



RESEARCH PAPER

Exploring the Role of School Leaders in Addressing the Issue of Teachers' Retention in the Context of Karachi Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of school leaders in addressing the issue of teacher retention in semi-government schools, located in Karachi, Pakistan. By applying a qualitative case study methodology, it gathers insights, through semi-structured interviews, from principals and teachers regarding leadership practices and their impact on teacher retention. Thematic analysis reveals that effective leadership practices, such as professional development, mentorship programs and supportive work environments, significantly enhance teacher satisfaction and retention. However, challenges like bureaucratic barriers and limited resources hinder these efforts. The findings highlight the need for policy reforms and greater support from educational authorities to overcome these obstacles. This research contributes to understanding educational leadership and teacher retention, emphasizing the unique context of Karachi's semi-government schools. It also offers practical recommendations to strengthen leadership practices, helping sustain teacher retention in these institutions.

KEYWORDS School Leaders, Semi-government Schools, Teachers' Retention, Case Study

Introduction

The teacher shortage has been a significant problem globally (UNESCO Report 2024); one factor contributing to this shortage is the rising number of teachers leaving / or replacing their careers. Every year, up to an estimated 8% of the teacher work force, quit the profession in the United States for a variety of reasons (Sutcher et al, 2022). Likewise, upto 50 percent of new teachers quit the teaching within the initial five years of their service in Europe, Australia, the United Kingdom and Hong Kong (Gallant & Riley, 2022). The problem of teacher attrition is not solely related to any specific country or region. The issue is evenly significant with certain distinct challenges in the context of Pakistan. Pakistan, like numerous other countries, is facing the teachers' attrition, mainly the ones new to the teaching profession (Asad, et al., 2022). In Pakistan, the effects of teacher attrition are very concerning, as the education system of the country is already facing multiple challenges, like resource limitations, inadequate infrastructure and the requirement of quality education for the growing populace. The research shows that the higher attrition has a negative impact on the students' achievements, learning outcomes and school culture (Pau, et al., 2022). The recruitment as well as replacement of new teachers has financial impact on the school in addition to causing anxiety in the school environment (Lei, et al., 2023). Therefore, it causes disruption in the continuity of learning, restricts the development of students, and puts an additional burden on the schools to recruit and train new teachers. Additionally, it further exacerbates the dearth of skilled and experienced teachers, which is a grave concern in the context of Pakistan.

Teacher retention means that a teacher chooses to stay at the same school, continuing to be classroom teacher and this choice is affected by various factors, both personal and professional (Jacob, 2023). In the domain of educational research, teacher retention is a complicated concept, which determines how well a school can keep experienced teachers over time. It is a key measure as it demonstrates how successful a school is at keeping a good teacher, reducing the turnover and maintaining a consistent level of teaching quality and school stability (Lei, et al., 2023).

Literature Review

The past researches have determined the causes behind teachers leaving the profession. Ingersoll & Tran (2023) found that almost half of the teachers leave their jobs because of the job dissatisfaction. This can comprise job fit, lack of job satisfaction, lack of administrative support, and the working conditions within the school (LaBerge, 2021). Some of the teachers consider a combination of these reasons as contributors. Each of these contribute to the overall problem of rising teacher attrition rates, which need to be addressed. So, it extends beyond the mere act of retaining teachers on a payroll, looking into the nuanced aspects of job satisfaction, commitment to the educational mission, and the creation of an environment conducive to professional growth (Hussain & Hayat, 2022).

The process of teacher retention is inherently dynamic and unfolds over time, encapsulating the teacher's ongoing relationship with the educational institution, colleagues, students, and the broader educational community. Involving parents, local leaders and other stakeholders in community-based programs can help create an atmosphere that supports the empowerment and critical thinking (Saleem et al, 2024). It involves the continuous negotiation of individual and organizational factors that contribute to a teacher's decision to remain in their current position or seek employment elsewhere (White & McCallum, 2022). Teacher retention, notably, does not occur in isolation; and it is associated with broader and systemic problems within the educational domain. The teachers' likelihood of choosing to continue serving or leaving is greatly impacted by the factors like the quality of leadership, the support provided to them, availability of professional development opportunities and the overall school culture (McGuire, 2023).

As of the latest available figures for Pakistan, 43 percent of teachers work in the public sector, with the remaining 57 percent in the private sector, including teachers serving in Deeni Madaris (Pakistan Education Statistics 2020-21, 2023). It is worth noting that while there is some data available on teacher attrition in the public sector, there is a significant lack of data in the context of semi-government schools, as much research work has not been conducted in such schools, may be due to their location in restricted areas, rigid regulations and procedures to get permissions for research etc, making such school difficult for data collection. Notably, the attrition rate is remarkably higher among private school teachers, which makes an in-depth investigation into the role of school leaders in addressing the issue of teacher retention even more crucial (Shaukat et al, 2023). Educational institutions are facing a growing concern as a substantial number of teachers opt to leave the profession at an alarming rate (McGuire, 2023).

The research has further investigated the impact of school leadership, as well as of the policies and procedures on the teacher retention in a number of global contexts (Nanjundeswaraswamy, 2023). This study is aimed at exploring the issue of teacher attrition, with a special emphasis on the school leaders' critical role in addressing this

crisis. It is important to investigate the causes leading to the growing ratio of teachers' attrition and the possible interventions, which can be used to address this issue, particularly in Pakistan's context. This study is aimed at bridging this knowledge gap and adding valuable insights into the field of education in Pakistan. Hence the question addressed in this paper is: What role do the school leaders play in teacher retention in the educational institutions in Pakistan?

Recent research studies have underlined the increasing issue of teacher attrition in Pakistan (Shaukat et al, 2023). The consequences of higher teacher turnover are far-reaching, limiting the student outcomes, institutional stability, and ultimately, overall quality of education. Its significance is also embedded in its potential to provide evidence-based practices and policies. Recent research studies in educational leadership and teacher retention have highlighted the significance of evidence-based decision-making in enhancing educational outcomes (Leithwood & Azah, 2021). This paper also offers practical recommendations grounded in empirical findings to address the problem of teacher retention in Pakistan.

Material and Methods

For this research study, a qualitative research methodology was used, with the primary focus on conducting a case study as research strategy. Qualitative research is very appropriate for investigating the complicated and context-specific phenomena (Brinkmann, 2022). With reference to teacher retention, qualitative research offers an in-depth investigation of the complexities the problem. Within the methodology of qualitative research, case study is selected to be the research strategy because of numerous compelling factors. Case studies are specifically well-suited to the research works, which are aimed at exploring complex, diverse and context-specific issues within their real-world settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The problem of teacher attrition, particularly within the semi-government schools, is a multifaceted issue impacted by various elements, like school culture, leadership, resource allocation and individual teacher experiences. Thomas (2021) describes case study as a thorough study of one particular unit with the aim of generalizing across the larger set of units. So, it is a method of research, which consists of a deep investigation of one or more instances or cases within their natural context and the selection of these cases is made as they are believed to offer a diverse and relevant source of information for the research question (Thomas, 2021). So far as the context of this study is concerned, the "cases" are the four selected schools, which are part of a larger chain of semi-government schools. This study focused on comprehending the viewpoints of Pakistani semi-government school principals and teachers in Karachi. Four schools, each of which represented a branch of the semi-government school system, provided the data for the collection. In order to obtain a thorough understanding of leadership and its influence on teacher motivation and retention, the sample comprised both school leaders and teachers. The sample consisted of four principals: one male and three females. They were 48 to 60 years old at the time the data was collected. These principals had rich educational experience and deep comprehension of the dynamics of school leadership. They had varying lengths of time as principals at their current schools – from nine months to one and a half years. This variation revealed aspects of the leadership philosophies and tactics used by both recently appointed and seasoned principals. Even though their current principalship had only been in place for a short while, over their careers, they had gained a great deal of expertise in educational leadership.

Eight teachers in total were chosen as research participants, two from each school. The teachers' ages varied from 35 to 38 years old. This age range was specifically selected to encompass those who were mature enough to still have a large chunk of their teaching careers ahead of them. This was a critical criterion since teachers in this age range are more likely to be thinking about switching schools in search of better possibilities, and they can offer important insights into the issues affecting their motivation and retention.

In order to ensure that they had a significant amount of service to reflect upon, the teachers had to have worked at their current school for at least five years. Including their time at prior institutions, their total teaching experience ranged from seven to thirteen years. This criterion was established to guarantee that the participants could offer knowledgeable insights into the elements impacting their retention and that they had a wide perspective on various school environments (White & McCallum, 2022). Due to the wide range of experiences included in the survey, several viewpoints regarding the effects of various leadership philosophies and educational settings on teacher retention and satisfaction were captured.

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Demographic Information of Participants

| Participant | Gender | Age Range (Years) | Current School Tenure (Years) | Total Experience (Years) |
|-------------|--------|-------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Principal 1 | Female | 50-55 | 1 | 25+ |
| Principal 2 | Female | 50-55 | 0.75 | 30+ |
| Principal 3 | Female | 45-50 | 1.5 | 20+ |
| Principal 4 | Male | 55-60 | 0.9 | 28+ |
| Teacher 1 | Female | 35-38 | 10 | 15 |
| Teacher 2 | Female | 36-39 | 8 | 13 |
| Teacher 3 | Female | 35-38 | 9 | 14 |
| Teacher 4 | Female | 35-38 | 7 | 12 |
| Teacher 5 | Male | 36-39 | 13 | 20 |
| Teacher 6 | Male | 35-38 | 11 | 18 |
| Teacher 7 | Male | 35-38 | 12 | 17 |
| Teacher 8 | Male | 36-39 | 7 | 15 |

On the basis of purposive sampling, the principals of all four schools within the metropolis were selected to know about their role in teacher retention. Likewise, eight teachers, two from each school, were selected. Purposive sampling facilitates the identification of participants relevant to documenting the phenomenon in question (Drolet et al., 2023). For this study, the teachers were required to be aged between 30 to 40 years as they are the ones who are mature and may change the school because they still have plenty of service left. The teachers are required to have at least five years of experience in the same school where they are presently serving; however, before joining their current school, they must have served as a teacher at some other school. Invitation would be extended to them and they would be included subject to their willingness to participate in the research.

The data for this study was collected through semi-structured interviews with the participants, consisting of four principals and eight teachers from semi-government schools in Karachi, Pakistan. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for their flexibility, allowing for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perspectives, and insights related to teacher retention and school leadership (King & Horrocks, 2022).

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the interview data. This method involved coding the data to identify recurring themes and patterns related to the research questions. The coding process began with open coding, where initial themes were identified and labelled. Then, the coding was used to identify core themes that encapsulated the key findings of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The analysis focused on several key areas: the role of school leaders in fostering a supportive environment, the challenges faced by teachers, the impact of leadership styles on teacher motivation and retention, and the strategies implemented to address these challenges. Through this comprehensive analysis, the study aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing teacher retention in the context of semi-government schools in Karachi.

School Leaders' Role in Supporting Teachers' Wellbeing

It is crucial to understand that the role of the school leader's job was to help teachers become more inspired. Their uplifting and non-judgmental guiding role also understood the need of fostering a caring atmosphere. The overall findings suggest that the principals respected the teachers work and contribution which resulted in teachers nurturing positive attitude. The literature also suggest that care and sense of appreciation enable teachers to feel safe and secure in the school setting.

A participant highlighted the role of school leader in teacher retention and said, "In the context of Pakistan, some leaders tend to instill fear rather than inspiration, leading to teacher insecurity and reluctance to engage fully in their roles."

"We strive to build a culture where teachers feel respected and supported. When teachers know they are valued, they are more likely to stay and contribute to our school's success," said a participant.

One participant said, "Positive interactions, appreciation and support from school leaders motivate teachers to actively participate in school activities and feel valued within the educational community."

According to the findings, teachers were comfortable approaching and communicating with the school leaders. Teachers have a sense of trust and collaboration in the environment created by the head teachers because of their appreciation and acknowledgment of teamwork (as stated in Pau, et al., 2022). The head teachers foster a culture of care that promotes a high retention rate by being aware of and working to address the needs of the teachers (White & McCallum, 2022).

The findings show that the role of school principals, particularly their leadership attitude and approaches, is crucial in creating a positive environment that fosters teacher retention. Effective leadership practices can significantly influence teachers' decisions to remain in their current positions. The data from the interviews revealed several strategies employed by principals to retain teachers, emphasizing the importance of supportive leadership and recognition of teachers' efforts. The principals highlighted the significance of creating a supportive work environment as a key factor in teacher retention. They emphasized open communication, collaboration, and providing emotional and professional support to teachers.

One participant highlighted, "We have a monthly recognition program where we highlight the achievements and contributions of our teachers. It's a small gesture, but it makes a big difference."

A participant remarked, "We encourage our teachers to participate in professional development programs. It not only helps them grow professionally but also shows that we value their development and career progression."

One participant shared, "I believe in maintaining an open-door policy. Teachers should feel comfortable coming to me with their concerns, knowing that I will listen and support them."

According to the findings, the principals acknowledged that acknowledging teachers' hard work and dedication boosts morale and encourages them to stay committed to their roles. The leadership attitude and practices contribute in enhancing teacher satisfaction and retention, as the teachers feel supported. According to Hussain & Hayat, (2022), principals who foster positive relationships with their staff and provide necessary support create a more committed and motivated teaching workforce. The interviews provided several examples of how these leadership practices were implemented in the schools.

For instance, one participant shared her experience of receiving support from her principal during a challenging period: "Last year, I was struggling with managing my workload and personal issues. My principal was incredibly supportive, offering flexible work arrangements. It made me feel valued and understood."

Another participant said, "Attending a workshop on innovative teaching methods inspired me to try new approaches in my classroom. The support from my principal in implementing these changes was instrumental in my decision to continue working here."

According to the findings, the teachers felt supported on being accommodated during their struggling times. Likewise, recognizing and appreciating teachers' efforts also found to be contributing in teachers' retention. White & McCallum (2022) found that when teachers feel valued and appreciated, they are more likely to remain in their positions, contributing positively to the school environment and student outcomes.

Implications

The study emphasises the need for a multimodal approach that focusses on enhancing leadership and work culture in order to reduce teacher attrition. The studies have demonstrated the critical impact that school leadership plays in improving the motivation, well-being, and job satisfaction of teachers. According to Curry Koppelberger (2023), leaders may significantly improve the teachers' retention by offering opportunities for professional growth, encouraging teacher autonomy, and creating a positive work atmosphere. Furthermore, elements that support a healthy learning environment include mentorship and workload management. In order to retain and attract human resources, especially teachers, school leaders play a crucial role. The significance of leadership in promoting teacher retention through staff mentoring, professional development opportunities, and the creation of a positive work environment has been repeatedly shown by research. Transformational leadership, for example, has a direct impact on teacher self-efficacy and professional attitudes, two

factors that are critical for retention, by emphasising mentorship and personal growth (Lin et al., 2022). Moreover, effective communication and professional learning opportunities have been identified as vital strategies for increasing teacher satisfaction and commitment. Schools that offer personalized professional development, as opposed to one-size-fits-all programmes, see better teacher retention rates. Such programmes often include mentorship and collaboration with fellow educators, allowing for professional growth aligned with individual needs (Foster, 2023).

Thus, leadership practices that prioritize supportive mentorship and ongoing professional development create a positive work atmosphere, leading to increased teacher commitment and retention. The emphasis on relational leadership as a vital component of teacher retention is one of the major theoretical contributions. The findings of (White & McCallum, 2022), who emphasise the value of supportive leadership in keeping teachers, are supported by and expanded upon by this research. Strong interpersonal relationships are essential in educational environments, as this study highlights. Relational leadership techniques include effective communication, support, and mentorship. Teachers see these behaviours positively.

Conclusion

Our conclusion is that if school leaders offer teachers a calm professional work environment, teachers rarely quit until there are significant problems. The study emphasises the necessity of changing policies to solve the unique difficulties in Karachi's semi-government schools face. Policymakers need to think about boosting financing and resources in order to guarantee competitive pay, suitable workspace, and extensive programs for supporting teachers. Policies should emphasise on ongoing professional development and comprehensive mentoring programmes in order to support teachers' career development and retention. Effective mentoring promotes professional development and job satisfaction, which lowers teacher attrition rates (Mellon, 2023). Additionally, these data can be used by institutions like academic research centres, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and educational training centres to create interventions that target particular issues with teacher retention. These initiatives can help retain excellent teachers and enhance overall educational outcomes by emphasising ongoing professional development and support networks (Hobson & Maxwell, 2020). For example, school leader training programs could contain modules on professional growth strategies and relational leadership. Together, NGOs and educational institutions can increase teacher retention by providing more support and assistance.

The study's conclusions about how ongoing professional development affects teacher retention also add to the ongoing conversation about teacher career development. While earlier studies have frequently concentrated on early mentorship and induction (Pau, et al., 2022), this study emphasises the significance of ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers at all stages of their careers. By highlighting the necessity of continued support and chances for professional development after a teacher's initial years of teaching, this study broadens the theoretical understanding of teacher retention. The identification of context-specific obstacles and options for teacher retention is a noteworthy theoretical implication. The study demonstrates how the dynamics of teacher retention and leadership practices in Karachi's semi-government schools are specifically shaped by socioeconomic considerations, resource constraints, and cultural expectations. The theoretical framework is enhanced by this context-specific understanding, which provides subtle

insights into the ways in which local conditions affect teacher retention and educational leadership.

School leaders have a complex role in both professional development and teacher retention. Relational leaders support professional growth, effective communication, and mentoring in order to build cultures that improve teacher satisfaction and lower attrition rates. Research indicates that teachers have a higher tendency to stick with a school if the administration places a high value on possibilities for professional growth and interpersonal assistance (Nugent et al., 2023). Retaining teachers and increasing their job satisfaction are greatly aided by professional development, especially through structured mentorship. In addition, offering chances for ongoing education and peer assistance fosters a cooperative and encouraging work atmosphere, which increases retention even more. According to Sutchet et al. (2022), implementing these measures can potentially improve job satisfaction, lower teacher turnover, and foster a healthy school climate. Acknowledging the school leaders' role in their professional development can prove to be very helpful for teachers. Through proactive participation in mentorship initiatives and leveraging professional development opportunities, the teachers can augment their competencies and propel their careers. Furthermore, realising the importance of a healthy work environment can inspire educators to look for and support improved working conditions.

Recommendations

By combining relational leadership techniques with an all-encompassing support network for teachers, the Comprehensive Support and Relational Leadership (CSRL) approach may help mitigate the issue of teacher retention. This model places a high emphasis on mentoring, ongoing professional development, building good relationships, creating a positive work atmosphere, managing resources well, and coordinating policies. A thorough examination of each CSRL model element is provided below.

In the CSRL approach, relational leadership plays a key role. It entails encouraging teachers and school administrators to work together, show empathy, and communicate openly. Relational leaders place a high value on developing trusting, supportive connections with their employees, since this has been demonstrated to have a substantial impact on teachers' work satisfaction and retention. Relational leadership practices and teacher retention are positively correlated, according to a recent study by Kim (2023), which emphasises that teachers who feel respected and supported by their leaders are more likely to stay in their roles.

Continuous professional development (CPD), is essential to keeping teachers in the workforce. Regular, specialised training opportunities that fit teachers' career stages and professional demands are encouraged by the CSRL model. Sharma (2023) asserts that continual professional development that is pertinent to the unique circumstances of teachers aids in lowering burnout and raising job satisfaction, which in turn results in higher retention rates. To keep instructors interested and motivated in their profession, schools should provide a variety of learning opportunities, such as seminars, workshops, and peer learning sessions.

Sustaining teacher retention requires a positive work environment. A school atmosphere where instructors feel appreciated, supported, and a part of a cohesive team is encouraged by the CSRL model. According to McChesney and Cross (2023), teacher

turnover is much decreased in a positive work environment that is defined by chances for teacher input in decision-making, fair workloads, and recognition of accomplishments. A welcoming environment is further enhanced by encouraging work-life balance through flexible scheduling and mental health support.

One essential component of the CSRL paradigm is resource management. For the purpose of lowering stress associated to the job and increasing retention, it is imperative that educators have access to the resources, supplies, and assistance they need. As per Nanjundeswaraswamy (2023), the establishment of a favourable teaching and learning atmosphere necessitates the efficient distribution of resources and the promotion of extra resources. To meet the demands of their teachers, school administrators need to be proactive in finding and managing resources.

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