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Role of School Leadership in Teacher Development: Head Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

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Abstract: *Teacher development is viewed as a primary influential factor in the quality of instruction and student achievement. Head teacher plays a pivotal role in the provision of conditions for teachers' ongoing professional development. It was a qualitative study with multiple research design aimed at exploring head teachers' beliefs towards their role in teacher development and to identify the leadership practices they adopt to promote teacher professional development in government secondary schools of Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan. Purposive sampling was used to select ten female head teachers, and semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain insights into their beliefs, experiences, and practices about teacher development. Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis as per the six-step analysis framework by Braun and Clarke and guided by an interpretive paradigm. Two general themes were identified: Head teachers' beliefs about teacher development—definitions, values, and foundational convictions; Leadership strategies, structures, and approaches to teacher development. The participants anticipated teacher development as an all-rounder process that can be personal, interpersonal, professional, and continuous and lifelong practice, and not just a short-term, skill-based training. They believed that teacher development was the most important factor in raising school quality and student achievement and that core values of fairness, trust, respect, and relational care should be the basis of their beliefs. Leadership practices encompassed peer learning and cooperative practice, individual mentoring and coaching, workshops and structured professional learning, classroom observation and data informed needs identification, fostering a culture of continuous learning, and integrating technology into professional learning. The results highlight the role of head teachers' beliefs in determining their professional development practices and have implications for leadership preparation, policy, and support systems in public secondary schools.*

Keywords: School leadership, Teacher development, Head teachers, professional development, leadership practices, government secondary schools.

1. Introduction

Teacher development has emerged as a key issue in international strategies to boost the quality of education and the effectiveness of schools. It is widely acknowledged that the quality of teaching is one of the major influences on student achievement, and modern education systems

want teachers to regularly upgrade their knowledge, improve their instructional practices, and be open to new pedagogical models to address varying learner needs (Aman et al., 2024; Jamil et al., 2024; Fullan, 2007; Day, 2012). As a result, teacher development is now considered a process of professional development, rather than a one-off training event, and a process of growth in teachers' instructional competence as well as in their more general professional capacities (Fullan, 2014).

The role of the school leader is critical to teacher development in schools. The head teacher is one of the most influential positions as a leader, as it has a direct impact on school culture, teaching and learning, and staff development opportunities (Hallinger, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2020). Their conceptions of teaching, learning, and their own professional development influence the understanding, priority, and use of teacher development at the school level. High-quality head teachers provide nurturing contexts where teachers are encouraged to work collaboratively, to reflect on their practice, and to continually learn, connecting directly to quality in the classroom (York-Barr & Duke, 2005).

The study of instructional and transformational leadership indicates that learning and teaching-centered leadership is significant in teachers' development and learning outcomes. Instructional leadership focuses on observation, feedback, and professional support to improve teaching, whereas transformational and distributed leadership involve collaboration, trust, participation, and shared decision-making, which can inspire teachers to undertake professional learning and to share in the school's improvement (Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Bush, 2018). In this context, head teachers, as facilitators, mentors, and collaborators rather than just administrators, are better able to create effective teacher learning.

Teacher development is now more important in Pakistan because of educational reforms and the need of the hour to enhance the quality of public education. Policy and professional norms at the national level highlight the importance of CPD in improving teaching quality and students' learning outcomes; however, public secondary schools are still constrained by limited resources, a lack of sustained training opportunities, and a lack of institutional support (UNESCO, 2021). An awareness of the head teachers' beliefs about teacher development and what kind of leadership they exercise in their schools with limited resources is important in this context to inform realistic and contextually grounded policy and design of support. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the beliefs and practices of head teachers in the domain of teacher development in government secondary schools of Sialkot.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine head teachers' beliefs about their role in promoting teacher development.
2. To explore leadership practices that support teacher professional growth.

Research Questions

1. What beliefs do head teachers hold about their role in teacher development?
2. How do head teachers enact leadership practices to support teacher development?

Literature Review

It is well known that teacher development is part of the quality and improvement of education in schools (Abbas et al., 2021). When teachers deepen their understanding, enhance their practices, and are reflective, they are more effective in supporting students' learning and advancing the school's goals (Day, 2012; Fullan, 2014). The role of head teachers in setting up the conditions to enable ongoing professional learning is crucial in terms of establishing expectations, allowing time and provision of resources to support professional learning, and modelling learning behaviours. If leadership is focused on teacher learning, professional development becomes a way of life in the school, rather than an isolated activity (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

The role of school leadership is important and has a strong impact on teacher development both formally and informally. Previous studies have been conducted at different levels to explore practices for effective institutional support regarding school leadership (Arif et al., 2023; Ghaffar et al., 2025; Jamil et al., 2024). Instructional leaders, in this case head teachers, interact directly with teaching and learning by visiting classrooms, giving feedback, and planning for specific professional interventions (Hallinger, 2011; Leithwood & Louis, 2012). It has been suggested that, where head teachers are seen to be involved in teaching and learning, teachers are more likely to enhance their classroom practice and professional skills and abilities. Instructional leadership is supported by transformational and shared leadership that encourages participation and trust in making decisions and motivates teachers to engage in professional learning and be collectively responsible for school improvement (Bush, 2018; York-Barr & Duke, 2005).

Effective teacher development is also a key to building positive school culture. Schools where there is trust, collaboration, and open communication allow teachers opportunities to learn from each other, share practice, and co-construct solutions to instructional problems (Southworth, 2009). Research has shown that professional learning communities and inquiry-based collaborative structures are effective in creating ongoing teacher learning opportunities, where teachers can plan, act, reflect, and refine (Timperley, 2011; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). The transition from isolation and compliance to dialogue, experimentation, and shared learning in such cultures must be facilitated through intentional leadership.

There is a strong link between head teachers' beliefs and their leadership and decisions about teacher development. Professional development is more likely to be valued by leaders who see teachers as key drivers of change and prioritize time and resources for this work, and who create learning experiences that address teacher needs and school priorities (Gurr, 2015; Leithwood et al., 2020). In contrast, at positions where professional development is viewed as indirect or imposed from the outside, professional development opportunities may be mandatory. In environments like those of Pakistani government schools, which lack resources and support for external training, which is often intermittent, the role of head teachers' beliefs and initiative is even more critical in determining whether teacher development is sustained, contextually responsive, and impactful (UNESCO, 2021).

Research Methodology

This study used a qualitative research approach with the aim of gaining insights into head teachers' beliefs about their role in supporting teacher development and the leadership practices they employ to enhance teacher professional development in government secondary schools. A multiple-case study approach was applied to generate an in-depth understanding of the experiences and views of the participants in the context of their real-life schools (Yin, 2018). The study used an interpretative paradigm that assumes that reality is socially constructed and can best be understood through the meanings that people assign to it (Creswell & Poth, 2018), which in this case was the head teachers' meanings of teacher development in their settings. Purposive sampling was applied to select the information-rich cases who have first-hand experience of the phenomenon, in a sample of ten government secondary school teachers in Sialkot, Punjab. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data, which enabled the participants to express their beliefs, experiences, and leadership practices with flexibility to probe and explore the data. With consent, interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analysed using reflexive thematic analysis according to the six Braun and Clarke's phases, which are familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and reporting. Ethical issues such as informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity were adhered to throughout the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Findings of the Study

Based on the objectives of the study, the following are the findings of the study with themes and sub themes:

Theme 1: Head Teachers' Beliefs about Teacher Development — Definitions, Values, and Foundational Convictions

Ongoing and Comprehensive Teacher Training

All ten participants viewed teacher development as a comprehensive, lifelong, and ongoing process of growth that encompasses interpersonal skills, personality traits, reflective ability, and relationship quality, rather than as a discrete occurrence or curriculum. With her exceptionally sophisticated vocabulary, participant 3, a head teacher with nine years of experience and an M.Phil. in education, conveyed this point with crystal clarity: *"In my opinion, teacher development is a comprehensive, continuous process that enhances teachers' knowledge, conduct, professional duties, and instructional abilities for them to mentor students"*. Participant 5, who holds a master's degree in education and a professional diploma in educational leadership, gave the dataset its most comprehensive and intellectually stimulating explanation:

> *Teacher training covers every facet of a teacher's professional and personal growth, in my opinion. In order to foster a more interesting and productive learning environment, the teacher works on enhancing his interpersonal skills, attitude, conduct, and relationships with students, as well as his teaching techniques.*

Through his exceptional honesty and sense of self, participant 6 was able to capture the experiential reality of this ongoing journey: *"I believe that continuous self-improvement, in addition to training, is essential for teacher development. In other words, a teacher should always learn something new, whether it be from their own errors or from the experiences of others."*

In their ongoing differentiation between teacher training and teacher development, the participants' comprehensive grasp of the concepts was evident. One of the most amazing remarks was made by participant number nine: *"In my opinion, development is a lengthy process, whereas education is a stage".*

Participant 3 explained this discrepancy in a very analytical way as follows:

> *In contrast, teacher training focuses on teaching particular skills for a specific amount of time, while teacher development takes a comprehensive and continuous approach that considers all areas of a teacher's professional and personal development.*

Teacher Development is the Foundation of School Quality and Student Learning

Additionally, all ten participants emphasized that teacher development is the main strategy for enhancing students' results and maintaining school quality, not just a professional advantage. The participant's genuine enthusiasm for this idea emphasized their strong emotional connection to the chain of events that led to the development. The participant with the most experience, participant 10, who had 16 years of teaching experience, stated it as follows: *"This nation's most logical and straightforward expression. I gave teacher development priority because I believe it is the most important thing"*. In her study, participant 4 gave a precise account of how teacher training impacts schools: *"When teachers work on improving themselves, they teach better, which boosts students' self-assurance and fosters a greater understanding of the subject. Ultimately, this enhances the institution's overall performance"*. According to Participant 7, creative teaching strategies are especially effective at engaging students in difficult subject matter:

> *When instructors use creative teaching techniques, students are more invested in subjects like math and science. In addition to improving their understanding, this also leads to a significant improvement in their performance, which improves the school's overall effectiveness.*

Core Personal Values Influence Beliefs about Development

Additionally, it was evident that the participants' leadership approach is based on relationships and morals when they spoke about the personal ideals and moral values that shape their perspective on teacher development. The values that were given the most importance were fairness, trust, respect, and the recognition of each teacher's individual value. According to participant 3, her leadership identity is founded on a moral foundation that includes fairness, respect, and cooperation. *"Because of my values, I treat teachers with fairness, respect, and cooperation, all of which help them feel safe and confident."*

Participant 8 offered one of the most humanistically grounded value statements in the dataset — describing a leadership philosophy rooted in listening, supporting, and appreciating rather than directing and evaluating:

> *If I speak from the heart, I have seen in my experience that the real foundation of any educational institution is its teachers. If a teacher is satisfied, confident, and ready to learn, he automatically transmits a positive effect to the students. I always try to see teachers not just as someone who does a job, but as a human being with their own problems, emotions, and needs. When we listen to them, support them, and appreciate their hard work, they work more wholeheartedly.*

In one of the most insightful closing remarks in the whole dataset, participant 10 expressed a profound relationship-centric leadership philosophy, stating that the foundation of successful head teacher practice is trust, individualization, and the establishment of a learning atmosphere free of fear.

In order for teachers to be able to freely share their issues and learn without fear, I constantly make an effort to foster that environment. Additionally, not every educator is as enthusiastic about it. Some people need more help, while others are self-taught, so I attempt to tailor my methods to each individual. Teachers must feel valued since they are more likely to carry out their duties well when they feel valued.

Theme 2: Leadership Strategies, Structures, and Approaches for Teacher Development

Under the third theme, research objective 2**,** which seeks to examine leadership approaches that foster teacher professional growth, is addressed. The vast, diverse, and contextually adapted repertoire of techniques by which participants turned their ideas into institutional action is covered in this topic.

Peer Learning and Cooperative Practice

Participant 1 highlighted the reciprocal learning environment promoted by her school's peer observation program, displaying a clear sense of institutional pride: *"We started a plan where instructors watched one another's lessons and provided feedback. This enabled teachers to improve their teaching methods by learning from one another".*

A comparable approach was presented by participant 2: conducting group discussion forums where instructors could freely exchange their professional experiences and learn from each other's practical skills. *"We started conducting group discussions where instructors shared their experiences. This allowed everyone to learn new talents".*

According to participant 6, this collaborative approach is intentionally informal, consisting of intimate, trust-based sharing sessions where teachers may openly discuss challenges and collaborate to find answers. *"We used to start small groups where teachers could get together to talk about and deal with their challenges. Because everyone talked openly and learned, I thought this simple approach was really effective".*

Participant 10, who best articulated the school's leadership philosophy in her last reflection, said that her school's learning culture is based on peer observation and expert discussion. "*Peer observation, cooperative learning, and professional discussions are encouraged to support teachers in learning from one another and improving their skills."*

Individual Mentoring, Coaching, and Direct Guidance

In addition to peer learning, participants discussed taking part in strong individual mentoring and coaching practices, providing individualized, one-on-one support to teachers who were dealing with particular instructional issues.

The third participant offered a comprehensive framework for promoting individual development, which included formal planning, individualized mentorship, and continuous formative feedback:

> *I provide teachers with opportunities for further education via a number of methods, such as classroom observation, feedback sessions, training planning, group seminars, and one-on-one mentoring. The benefits of individualized, direct intervention were also shown by the participants' discussion of specific instances.*

Participant 3 recounted a notable improvement that occurred after providing systematic, step-by-step training on lesson preparation, in contrast to a teacher who was having trouble keeping the class's attention: *"It was tough for a teacher to maintain the students' focus. I sat down with her, improved her planning, and taught her to use hands-on activities, which resulted in significant improvements in her class."*

Participant 7 described the specific pedagogical shift achieved through coaching a mathematics teacher toward visual and tactile instructional methods: *"A math teacher was having trouble explaining difficult concepts. I suggested that he use visual and hands-on methods, which made a significant difference in student understanding."*

Participant 9 described a particularly patient and step-by-step coaching intervention to build a technophobic teacher's digital competence: *"A teacher was having difficulty using technology. I sat with him and taught him step-by-step, after which his teaching became more interactive."*

Workshops, Training Sessions, and Structured Professional Development Programmes

Multiple participants described the design and delivery of formal workshops and structured training sessions as a central pillar of their professional development strategy, with several describing innovative, subject-specific, and practice-based formats that went beyond conventional lecture-style training. Participant 4 described a workshop on speaking and writing skills for English teachers that produced directly observable classroom improvements: *"We once held a special workshop on speaking and writing skills for English teachers, after which the teachers adopted new methods in class and the students' grasp of the language clearly improved."* Participant 7 described a practical, hands-on science training programme whose impact on student engagement was immediate and visible: *"We started hands-on training for science teachers, after which teachers started incorporating experiments and activities into the classroom. The positive impact was clearly visible on student interest and learning."*

Participant 3 described a very methodical and evidence-based method that involved putting it into practice: "Every instructor should have a one-year personal development plan that includes quantifiable goals and regular evaluation.

> *We created a one-year development strategy with measurable goals for each instructor. By means of this, we saw notable improvements in teachers' performance with consistent supervision, direction, and feedback. The ability to teach, particularly in the area of student performance.*

Classroom Observation and Data-Informed Needs Identification

Systematic classroom observation was described by all ten participants as a key method for both determining teachers' development requirements and delivering formative, non-threatening feedback that fosters growth. Participant 3 discussed a multi-source data triangulation method of needs identification, which integrates teacher self-evaluation, classroom observation, and student outcomes: *"To ascertain student needs, I use data-driven*

decision-making, including classroom observations, teacher self-evaluation reports, and student outcomes."

The centrality of direct teacher communication alongside formal observation data was emphasized in a similarly thorough approach described by participant 5: *"I assess teachers' teaching performance to determine their needs, monitor student outcomes, and attempt to comprehend their issues by speaking directly with them".*

In line with a leadership style that values relational intelligence alongside systematic data gathering, participant 9 depicted a complementary strategy that places a high priority on informal, relationship-based discussions alongside organized observations: *"In addition to classroom observations, I engage in informal chats with teachers and attempt to comprehend their challenges".*

Fostering a School Culture of Continuous Learning

In addition to specific approaches, all 10 participants saw the creation of a broader institutional culture of lifelong learning, one that sees learning as the norm rather than the exception, as their most strategic and sustainable contribution to teacher development. Participant 6 described a values-transformation approach that emphasizes psychological safety and collaborative humility in the learning environment, in opposition to the idea that everyone already knows everything: *"Everyone has something to teach each other because no one knows everything, and I want to emphasize this point. With this mindset, one starts to change the environment bit by bit".*

In a culture-building strategy that emphasizes jointly celebrating successes and failures, participant 4 discussed creating a psychological environment where honesty and vulnerability are valued rather than penalized: *"To create a welcoming environment and allow everyone to learn from one another, I encourage teachers to share their successes and challenges".*

To promote a cumulative culture of achievement and mutual support, participant 9 offered a particularly effective incremental recognition technique that included always and openly complimenting teachers for their little successes: *"I encourage teachers to share even their minor accomplishments so that others can learn from them".*

Technology Integration and Digital Learning

Several participants in the technology integration into professional development described it as a unique and increasingly important component of their leadership practice, reflecting the changing demands of 21st-century education and their own commitment to preserving the educational relevance of their schools.

Participant 9 presented a practical, peer-to-peer approach for enhancing digital skills: *"I make use of free online resources and peer-to-peer learning strategies".* Participant 7 described her strategy for teacher digital development with her usual openness, drawing on her STEM education training and MSc (Mathematics) background to guide her technological leadership: *"I place a high value on growth because I think a teacher cannot provide pupils a higher quality of education if he does not keep up with the times".*

Participant 8 provided specific and successful advice on how teachers might use Google Classroom and online resources. The initial resistance as well as the successful implementation of this advice were both documented. *"Google Classroom and online resources were once challenging for teachers to learn from us, but after a while, they started using them effectively, improving their students' learning experience".*

Discussion

This study confirms and expands previous research on the conception of teacher development by government secondary school head teachers as a whole, continuous, and relational process and not a process composed of a set of training events. The distinction participants made between short-term training, geared toward skills, and long-term development, geared toward

cultural change, resonates with the conceptual work that differentiates episodic "training" from continuous professional learning and cultural change (Day, 2012; Fullan, 2014; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Their deep belief that teacher development is the primary lever to improve student learning and school quality aligns with the fundamental premise of leadership research that investing in teaching and teacher development is the most reliable way to improve student outcomes (Andrews, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2020). Their emphasis on peer learning, collaborative observation, mentoring, and coaching resonates with research indicating that working in professional learning communities (PLCs) and inquiry-based professional development are effective and sustainable models for teacher learning (Timperley, 2011; York-Barr & Duke, 2005). Meanwhile, the participants' focus on relational values – fairness, respect, trust and appreciation – and on creating a culture of lifelong learning reflects how effective leadership incorporates structural and moral and relational elements, as reflected in the concepts of professional capital and student-centred leadership (Gurr, 2015; Robinson, 2011; Bush, 2018). Their innovative ways of operating within scarce resources, notably peer-to-peer learning and the use of free online tools, highlight the need for the ingenuity of leaders working in resource-poor environments and indicate that policy and system support should complement, not replace, what they are doing (UNESCO, 2021).

Conclusion

It is concluded that head teachers in government secondary schools are critical in working towards the development of teachers and that their beliefs have a significant impact on the nature and quality of leadership they provide. Participants always considered teacher development as a holistic life-long learning process involving pedagogical skills, interpersonal capacities, reflective ability, and teacher professional identity, and as essential to student achievement and school improvement. This conviction translated to a broad range of practices, such as peer learning structures, individual mentoring and coaching, workshops and structured professional development programmes, systematic classroom observation, and fostering a culture in school that makes continuous learning the norm. The results also indicate that good head teachers provide leadership to support teachers' development rooted in key foundational values and commitments. Head teachers treat teachers with fairness, respect and empathy; recognise their contribution; build trust and psychological safety; and this motivates teachers to do self-reflection, experimentation and professional development. The creative, resource-conscious practices reported by the participants (including in-house workshops led by staff, cycles of peer observation and free internet resources) illustrate leadership ingenuity and professional capital in action. Building support for teacher development in public secondary schools will thus involve investment in teacher training and support at the system level as well as targeted investment in head teacher leadership through opportunities for their own professional learning, reflection, and collaboration.

Recommendations

The following are some recommendations based on the study findings:

- Head teachers need to work systematically, through a combination of observation of teachers' classrooms, student learning data, and one-to-one discussions, to identify individual teacher development needs and to tailor mentoring, coaching, and professional learning opportunities.
- Collaborative professional learning structures (peer observation, lesson study, internally led workshops) should be installed in schools as a means of building teacher capacity and taking full advantage of peer expertise and freely available digital resources to ensure a sustained approach to teacher development in the absence of external funding.

- Professional learning time should be a structural requirement of the formal school timetable rather than an add-on, which district education authorities should provide.
- Formal awards, public recognition, and promotion opportunities for head teachers should be used to identify and reward head teachers who are highly committed and effective in teacher development.
- Leadership preparation and in-service programmes for head teachers need to be redesigned to be more sustained and reflective, involving leadership values, professional identity, and relational practice, as well as technical skills of managing and leading teacher development.

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