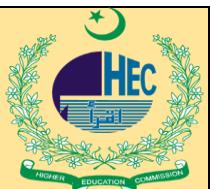




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## Transformative Leadership of an IBA-Recruited Head Teacher: School Improvement Initiatives in Rural Khairpur, Sindh

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** This research explores the performance and transformative leadership programs of head teachers who are hired using Sukkur IBA University Testing Services (STS) merit-based system in Sindh, Pakistan. The key aim is to assess how these non-seniority-based leaders negotiate the systemic issues of the rural education system to trigger an environment of school improvement.

**Methods:** The research uses a qualitative instrumental case study design, and it is based on Government Branch High School X located in the Basti Tehsil of District Khairpur. Semi-structured interviews with 29 stakeholders, consisting of head teachers, staff members, students, parents, chairmen of School Management Committee (SMC), and Taluka Education Officers (TEOs) were used to collect data. Triangulation was done by document analysis of school registers, cash books and visitor records.

**Findings:** The research finds that the IBA-appointed head teacher (HT1) was able to institute critical reforms in four areas, including functionalizing infrastructure (solar power, washrooms), systematizing academics (weekly testing, multimedia use), mobilizing community resources (land and furniture donations), and creating a role-model leadership culture. Although there were persistent shortages of resources and early opposition by the community, the merit-based recruitment led to the much better punctuality of teachers and their interaction with the students.

**Implications:** The results imply that third party merit testing to professionalize the school leadership cadres is working well to avoid political patronage. Nevertheless, the paper notes that because of the contractual character of these appointments, it leads to a kind of a contractual paradox, in which job insecurity leads to short-term excellence but long-term professional anxiety.

**Keywords:** Head Teacher Performance, School Improvement, Sindh Education Reforms, Merit-based Recruitment, Transformative Leadership, Rural Education.

### Introduction

#### The Crisis of Educational Leadership in Pakistan

Pakistan is experiencing a situation that is profoundly unsatisfactory in terms of the development of educational indicators in the country, and at present, the country is home to around 23 million out-of-school children, who are aged between 5 and 16. In the case of the students who are in the public schooling system (Khalid, 2023), the standard of teaching is often undermined by a history of ineffective recruitment procedures and political interference in the process of appointing educational staff. This crisis is especially apparent in the province of Sindh, where it is measured by Standardized Achievement Test (SAT) and Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) (Ahmed and Shamsi, 2022). The statistics of the Sukkur area show that eighth-grade students are scoring less than 30% in core subjects like mathematics and science, which indicates a basic failure in the teaching backbone of government-schooling.

Traditionally, these schools are controlled by promotions through seniority whereby the most senior teachers get a promotion to the position of head teacher irrespective of their management skills or leadership potentials (Bhayo et al., 2018). Such a system has often created the culture of an authoritative administration, i.e. an emphasis on bureaucratic compliance not on pedagogical improvement (Shah et al., 2024). This political interference in these appointments has further demoralized the good candidates resulting in a demoralized work force and poor infrastructure. Realizing this systemic rot, the Government of Sindh embarked on a historic policy change by unveiling the concept of recruiting 1,000 head teachers on merit basis by using Sukkur IBA University Testing Services (STS). The idea behind this intervention was to introduce a new breed of leaders, what is commonly known as IBA Head Teachers, who would be able to act as change agents in the worst neglected rural corridors of the province.

Poor leadership abilities and unethical recruitment methods are the main causes of the country's public schools' poor performance, which is frequently equated with failure (Bhayo et al., 2018). Research across the globe claims that the head teacher is the key player who can change the atmosphere and culture of the school, but in Pakistan, the head of the school has historically been seen as merely an administrative stand-in (Dool et al., 2023). As a result, there is a dearth of empirical research on the performance of recently hired, merit-based leaders in dysfunctional systems.

This research fills the gap by examining the performance of head teachers who were appointed using the STS testing mechanism. In particular, it analyses Government Branch High School X in the rural area of Khairpur to learn what initiatives were undertaken, what were the challenges, and what was done to cope with the challenges. The logic behind this research is that such a study would inform policy on the efficacy of third-party recruitment and the sustainability of school gains when leaders are contracted and have a high degree of job insecurity.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of the proposed research is based on the principles of transformative and instructional leadership, adjusted to the specifics of socio-political situation in Sindh (Ahmed and Kiran, 2024). In the articulations by Bass and Leithwood, transformative leadership involves a leader to go beyond the mere transactions of power and instead transform the beliefs, values and the attitudes of all the stakeholders to encourage a common vision of success (Alzoraiki et al., 2024, Leithwood and Jantzi, 2005, Bass, 1990, Assefa and Mujtaba, 2025). This is translated into a school level leader who motivates the teachers to go beyond their selfish interests towards a common school objective of student success.

In Pakistan, Memon (1999) and Rizvi (2008) focus on the idea that school leaders need to balance between administrative and pedagogical leadership. Conventional leaders in Sindh tend to dedicate their best time to the authoritative management and money-related matters,

leaving the learning environment poorly attended. The merit-based recruitment model implies that the leaders recruited due to professional competency will automatically assume the roles of Instructional Leaders who serve as classroom observers, mentors, and resource mobilizers. Moreover, the paper relies on the Prophetic Model of leadership introduced by Khaki (2005), according to which the head teacher is a moral actor, who is committed, tolerant, and participatory in terms of his/her community involvement.

### **Literature Review**

The process of recruitment and induction of school heads in the Sindh government sector traditionally took two routes namely competitive tests by the Sindh Public Service Commission (SPSC) and promotions based on seniority. The recruitment rules of 2014 showed that 80 percent of the selections should have been allocated to the SPSC, and 20 percent were to be allocated to the promotion of existing teachers. Nonetheless, the SPSC process has been characterized by significant gaps in between recruitment periods leaving many schools in the care of so-called in-charge heads who are not formally trained or authorized to lead the school. The system of seniority, as harshly reviewed by Memon (2010), tends to uplift lazy and non-productive people who have become used to systemic inefficiency.

These processes of weakness were not followed in 2016, when the Chief Minister of Sindh decided to hire head teachers by using Sukkur IBA University. The STS test was made in such a way that it could test the candidates in respect to the content knowledge, teaching methods, classroom management, and leadership styles- the skills that were not vetted before in promotions that were based on seniority. Rural school success literature has highlighted that in developing countries, it is not the availability of extra resources that make a principal successful, but rather how well the limited resources available to him/her are utilized in mobilizing the community (Shah et al., 2024).

According to the findings of scholars such as (Leu et al., 2005), in the sub-Saharan context like in rural Sindh, new school heads are confronted with issues such as parental disinterest, shortages of teachers and poor infrastructure. To address them, a leader should assume several roles, school manager, community mobilizer, resource developer, and caregiver. The IBA-recruited head introduction is an effort to bring in an agent of the Second-Order Change that can offer a safe working environment, instructional supervision, and faculty motivation.

### **Methodology**

The current study employs a qualitative instrumental case study design, which was selected due to its capacity to give an in-depth and holistic view of the processes implemented by merit-recruited head teachers in their natural environments (Creswell & Creswell, 2014; Takona, 2024). The administrative, geographical boundary of the Department falls within the administrative and geographical boundaries of Government Branch High School X in the Basti Tehsil of the District, Khairpur, Sindh.

### **Participant Selection and Sample Characteristics**

Participants were selected through purposive sampling because they had experienced the change in a seniority-based head teacher to an IBA-recruited leader (Creswell & Creswell, 2014). The research used a sample of 29 individuals in three schools to achieve data saturation and School X was the major unit of analysis. Table 1 provides the breakdown of the participants of the broader study.

**Table 1 Participant details**

S. No.	Participant Category	Case One (School X)	Case	Case Three	Total
			Two		
1	Head Teachers	1	1	1	3

<b>2</b>	Teachers	1	1	1	3
<b>3</b>	Students (Class 10)	4	4	4	12
<b>4</b>	Parents	2	2	2	6
<b>5</b>	SMC Chairmen	1	1	1	3
<b>6</b>	Taluka Education Officers	2 (Primary/Secondary)	-	-	2
<b>Total</b>		<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>29</b>

The teachers were chosen by having not less than five years' experience at the school to give them an opportunity to see the leadership styles of the previous and the current head teacher. Class 10 was chosen among students due to similar motives of long-term observation.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Semi-structured interviews and a document analysis were the main data collection methods. The interviews took place in Sindhi language, so that the participants could have no problems with the language and could share their lived experiences without language barriers. The semi-structured guides were based on themes of initiatives, challenges, stakeholder support, and future outlooks (Creswell & Creswell, 2014).

Document analysis encompassed the examination of school records in several years. Triangulation was done through the comparison of interview narratives with student attendance register, teacher muster roll, cash book (SMC fund utilization), visitor book and result sheets (Ghanad, 2023). Thematic analysis, both within-case and cross-case (Creswell & Creswell, 2014; Nii Laryeafo & Ogbewe, 2023), was used to analyze the data and determine unique contextual factors and common trends across the IBA-recruited cadres.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The data collection commenced only after seeking the permission of the Director of Elementary and Secondary Education, Sukkur Region. The participants gave their written consent, and those students who were below 18 gave assent forms with parental consent (Nii Laryeafo & Ogbewe, 2023). The anonymity was also ensured by using pseudonyms of schools and individuals to ensure that participants are not subject to administrative consequences (Creswell & Creswell, 2014; Ghanad, 2023).

### **Findings**

The Government Branch High School X is in the rural village of Sojhro Khan. When the IBA head teacher (HT1) arrived at the school, the school had large numbers of students in paper terms but poor attendance. The infrastructure was not properly maintained and the culture within the schools was characterized by teachers as traditional and unmonitored.

### **Physical Environment and Infrastructure**

The head teacher acknowledged that motivation of students and teachers are necessitated by a dignified physical environment. He was more interested in utilizing the unspent SMC funds to ensure that the school washrooms were in usable conditions and this action has been mentioned by parents as being a key determinant in their decision to send their girls to the school. Since frequent power outages were common in the rural setting, HT1 installed a solar system to have fans and multimedia equipment running continuously in the intense heat of the Sindh summers.

Other physical activities were the painting of the school building, educational charts in every classroom, and improvement of the school ground. HT1 also laid down "little parks" and a plantation drive project to turn the school into a pleasant learning environment, and to turn the bleak government building it once was into a clean and welcoming educational facility.

According to the stakeholders, these physical changes were direct pointers that the new management was serious in reform.

### **Syntactic Academic Reforms**

HT1 transformed the school, which was ad-hoc based in terms of its instructional model, into a data-driven academic system. He implemented an organized plan of study and strict examination schedule, with weekly, monthly and mid-term tests. This was a big change as compared to the old regime where students were usually evaluated only at the end of the exams.

The head teacher used technology by presenting multimedia presentations in the classroom and used science kits to carry out experiments. To address chronic shortages in the staff on technical subjects, HT1 employed his social agency to recruit local educated graduates to teach on an honorary basis. Such a strategy not only helped to fill the gap in the subject but also involved the local community into the life processes of the school.

### **Resource Mobilization and Stakeholder Ownership**

His attitude toward student absenteeism was one of the most innovative approaches used by HT1. He also prepared School Leaving Certificate to chronically absent students and had them sent home. This is a proactive step that compelled parents to pay a visit to the school and through this, HT1 was able to have them in a discussion concerning the future of their child. This is an effective strategy that erased the barrier of communication between the school and the rural community.

This transformation heavily relied on the role of the SMC Chairman who would accompany the head teacher to meet with the higher officials to insist on more resources. The people reacted to this openness with such support never seen before. The trees used to make school furniture were donated by the local villagers and more than 100 plants were donated to the school by the Taluka Press Club to make its greenery programs. Even a retired teacher offered 100 uniforms to make sure that poor students can go to school with pride.

### **Head Teacher as a Role Model**

The most widespread theme identified in the data was that of HT1 being a Role Model. In contrast to old fashion heads who almost always came late or missed the teaching classes, HT1 was the first to show up in school and the last to go. He even attended classes himself, especially on the days that teachers of subjects were not available, which instilled a sense of timeliness and routine among the teachers and students. According to one teacher, the cultural shift in the school was largely due to the fact that HT was a teacher who was dedicated to the fact that he was first a teacher, and then an officer.

### **Discussion**

The action of HT1 in School X highlights the basic distinction between leadership by merit and leadership by seniority. Traditional promotions based on seniority in the Pakistani setting has created an administrative-oriented leadership style that focuses more on survival and compliance as opposed to innovation. The head teachers recruited by STS, however, introduced a trans-formative-pedagogical orientation that enabled them to cut through the bureaucracy with greater professional agency.

### **The Impact of Contractual Status on Performance**

One of the most significant results of this study is the two-fold effect of the contractual status of the head teacher. On the one hand, job insecurity that characterizes the contract worker was a strong motivational factor towards high performance. This is consistent with the theory of the Psychological Contract proposed by Rousseau (1990) in which the employees experience

an increased motivation to act when they believe that the terms of their work are temporary and may be established.

Nonetheless, insecurity is a strong source of stressor. The all concerned stakeholders, TEOs and parents alike, were concerned that such high-performing leaders were yet to be regularized by the Government of Sindh. The recent administrative orders to halt the salaries or relieve IBA head teachers whose services had not been regularized by SPSC has been a source of sheer anxiety. It is an indication of a contractual paradox that argues that the government is unwittingly undermining its own reform by keeping its best change agents in a state of unrelenting job insecurity.

### **Overcoming Resource Dearth through Social Capital**

The research indicates that the effectiveness of IBA recruited head teachers majorly relies on how well they can develop a Social Capital in the society. Although the traditional heads frequently lamented the absence of government funding (ADP funds), merit-recruited heads such as HT1 turned horizontally to the community and the NGOs as sources of funds. The results demonstrate that parents who believe that a head teacher is honest and dedicated are ready to contribute money and material resources - to purchase transformers, donate land and honorary work. This proves that the leader will is more critical than the wealth of the institution during early stages of school improvement.

Leadership Attribute	Seniority-Based Impact	Merit-Based (STS) Impact
<b>Punctuality</b>	Often irregular due to lack of oversight	HT as role model; first-in, last-out
<b>Resource Use</b>	SMC funds often unspent or mismanaged	Funds used for solar power, washrooms
<b>Community Relations</b>	Traditional distance; limited engagement	High engagement; land/material donations
<b>Pedagogy</b>	Reliance on traditional dictation methods	Integration of multimedia and practicals
<b>Accountability</b>	Vertical; focused on bureaucratic orders	Horizontal; focused on parents and results

### **Implications**

The case of Government Branch High School X transformation exemplifies a particular causal sequence of reform that has very important consequences on the general Sindh education sector. The first policy intervention, which was transparent, third-party testing was a filter selecting people with high levels of professional agency and pedagogical knowledge. This agency was then translated into functionalization of resources, which further boosted the student motivation and teacher attendance.

The "ripple effect" of observable school progress at the time re-involved the community who had since deserted the public school system in favor of the cheaply made private ones. Such re-engagement gave the extra resources (honorary teachers, land) to maintain the improvements regardless of the slow bureaucratic response of government to make ADP funds available.

Nonetheless, there is also a negative ripple effect recognized: the professional anxiety due to the absence of regularization. Without these head teachers becoming part of a stable, secure civil service system, the brain drain of such trained leadership to the private sector is unavoidable. Additionally, the research indicates that the effectiveness of such head teachers is nowadays local and individualistic but not systemic.

### **Policy Recommendations and Future Prospect**

With regard to the presented empirical data and the discussion of the systemic issues, the recommendations to the Government of Sindh and the School Education and Literacy Department are as follows:

#### **Professionalization and Regularization**

The Government of Sindh must take the necessary immediate action to regularize the services of all high performing IBA-recruited head teachers. It is pointless and discouraging to call upon the Sindh Public Service Commission (SPSC) to re-vet people who have already demonstrated their merit by undergoing three party testing to determine and years of success on ground. Rather, a regularization route based on performance ought to be introduced, where data on TEO reports and school SAT scores are used to verify tenure.

#### **Development of a Management Cadre**

In order to make merit-based leadership sustainable, the government ought to create a different cadre of School Management, which is referred to as School Management Cadre. This would help the young educators who are leadership oriented to gain management positions early on in their careers instead of getting management positions through seniority-based promotions. Institutions such as Sukkur IBA and the Sindh Teacher Education Development Authority (STEDA) should extend sustained professional development to these cadres to remain abreast of the current trends in the world of teaching leadership.

#### **Enhancement of Support Bureaucracy**

The functions of Taluka Education Officer (TEO) and District Education Officer (DEO) should not be that of a checking body of attendance but an empowerment of improvement of schools. TEOs ought to possess certain key performance indicators (KPIs) of their effectiveness in helping their head teachers to overcome legal conflicts, gain access to infrastructure, and cope with staff resistance.

#### **Scaling the "School X" Model**

The Government ought to use the Essential Supports package, found in School X, solar power, working washrooms, and multimedia facilities, as a minimum standard to all rural schools. With such basic facilities in place, the government can clear the way and allow the head teachers to concentrate on the instructional core.

#### **Performance-Linked Accountability**

The regularization should be matched with a strict accountability system. One of the concerns that the government should adopt is the 360-degree appraisal system where the performance of the head teacher should be appraised not only by the superior but also by the SMC and data on student learning outcomes. It would help to avoid the passivity that is a repercussion of permanent government employment.

#### **Conclusion**

The case study of Government Branch High School X in rural Khairpur is a strong indication that the Sindh education crisis is essentially a crisis of leadership. Once the so-called seniority trap is avoided and a more merit-based and transparent recruitment system is adopted, schools that were once viewed as the so-called useless ones can be transformed into thriving learning institutions. The IBA-recruited head teachers have already managed to prove that the transformative leadership based on being a role model, marshaling community social capital, and formalizing the academic evaluation can lead to some essential outcomes even in the environments with limited resources.

This study ends on a critical note, however, the Khairpur Miracle, according to this research, is weak. The existing practice of ensuring these leaders are in a perpetual state of contractual limbo is backfiring. To have a Sindh education system that is no longer a system of political

patronage, instigating merit into the system is essential. Through regularization of these head teachers, creation of management cadres and creation of facilitative bureaucracy, Sindh can afford to take the lead in educational reform of the country. The example of School X can be taken as a guidebook: quality education can be achieved once the individual in charge has the merit to control and the security to foresight

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