	8	1	8	2	
	M	5	42	2	17	2	16	1	8	2	17	2	

The responses concerning the second facet of instructional leadership, Communicating School Goals, reveal varied perspectives based on gender and locality. In rural areas, 55% of female heads agreed with the proposition, while 31% disagreed. Conversely, 34% of male heads agreed, and 51% disagreed. In urban settings, 36% of female heads supported the statement, while 39% opposed it. For male heads in urban areas, 28% agreed, and 38% disagreed.

Among rural teachers, 55% of female teachers agreed with the statement, and 31% disagreed. In contrast, 33% of male teachers agreed, while 52% disapproved. Urban teachers showed a similar pattern: 36% of female teachers agreed and 40% disagreed, while 28% of male teachers agreed, and 36% disagreed.

District Education Officers (DEOs) exhibited a high level of agreement with the statement, with 75% of female DEOs and 59% of male DEOs in favor. Disagreement was relatively low, with 16% of female DEOs and 25% of male DEOs opposing the statement.

Figure: The percentage of Responses of stakeholders about Instructional Leadership regarding Communicating School Goals

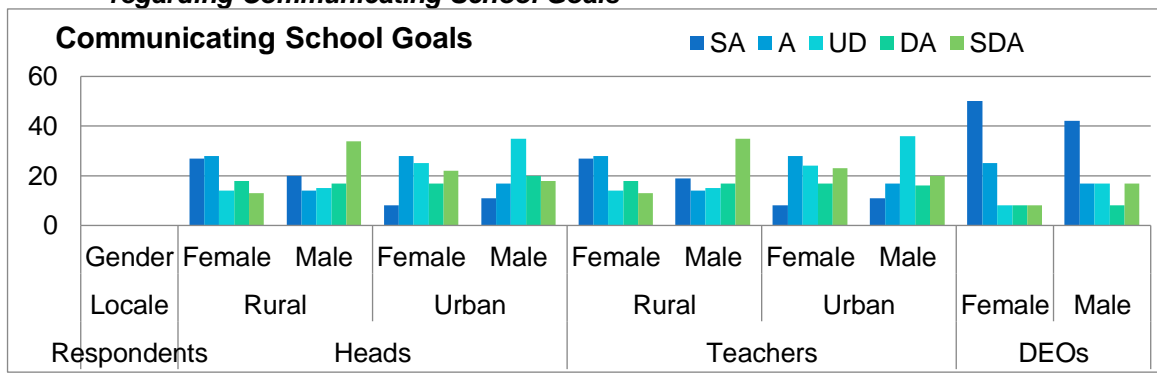


Table: Comparison of stakeholders' responses about Instructional Leadership regarding Communicating School Goals.

Stakeholder	Schools	Gender	Communicating School Goals			Comparison					
			N	Mean	S.D	Gender			Schools		
						t-cal	t-tab	P-value	t-cal	t-tab	P-value
Heads	Rural	F	45	2.45	.19	9.15	±2.00	0.000	5.91	±1.96	0.000
		M	75	1.76	.47						
	Urban	F	6	3.61	.13	15.84	±2.13	0.000			
		M	11	2.4	.15						
Teachers	Rural	F	112	2.5	.31	11.7	±1.96	0.000	9.01	±1.96	0.000
		M	227	1.82	.57						
	Urban	F	15	3.62	.11	9.21	±2.00	0.000			
		M	30	2.55	.43						
DEOs		F	2	3.29	.6	-3.93	±4.30	.001			
		M	2	2.41	.15						

According to the data on Communicating School Goals, various significant differences were observed:

Rural Female Heads: The mean score value for rural female heads was 2, based on 45 samples. For rural male heads, aged 45 and above, the mean score was 2.77 from a sample of 75. The t-calculated value of 9.15 and a p-value of 0.000 indicate significant differences between the two groups.

Urban Female Heads: The mean score value for urban female heads was 3, from a sample of 6. The comparison between rural female heads (N=61) and urban male heads (N=11) showed a mean score ratio of 2.40, with a t-calculated value of 15.84 and a p-value of 0.000, reflecting significant differences.

Teacher Perceptions: Rural Female Teachers: The mean score for rural female teachers was based on 112 samples. The mean score ratio for male teachers aged 50 and above compared to rural male teachers (N=227) was 1, with a t-calculated value of 11 and a p-value of 0.000, indicating significant differences.

Urban Female Teachers: The mean score for urban female teachers was 3, from a sample of 15. The ratio between urban female teachers and urban male teachers (N=30) was 2.55, with a t-calculated value of 9.21 and a p-value of 0.000, showing significant differences.

Overall Teacher Perceptions: The t-calculated value between rural and urban schools was 9.01 with a p-value of 0.000, highlighting significant differences in teacher perceptions of school statistics.

District Education Officers (DEOs): For the 2 female DEOs, the mean score value was 3. Among 29 DEOs, consisting of 17 females and 12 males, the t-calculated value was -3.93 with a p-value of 0.001, showing significant differences.

These results underscore the significant differences observed in perceptions and evaluations of school goals across different groups and settings.

Table: Comparison of stakeholders regarding Communicating School Goals

Group	Df	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	A	F-cal	F-tab	P-value
Between Groups	2	6.078	3.039				
Within Groups	522	87.522	.168	.05	18.126	3.02	0.000
Total	524	93.600					

P < 0.05

The table indicates that the F-calculated value is 18, while the F-tabulated value is 3.02, with a p-value of 0.000. This significant result suggests that there are notable differences in the responses from the three stakeholder groups—School Heads, Teachers, and DEOs. Based on these findings, the researcher has accepted the alternative hypothesis, which confirms that there is a significant difference in the opinions among the stakeholders.

Conclusion

The study revealed that school heads in rural areas perceived female heads as more effective instructional leaders than their male counterparts, particularly regarding Communicating School Goals. This perception was more so evident across the urban areas as a significantly higher proportion of female instructional leaders were observed than males. As a result, the heads of

urban schools showed a higher level of instructional leadership in their schools as compared to the heads of rural schools.

Consistent with this study, heads of schools by gender as perceived by several teachers supported this notion that female heads are more effective than their male counterparts, especially in rural schools. The comparison also pointed out that many of the urban schools had a greater number of female heads who were also identified as effective instructional leaders.

DEOs also mentioned while comparing female heads and male heads, female heads are more directive than male heads. Differences between the means of the three groups of respondents, that is, school heads, teachers, and DEOs, emerged, and there were disparities in perceptions of instructional leadership depending on the gender of the respondent and locality.

Discussion

According to the research, there was a marked difference in how male and female school principals value the aspect of the institutions' goals and how they value the need for communication. These variations inform the information that different degrees of emphasis are placed by the principals in rural settings towards the diverse strategies regarding the expression of the school goals and aims. This result tallies with the literature where researchers identify the ways and extent to which gender influences leadership qualities and choices (Eagly, Karau & Johnson, 1992).

Boys and girls engage in the process of communication uniquely; this perhaps has an impact on their ideas on how school goals should best be communicated. The cross-tabulation analysis revealed a degree of disparity in respondents' perception of the goal communication between male and female school administrators based on rural/urban context. This finding confirms earlier research and further implies that gender differences may affect how school administrators in large metropolitan environments perceive and facilitate goal communications.

The present study also found that there are major disparities regarding the ways that school leaders in rural and urban areas associate their schools' goals. Such geographical variation in the responses to goal communication may be attributed to the environmental conditions that exist in rural and urban schools.

Besides, the research also revealed that different genders mean significance for teacher' perceptions of their public secondary school heads in sharing school objectives. It also seems that the gender of the school head plays a role in how goals are being relayed and therefore would explain the perceived differences.

Also notable in the study was a skewed distribution of correlation between the DEOs and instructional leaders concerning school goals communication. This means that gender could play a role in shaping the administrative points of view as well as the sharing of educational goals. These findings support and extend prior studies by Carli and Eagly (2011), who examined gender as a moderator of leadership processes, including goal communication across organization levels.

Recommendations

The findings of this research imply that to improve principals' instructional leadership, the training program for public secondary schools should focus on relevant aspects. In so doing, it seeks to find ways of increasing the effectiveness of the principals in the instruction deliveries as well as enhancing the achievement of the school's goals and objectives.

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