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# Getting Empowered and Developing an Environment of Administrative Resilience for the Effective Functioning of Public Colleges

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative research explores strategies for empowering principals and fostering administrative resilience to enhance the effective functioning of public colleges in Pakistan. A purposive sample of 12 principals from various public colleges was selected to collect data through semi-structured interviews. The study explores principals' perceptions of existing administrative challenges, their experiences with empowerment initiatives, and their conceptualizations of an ideal resilient administrative environment. Motivation to work, community engagement, and missionary zeal emerged as the main themes of the study after undertaking a thematic analysis. The findings suggest that empowering principals through increased autonomy in decision-making, professional development opportunities, and access to necessary resources significantly contributes to improved college management. Furthermore, the development of administrative resilience, characterized by adaptive leadership, robust communication channels, and a supportive organizational culture, is crucial for navigating unforeseen crises and ensuring sustained operational efficiency. The study highlights the critical need for policy interventions aimed at decentralizing authority, investing in leadership training, and building collaborative frameworks to cultivate empowered and resilient administrative structures within Pakistan's public college system, ultimately leading to enhanced educational outcomes.

**Keywords:** Empowerment, resilience, academic development, visionary leadership, work-motivation, community engagement.

## 1. Introduction

Leadership is a process, capacity, or potential to influence the behaviors of followers, a process to direct and guide the work of others towards the achievement of certain goals in a provided conditions. It is also well-defined as the capability to influence a cluster towards the recognition of an objective. Leaders are required to improve future visions and to inspire the managerial members to want to achieve the visions (Pillai, 2012; (Singh et al., 2023). The

principalship has the same qualities and characteristics of leadership. It is an interpersonal procedure in which a manager influences and guides the workers towards the achievement of goals. It means a few qualities to be present in a person, which include intelligence, maturity, and personality. It is a set process. It comprises two or more people interacting with each other. A leader is intricately involved in determining and forming the behavior of the cluster towards the completion of administrative goals. Leadership is circumstances-bound. There is no best style of leadership. It all depends on tackling the situations (Nguyen et al., 2023).

Leadership literature portrays that many theories and approaches of leadership have been refined and presented, but none is compulsory for all scenarios and contexts, and none of these is irrelevant. Because their relevancy depends on the circumstances and context in which they are to be applied. As Great Man theory opined that people inherit certain qualities and traits that make them leaders. Trait theory found that leadership was a sole property of amazing individuals, and the traits that leaders have cannot be produced. Trait theory has been coined from the word trait. Traits are the qualities and characteristics of a person that are seen in their personality. These qualities and traits make one person distinct from others. Most of the studies on leadership during the early 1900s emphasized the personality traits of the leaders. Nevertheless, this theory was confused with a dilemma in that area of study. If it is assumed that some of the traits are associated with educational leadership, and in what sense we will be able to explain the people have those traits but do not have leadership capabilities (Gracia, 2014).

The theories on leadership behavior led to further theories of leadership. The theories on behavioral leadership were more concentrated on the various behaviors of the leaders and did not pay attention to the innate abilities and cognitive qualities. The leader's behaviors or actions are theoretically called leadership styles. The recognized three styles, namely: authoritarian, democratic, and laissez-faire, which impacted group decision making, praise, and criticism. In 1945, a group of researchers at the Ohio State University recognized observable behaviors of leaders and decided that it is not the personality traits that make a leader. They came up with two factors that accounted for most of the differences in leader behavior. The actions and behaviors of the leaders are the main concerns of the theorists who believe in behavioral leadership, and they believe in observing a leader's actions and activities, particularly when the leaders in action deal with certain circumstances (Ray, 2012). This specific theory asserts that leaders are a product of the environmental conditions and are not born as leaders. Therefore, they suggest that one can become a leader if one learns to pursue certain behaviors, responses, and actions in reply to the specific conditions (Rahi et al., 2022).

The situational theories of leadership claim that no leadership style is perfect alone, as leadership styles differ according to different factors such as the quality or situation. This theory argues that a leader should show a particular behavior in a particular situation rather than behave the same in all situations (Brabandt, 2016). According to this theory, there is no one way of leadership as the internal and external sides of the situation need the leader to adjust to that particular situation.

Transactional theories of Leadership are also recognized as administration theories, concentrated on the role of management, organization, and group presentations. The theorists who advocate these notions assert that the reward and punishment mechanism is very crucial. The leading theorist among them was Burns (1978). A chance to lead the group is allowed to the leaders if they follow the transactional leadership theory, and as a result, the group members make an effort to follow the instructions for the accomplishment of certain objectives. The leaders are empowered to manage and manipulate the behavior of their followers for certain reasons (Kumar, 2013; Shelton et al., 2022).

Servant-leadership theory was first coined by Robert K. Greenleaf in 1970. He derived this term from Hermann Hesse's novel "Journey to the East," in which the main character is called the servant of the traveling group who later becomes the group leader. According to this theory, a leader's main inspiration and role is service to others. And a great leader is perceived as a servant first. Servant-leadership starts

## **2. Purpose of the Study**

The present research is conducted in the context of higher education institutions in the public sector. This includes public sector colleges whose principals face various administrative problems and issues due to different socio-political reasons. This research is an attempt to trace the prevailing literature on leadership theories and make an attempt to explore their relevance in the context of public sector colleges and their leadership. The study aims to develop a viable theory for the leaders of these colleges after gaining their leadership experiences and understanding.

## **3. Research Questions**

1. How can the principals working in the public colleges be empowered?
2. What do the principals of public colleges experience as the motivation to work and keep their faculty motivated to exercise the empowerment?
3. What are principals' experiences of community engagement, and how does it help empower them for the ongoing development and working of the institutions?
4. How does missionary zeal and visionary power of the college principals help them realize their duties for the appropriate functioning of the colleges?

## **4. Research Methods**

A Grounded Theory approach was adopted for this study. The Grounded Theory approach of qualitative method is used to build a new theory when there is a gap in the literature or no research work exists before. As the researchers could not find relevant material about the topic so they used the grounded theory approach. There are three kinds of grounded theory: the classical approach of grounded theory, the Straussian grounded theory, and the Constructivist approach of grounded theory by Kathy Charmiz. The researchers used the constructivist approach of grounded theory by Kathy Charmiz. Constructivist grounded theory is a qualitative research method that is used to examine social or personal experiences about a certain situation or phenomenon about which no prior theory exists (Mills et al.2006, a). So, the researchers considered this approach most suitable to conduct this research study.

The population of this research study consisted of all the principals of public sector colleges of Punjab, Pakistan. There were 749 public sector colleges in Punjab, so the population size was 749 principals of public sector colleges, but due to time and financial constraints, the participants located in the division of Sahiwal, situated in the Punjab province were accessible who were working in the public colleges. These participants were selected from the 34 public colleges situated in this division. Sixteen colleges had female teachers and eighteen colleges had male staff. A sample consisting of twelve principals was selected purposively from these colleges. Data was collected by semi-structured interviews. Participants were selected by using a purposive sampling technique. Interviews were conducted face-to-face to gather more reliable and valid data and to observe the body language and facial expressions of the participants. The average duration of each interview was almost 43 minutes. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. Ethical consideration was properly taken into account, and interviews were conducted with the prior consent of the participants.

The constructivist approach of Grounded Theory by Kathy Charmaz was used to examine

and analyze the phenomenon to formulate a new theory, as the relevant literature about the researcher's topic of research could not be found. Constructivist grounded theory is a qualitative research method that is used to examine social or personal experiences about a certain situation, about which no prior theory exists (Mills et al.2006)

## 5. Results of the Study

Most of the participants reflected that they were less empowered, or to some extent disempowered, or they enjoy just theoretical powers. They cannot make decisions independently, keep proper checks and balances over the staff, and utilize the funds. At this point, the researchers asked the principals, "If they are less empowered, then how do they run the colleges and maintain quality education"? There emerged three common categories in response to this question. (i) Motivation to Work (ii) Community engagement, and (iii) Missionary Zeal. These themes are elaborated here.

### Motivation to Work

While responding to a question, if you are less empowered, then how do you run the college and maintain the quality of education? Most of the principals stated, by motivating, inspiring, and even impelling the staff. They were of the view that staff perform their duties better when they are motivated, inspired, instead of excessive use of powers against them to work. There are two ways to keep the subordinates working better: one is to force them to work, and the second is to inspire and motivate them to work. Referring to this situation, the participant, P7, principal of a boys' college, primarily with the designation of AP of English and having three years of managerial and fourteen years of experience in teaching, reflected that:

*The work done by force is not always well done; instead, the work done by inspiration, politeness, and motivation is always well done. You can say work done by inspiration, politeness, and motivation is self-done, and self-done is always well done.*

Most of the principals were of the view that the principals feel themselves less empowered, so they are unable to comply with their orders and instructions by command. There are many hurdles in the smooth running of the colleges, and quality education is compromised. To keep the colleges functional, they try to motivate the staff to perform their duties by giving respect and honor to the staff, by visiting their homes, taking part in their sorrows and happiness, and acknowledging the hardworking teachers. Referring to this situation, a principal (P6) of a commerce college with a master's degree in commerce and thirty-four years' of experience in teaching and seven years of academic administration described his perceptions:

*Even if a principal is fully empowered, he will have to motivate and inspire his staff for the welfare of the students and the betterment of the college. The difference is that a less empowered principal has to inspire and motivate the staff much more than the empowered principal*

There are two kinds of motivation: intrinsic motivation and the other is extrinsic motivation. Intrinsically motivated persons need no reward to work, and they don't work to avoid punishment; rather, they work to satisfy their inner soul. They don't feel at ease until the completion of tasks assigned to them. While extrinsically motivated individuals work either to get a reward or to avoid punishment (DSD, 2012). In any organization, there exist both kinds of employees; similarly, in public sector colleges, there is a presence of both categories of teachers/non-teachers. The powerless principals cannot give punishment to the extrinsically motivated teachers, but he/she can give rewards to them by giving respect, honor, and an appreciation letter even for their little good efforts or performance, this will ultimately tilt them towards the right direction. Referring to this situation, a principal from a commerce college, coded with P8 in the current research, had an

experience of three decades in teaching and eight years in educational management, was of the opinion that:

*"I never discourage these sorts of teachers; instead, I motivate them by saying that they have done 50% of their duty by coming to college, and ultimately, they will start performing the remaining 50% duty too."*

### **Community Engagement**

One way of overcoming the issues and challenges to quality education and empowerment in public sector colleges is to wait for the government to resolve the issues, and the second is to involve society in sharing the problems of public sector colleges. In the absence of practical empowerment and a lack of monetary grants, the philanthropists and donors from the community can play an important role in the proper functioning of the Public Sector College to some extent. Pakistani are very famous for giving charity and donations across the world. With the help of the local donors, principals of public sector colleges can improve and create a quite conducive atmosphere for teaching and learning by fulfilling the missing facilities and resources. Referring again to this situation, P10, who was a principal of the Govt. Graduate College for boys and a professor in Education. He had 21 years of teaching and 5 years of administrative experience reflected his thoughts in these words.

*I make efforts myself to overcome the challenge by involving society to come forward and help donate to the college to provide the maximum facilities. You will be surprised to know that I have hired 7 teachers of different subjects for 6 months this year, to whom I have paid more than 6 lakhs through donations. Tenure of CTIs has come to an end on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2021, but I have requested them to give me one more month, and they accepted it. If the principal is determined and shows willpower and missionary zeal, he can manage and overcome the most difficult challenges*

In response to this kind of situation, P-9, who was a principal in the Govt. Associate College of Commerce, with 30 years of teaching and 6 years of administrative experience, described his views in the following words.

*"To keep on crying the lack of resources shows the incompetence and lame excuses on behalf of the principals, principalship is the name of competency to produce maximum outcomes within the minimum available resources."*

### **Missionary Zeal**

In the presence of less empowerment or "theoretical" powers of the principals of public sector colleges, missionary zeal and visionary power are important alternatives to keep the colleges properly functional and maintain the quality of education. Missionary zeal is something that prompts the individual's inner soul to show enthusiasm in accepting and completing any task with great passion, and visionary power is the ability to make the right decision at the right time. There are many examples in public sector colleges where the principals have been appointed just based on seniority without judging their aptitude, interest, competency, missionary zeal, and visionary power, so the absence of these attributes creates hurdles for the principals to run the colleges and maintain quality education. A less empowered principal with full of missionary zeal and visionary power can make more timely and wise decisions than a principal with full powers but less missionary zeal and visionary power. In response to the researcher's question, "If you are less empowered, then how do you run the college to maintain the quality education?" in other words, what are the alternatives? Most of the principals reflected that they try to run the college by our visionary power and missionary zeal. Referring to this situation, P 7, who was a principal in the Govt. Associate College (boys) and assistant professor, having the degree of M.A. English and

having 16 years of teaching and 3 years of administrative experience, elaborated his personal experience in the following words.

*The principal's role is to run the college and produce quality education within the available resources. It can be done by two things: one is missionary zeal, and the other is visionary power. Missionary zeal boosts my morale, and visionary power helps me make decisions.*

Decision-making is one of the great traits of the principals. They have to make decisions daily regarding the academic and administrative issues. Timely and right decisions help in the proper functioning of colleges and promote quality education. The more the principals have visionary powers, the more they will make timely and wise decisions. There is a great link between visionary principalship and the success of colleges. The problem is that principals don't have or don't show visionary powers; they just follow the others. Again, referring to P10, who was a principal of the Government. Graduate College (boys) and a professor qualifying Ph.D. He had 21 years of teaching and 5 years of administrative experience, reflected in his experiences as under:

*Ground realities of all colleges are not the same. There is a need to think out of the box, I always try not to follow the suit but to apply my vision, keeping in view the requirements of my college.*

In short, mission and vision are the key characteristics of the principals to perform their duties efficiently and effectively. These are such qualities which enable the principals to overcome the issue of less empowerment and lack of resources to some extent.

### **Developing an Environment of Administrative Resilience for the Functioning of Public Colleges**

The present research study was focused on examining the phenomenon of getting empowered through different sources. The researchers studied the abundance of literature in which there was a lot of material about empowerment, women empowerment, employees' empowerment, workforce empowerment, and teachers' empowerment. but all the literature about empowerment was either from the school education field or about other fields than education; the researcher could not find any literature about the empowerment of college principals or college education. Similarly, literature about quality education was about school education, not about the college wing. So, there was a gap in the literature; the researcher tried to fill the gap by developing a theory to explain the phenomenon comprehensively, as the researcher could not find relevant literature about the phenomenon

After the data analysis, developing core categories and sub-themes, the researchers discovered the fact that no or very little research has been done about college education, empowerment of college principals, and quality education of colleges as compared to school education. As little research has been done about the problems and issues of college education, so no attention has been given to college education as compared to school education. Analysis of the data provided by the participants shows that the principals of public sector colleges are "less empowered" or they have powers only on paper, which means they are merely "theoretically" empowered. They are not fully authorized to utilize the budget independently; rather, they have to go through a long, delaying departmental process of reappropriation and approval of the budget. Their proposals and recommendations are not given weight, and they are not invited to take part in policy-making about colleges. They have to face political pressure too while exercising their powers, which compels them to compromise on college rules and regulations.

Slack season at intermediate level in public sector colleges is one of the big challenges to quality education, but there is no proper check and balance over the colleges to address this

challenge, and the principals do not have sufficient powers to give exemplary punishment to those who remain indulged in this practice of slack season. There is no literature about the slack season in public sector colleges. To enhance and improve the quality of education in public sector colleges the sufficient numbers of teachers are pre requisite but unfortunately in all the public sector colleges there is a great shortage of teaching staff, currently almost 8000 seats of different categories of college teachers are lying vacant and the principals have no powers to recruit the teachers as and when needed even they cannot hire College Teaching Interns (CTIs). They have to wait for the government to start the recruitment process, and it may take years. Resultantly, quality education in public sector colleges is compromised.

Similarly, another challenge to quality education is Student Teacher Ratio (STR), which is interlinked with the shortage of teaching staff. There are many colleges where the required number of teachers according to STR is very less, but a surplus number of teachers are working there, and there are also many colleges where the required number of teaching staff is much higher, and the number of working teaching staff is very less. The principals have no power to shuffle the teachers according to STR. This challenge can only be addressed by doing rationalization, but the teachers themselves are against the process of rationalization as no one wants to dislocate himself/herself from his/her desired stations. So, due to agitation on behalf of the PPLA, the department is reluctant to do rationalization; as a result, the colleges, especially in remote areas, are facing an immense shortage of teaching staff, and the quality of education in public sector colleges remains at a low standard.

Non-parental involvement is another challenge to quality education. Unlike the private sector colleges, the parents of the students of public sector colleges don't show interest in the studies of their children. They don't remain in touch with the teachers and the college administration. They don't bother to attend the PTM, and principals have no power to bind them to attend the Parents Teachers Meeting (PTM). So, there is always a gap in communication between the parents and the colleges, which results in low-quality education. The present research study discovered and maintained that principals of public sector colleges are not "fully empowered" even though they are empowered on paper only. The public sector colleges are facing a lack of resources, too. Now, the question is that if the principals are less empowered, then how do they run the colleges and maintain the quality of education? In other words, what are the alternatives to less empowerment of principals? After the collection and analysis of data, the current research study discovered three core categories deduced from the participants' interviews. These categories can be called alternatives to less empowerment.

Firstly, they try their level best to produce maximum quality outcomes by motivating and inspiring the staff, as they believe that motivation works better than excessive use of powers. The principals can try to involve the staff in making any plan for the betterment of colleges, which will make the staff feel belongingness and honor. So, teamwork and motivation can help principals to maintain quality education even in the absence of powers of principals.

Secondly, by engaging the community, community engagement means involving the society and local community to help reduce the problems and issues of colleges. The principals must not feel shy to seek donations from the well-to-do personalities of the community to provide maximum facilities in colleges. The government may not provide resources timely manner to newly and sudden requirements of the colleges, for this, the principals may get help from the college council to decide from which persons they should seek donations to provide a conducive learning environment in public sector colleges.

Thirdly, as teaching is a prophetic profession so principals should perform their duties by considering it worship. The principals who have missionary zeal and visionary powers don't keep

on crying the rhetoric of less empowerment and lack of resources, but they think out of the box by producing maximum output within the minimum available resources.

## Discussion

So, what are the ways forward or alternatives if the principals or less empowered or theoretically empowered as principalship is the process and competency to get maximum output within the minimum available resources? Most of the principals were of the view that there are three main ways forward or alternatives: the ability to motivate the staff, community engagement, and missionary zeal.

Most of the principals described that it's a fact they are less empowered now that they have to run the college, so instead of talking about powers and authority, motivation and inspiration can play a vital role. As the principals think that they cannot fully and properly comply with their orders by power and authority so they can motivate their staff to work as a team. They can share their responsibilities with their staff, which will give them a sense of ownership and honor to work for the welfare of the colleges (Hautala, et al., 2021).

Another way forward appeared after data analysis was the community engagement. It means to involve the community and local people to share the burden or responsibilities of the principals. The principals should seek donations and funds from the well-to-do people of the community to provide the missing facilities or hire teachers to minimize the deficiency of teaching staff.

The third way forward or alternative was Missionary Zeal and Visionary Power (Northouse, 2021). The missionary zeal and visionary power are dynamic alternatives to keep the colleges running and maintain the quality of education (Antonowicz & Jones, 2023). Missionary zeal is the ability that stimulates the principal's inner soul to show eagerness in completing any task with great passion. There are many examples in public sector colleges where the principals have been appointed just based on seniority without judging their aptitude, interest, and competency. The more the principals possess the quality of missionary zeal and leadership, the better they will run the colleges and maintain quality education (de & Altbach, 2021). Thus, while selecting the principals, the qualities of leadership, aptitude, and missionary zeal must also be evaluated along with other requirements.

## Findings & Conclusion

The research revealed that in the absence of powers, the principals try to run the colleges by motivating and inspiring the subordinates. According to principals, staff perform their duties better when they are motivated, inspired, instead of excessive use of power into them to work. There are two ways to keep the subordinates working better: one is to force them to work, and the second is to inspire and motivate them to work. The second alternative that came up was community engagement to lessen the issues of colleges. One way of addressing the challenges to quality education and empowerment in public sector colleges is to wait for the government to resolve the issues, and the second is to involve society in sharing the problems of public sector colleges. In the absence of practical empowerment and a lack of monetary grants, the philanthropists and donors from the society can play an important role in the proper functioning of the Public Sector College to some extent. There are many examples, as mentioned in the data analysis, that many principals overcame the issue of limited budget or shortage of teachers by getting donations from the haves and well-to-do people of the society. Such principals never feel it disgrace to ask the people to help reduce the problems of colleges.

To keep on crying the lack of resources shows the incompetence and lame excuses on behalf of the principals, principalship is the process to produce maximum outcomes within the minimum available resources, and to think out of the box/make alternatives to the issues. The third



alternative was Missionary

**Zeal and Visionary Power.** The results of the research revealed that in the presence of less empowerment or theoretical powers of the principals of public sector colleges, missionary zeal and visionary power are vital alternatives to keep the colleges properly functional and maintain the quality of education. Missionary zeal is something that prompts the individual's inner soul to show enthusiasm in accepting and completing any task with great passion, and visionary power is the ability to make the right decision at the right time. There are many examples in public sector colleges where the principals have been appointed just based on seniority without judging their aptitude, interest, competency, missionary zeal, and visionary power. A less authoritative principal with full missionary zeal and visionary power can make more timely and wise decisions than a principal with full powers but less missionary zeal and visionary power.

The more the principals have visionary powers, the more they will make timely and wise decisions. There is a great link between visionary principalship and the success of colleges. The problem is that principals don't have or don't show visionary powers; they just follow the others. In short, mission and vision are the key characteristics of the principals to perform their duties efficiently and effectively. These are such qualities which enable the principals to overcome the issue of less empowerment and lack of resources for some

#### **DECLARATION**

All possible measures have been taken to ensure compliance with national and international ethical standards, moreover, there are no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

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