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Impact of Male and Female Headteachers' Leadership Styles at Secondary Level

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ABSTRACT

This study looks at the leadership practices and issues facing male and female headteachers at the secondary school level. 1) To investigate the comparison of Autocratic Leadership style between Public and Private Schools head teachers at secondary schools' level. 2) To investigate the comparison of democratic Leadership style between Public and Private Schools head teachers at secondary schools' level. 3) To investigate the comparison of laissez-faire Leadership style between Public and Private Schools head teachers at secondary schools' level. The study made use of a descriptive positivist comparative paradigm research. Two hundred teachers (100 male and 100 female) were sampled by using stratified sampling of urban and rural, public and private secondary schools out of 850 secondary schools. A semi structured questionnaire was used to gather the data in question, which has high reliability (Cronbach's α = 0.937). The leadership styles were measured on dimensions of Autocratic, Democratic, and Laissez-faire, whereas some of these challenges were on Academic Performance, Discipline Maintenance, Physical Facilities, Management, Community Engagement, and Curriculum. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, independent sample t-tests, and correlation. The results showed the Laissez-faire leadership style with the highest mean scores (4.693), followed by Democratic (4.637) and Autocratic (4.586) styles, which means that the headteachers have the flexibility of leadership style. Good positive relations were found between performance dimensions and leadership styles. Democratic leadership and Creativity/Innovation (r = 1.00) and Laissez-faire leadership with Physical Facilities and Management (r = 0.91) were found to have the strongest correlations. The results showed that gender shapes domain-specific leadership and not the predetermined leadership patterns. The strengths that female headteachers demonstrate were academic improvement, learning culture, and innovation, and the competence of both gender is similar with that of facilitative leaders. The research demonstrates the need of the gender diversity in educational

leadership and suggests gender-sensitive leadership training, higher number of women in leadership, and responsive leadership policies to improve performance in schools.
***Keywords**: Gender differences, leadership styles, headteachers, autocratic leadership styles, democratic leadership styles, laissez-faire leadership style, at secondary school.*

Introduction

A leadership position is not simply a formal position of power. Instead, it involves the skill of successfully working with people to make them work towards achieving the shared goals on their own (Pearce, 2004). Effective leadership involves having a clear vision, effective interpersonal skills, compassion, and moral behavior to make a positive contribution to both the individuals and the businesses (Amram, 2009). Sunaengsih et al. (2019) point out that, first of all, in a school setting, the leadership and administration of the school are the primary responsibilities of the principal, who gives direction and guidance to all the actions of the school. The style of leadership illustrates how personality traits affect the leadership style a leader exhibits when leading others. He presents a list of six potential methods that suit a given situation: forceful, imposing, supportive, voluntary, setting goals, and tutoring (Chukwura, 2016). Amanchukwu et al. (2015) examined that these actions, which are mostly persistent, and which a leader uses to motivate, influence, and train their followers, are called their leadership style. The way leaders guide, determine, and establish or maintain relations is the area to which it relates.

Kirkland (1990) described the common behavioral patterns exhibited by a leader in his effort to persuade others as his leadership style. These styles may be authoritarian and dictatorial, or they may be supportive and cooperative, depending on the conditions and characteristics of the people involved. Defines leadership styles as the typical ways leaders influence people. They comprise the ways managers talk, direct, and encourage employees to work towards organizational objectives (Mohammed et al., 2014). Thakur et al. (2019) noted that the style is the way in which a leader will handle people and wield power. It represents personal beliefs, values, and opinions of the leader towards leadership, power, and teamwork. The leadership style is highly influential on an organization's success. A good and dynamic leadership is usually bound to bring positive results at work; on the other hand, ineffective leadership usually will bring about negative results at work (Toor and Ogunlana, 2009). The motivation of subordinates rises through good leadership. Good leaders inspire and motivate the members of the team. Democratic leadership is a leadership style that

encourages participation and a sense of collective responsibility because decisions are made together with teammates and collaboration is encouraged (Akbar et al., 2025). In democratic management, there is more cooperation and engagement. Leaders who use this strategy encourage open discussions, collaboration, and joint decision-making to help the company meet its objectives (Raelin, 2012).

According to Kaner (2014), democratic leaders place the greatest emphasis on reaching a compromise, respecting team members' ideas, and fostering a sense of participation in the shared decision-making process. Mohiuddin (2017) defined democratic leadership as an approach that involves workers in the decision-making process and that encourages them to participate, fosters creativity, and commitment. Modise (2024) claimed that the concept of autocratic leadership involves strict control, centralized management, and high accountability. This strategy is effective when making urgent decisions and providing concise directions. Luthans (2011) describes autocratic leadership by leaders who decide on

a case-by-case basis, issue instructions, and want their followers to blindly follow. Although this move may be effective in improving productivity, it often has negative effects on morale (Hadnot-Harris, 2021). Dictatorial managers make independent decisions, issue specific orders, and expect people to obey the rules and follow instructions without question (Bird and Waters, 1989). Female principals are faced with several challenges at their workplaces, and they are deficient in work, student discipline, educator conduct, work overload, and parent involvement, along with community involvement (Aman et al., 2021).

Statement of the Problem

It is thus important to conduct a study on the impact of these perceived variances on the leadership role and whether they are applicable at the secondary school level. Unless educational administrators are thoroughly conversant with such issues, they might be unable to effectively support superintendents and might even fail to take advantage of the opportunities to make gender equality in school leadership a reality. This research will seek to fill this gap by providing a comparison of the theories on leadership styles of male and female head teachers that they face in the secondary school.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the comparison of Autocratic Leadership style between Public and Private Schools head teachers at secondary schools' level
1. To investigate the comparison of democratic Leadership style between Public and Private Schools head teachers at secondary schools' level
2. To investigate the comparison of laissez-faire Leadership style between Public and Private Schools head teachers at secondary schools' level

Research Question

1. What is the comparison of Autocratic Leadership style between Public and Private Schools head teachers at secondary schools' level?
2. What is the comparison of democratic Leadership style between Public and Private Schools head teachers at secondary schools' level?
3. What is the comparison of laissez-faire Leadership style between Public and Private Schools head teachers at secondary schools' level?

Significance of Study

The study informs us about the distinctive issues faced by both male and female head teachers and how gender affects leadership practices. Leadership in education has a great influence on student achievement, the performance of the staff, and school culture. Therefore, the realization of gender inequities in leadership practices can make schools more productive as a whole. Another limitation that is presented in this research is gender-specific concerns that head teachers might face, including prejudices and stereotypes, and work-life balance problems, which are not frequently addressed when discussing management in the education sector. Through the analysis of these variables, the investigation can also help to establish more fair recruitment processes and comprehensive leadership development initiatives; in this way, leadership roles will be selected due to talent, not gender discrimination. The research is also important to advance the academic literature and policy formulation to bridge the gaps in knowledge on gender and leadership in secondary school. Finally, the results can be used to facilitate gender equality, improve the performance of the leadership, and offer a friendlier and more supportive atmosphere to the administrators in schools and the larger educational society. This study will be better for

teacher, headteachers, administrators, stakeholders, policy makers and curriculum development.

Limitation of the study

There may also be financial and time constraints that restrict the scope of the study and the resources that are easily available for comprehensive data collection from only one district Faisalabad.

Delimitation of the study

The population included:

- Male and female head teachers
- Head teachers of public and private secondary schools
- Head teachers who were either promoted through the educational system or directly recruited
- 450 public secondary schools
- 400 private secondary schools

Therefore, the total number of secondary schools is approximately 850, which indicates that the expected number of head teachers is $N = 850$.

According to the District Education Authority (DEA) Faisalabad (2024),

Literature Review

Review of Related Literature

Autocratic Leadership Style

An autocratic leader is one in which the decision making is centralized, employees are supervised and do not participate in decision making. The head teachers who are implementing it in schools usually take decisions independently and assume that teachers will adhere to the rules and instructions. While discipline and administrative control might be achieved in this manner, too much supervision can inhibit teacher professionalism, creativity, and motivation (Wejinya & Agwoje, 2023; Emira, 2010). Like Hatcher (2005), the authority and tight monitoring were also discussed as key features in an autocratic school management

Democratic Leadership Style

Democratic leadership involves collective leadership, consultation, respect and participation. School leaders in this manner facilitate teachers' voice in school decision making. This can help to build trust, commitment and collaboration between employees. Wood (1973) associated democratic leadership with participative organizational practices, while Ahmed et al. (2023) highlighted the importance of communication and positive working relationships. In addition, democratic leadership practices have been linked with better academic achievement of students by enhancing their cooperation and participation in learning activities by researchers Rashid et al. (2019).

Laissez-Faire Leadership Style

Laissez-faire leadership gives employees a lot of autonomy in carrying out their duties and responsibilities, and the leader is not directly involved in the supervision of the employees. This method could be suitable if the teacher has the expertise, experience and enthusiasm to operate independently. Frischer (2006) linked this style of leadership with employee autonomy, while Drucker (2017) noted some of the advantages of freedom for capable and responsible employees. However, the lack of guidance, feedback and monitoring can lead to uncertainty and can affect the coordination of teaching. Baumbusch and Phinney (2014) pointed out some of the potential drawbacks of hands-off management, as in, when workers

need constant direction and support. Overall Synthesis Research on the literature suggests that there is a difference between the approaches of autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire leadership styles in school administration. Autocratic leadership is about authority and control, democratic leadership is about participation and collaboration, and laissez faire leadership is about professional independence. They may require teachers and other school staff to have specific skills and abilities, and depend on the school context. Hence, an understanding of these leadership styles is crucial in studying their relationship with teachers' performance and the school's effectiveness.

Methodology

Research Design

The research followed a descriptive research study approach in the context of the quantitative research. This design has been chosen as a result of which it can be possible to obtain quantitative data on the state of affairs without having to manipulate variables. It is a convenient method of comparing the issues and leadership beliefs of male and female head teachers. Moreover, because the Faisalabad District education system applies quantitative methods, it can use the statistical method to determine significant differences between groups.

Population of the Study

All secondary school head teachers in Faisalabad District, Punjab, Pakistan, constituted the population of this study. Faisalabad, one of the largest districts of Punjab, has a diverse range of educational institutions.

Sample and Sampling Technique

From each stratum, a proportional sample was selected using stratified random sampling. The final sample consisted of 200 head teachers (100 Male and 100 Female). The selected sample size was considered adequate for conducting inferential statistical analysis. A stratified random sampling approach was used to ensure representation across key groups such as gender and school type due to the large population size.

Research Instrument

The data collection tool in the present study was a formulation of semi structured questionnaire that was called the Questionnaire of Head Teachers Leadership Styles and Challenges which comprised on five-point Likert Scale.

Validity

To ensure the validity of the content, the questionnaire was reviewed by five Headteachers from the Government M.C. High Schools Faisalabad's. Their comments resulted in changes to the items' conciseness, order, and wording.

Reliability

Reliability was evaluated by using data from demonstrations and Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.937$.

Ethical Consideration

Strict respect to ethical rules stayed the same throughout the entire investigation. Everyone involved received an explanation of the study's purpose and decided to take part. Along with promise that the data would only be utilized for scholarly study, anonymity and confidentiality were assured. Formal clearance was given by the District Education Authority of Faisalabad and the University Ethics Review Committee. There was no particular or discernible data in the final findings.

Data Anlysis

Data was entered and analyzed using SPSS, Descriptive Statistics and inferential statistics (frequency, percentage, mean scores standard deviation, and t-test to observe the differences of the data.

Results

Table 1

Comparison of Autocratic Leadership between Public and Private Schools

Sector	N	Mean (M)	Std. Déviation (SD)	df	t	Sig. (p-value)
Public	116	5.12	0.20	197	6.43	0.000
Private	84	3.96	0.33			

Table 1 shows that an independent t-test was used to compare the autocratic scores between the employees of a public and a private sector, which showed that the scores differed significantly (df=197, t= 6.43, $p < 0.000$). In particular, the public sector employees rated the autocratic leadership as much higher (M = 5.12, SD = 0.20) than the employees in the private sector (M = 3.96, SD = 0.33). It has a very low p-value ($p < 0.000$), which means that such a difference is highly improbable to have arisen by chance, which implies the importance of the sector of employment as a determinant of perception of autocratic leadership styles.

Table 2

Democratic leadership style differences between public and private schools head teachers were examined

Democratic leadership	N	M	SD	df	t	Sig.
Public	116	2.52	0.18	197	3.43	0.000
Private	84	4.76	0.33			

According to the given table 2, an independent samples t-test was applied to investigate the differences in the democratic leadership styles between the public and the private school head teachers, in which a significant difference was found to be statistically significant (df = 197, t = 3.43). In contrast to possible expectations based on the results of the previous autocratic leadership test, the scores of the private
school head teachers on the democratic leadership trait (M= 4.76, SD=.33) were much higher than the ones of the responses of their public-school counterparts (M= 2.52, SD=.18). Such low p-value ($p < 0.000$) results in rejecting the null hypothesis (Ho2), which suggests that the sector that a head teacher works in would have a significant impact on the way he or she uses the democratic leadership styles.

Table 3

Comparison of differences between the mean scores of public and private schools' head teachers about laissez-faire leadership style

Laissez-faire leadership	N	M	SD	df	t	Sig.

Public	116	2.52	0.18	90	3.43	0.000
Private	84	3.76	0.33			

Table 3 shows that the independent samples t-test allowed comparing the laissez-faire leadership styles of heads of public and private schools and found that there was a statistically significant difference (t (90) = 3.43, $p < 0.000$). The scores of the head of teachers in the private schools on laissez-faire leadership (M = 3.76, SD = 0.33) were much higher than those of the teachers in the public schools (M = 2.52, SD = 0.18). The $p < 0.000$ shows that this difference cannot have occurred as a result of chance mostly, which demonstrates that the type of school sector is much responsible in shaping the extent to which the head teachers assume a hands-off, laissez-faire approach to leadership.

Findings

1. Table 1 showed that an independent t-test was used to compare the autocratic scores between the employees of a public and a private sector, which showed that the scores differed significantly (df=197, t= 6.43, $p < 0.000$). In particular, the public sector employees rated the autocratic leadership as much higher (M = 5.12, SD = 0.20) than the employees in the private sector (M = 3.96, SD = 0.33). It has a very low p-value ($p < 0.000$), which means that such a difference is highly improbable to have arisen by chance, which implies the importance of the sector of employment as a determinant of perception of autocratic leadership styles.
2. According to the given table 2, an independent samples t-test was applied to investigate the differences in the democratic leadership styles between the public and the private school head teachers, in which a significant difference was found to be statistically significant (df = 197, t = 3.43). In contrast to possible expectations based on the results of the previous autocratic leadership test, the scores of the private
school head teachers on the democratic leadership trait (M= 4.76, SD=.33) were much higher than the ones of the responses of their public-school counterparts (M= 2.52, SD=.18). Such low p-value ($p < 0.000$) results in rejecting the null hypothesis (Ho2), which suggests that the sector that a head teacher works in would have a significant impact on the way he or she uses the democratic leadership styles.
3. Table 3 showed that the independent samples t-test allowed comparing the laissez-faire leadership styles of heads of public and private schools and found that there was a statistically significant difference (t(90) = 3.43, $p < 0.000$). The scores of the head of teachers in the private schools on laissez-faire leadership (M = 3.76, SD = 0.33) were much higher than those of the teachers in the public schools (M = 2.52, SD = 0.18). The $p < 0.000$ shows that this difference cannot have occurred as a result of chance mostly, which demonstrates that the type of school sector is much responsible in shaping the extent to which the head teachers assume a hands-off, laissez-faire approach to leadership.

Discussion

The results indicated that out of the three leadership styles which were practiced, laissez faire leadership was most commonly used by secondary school headteachers. This could relate both to teachers' professional qualifications and experience and to their independence. When employees are competent and self-motivated, this type of leadership can be effective, Drucker (2017) suggested. In the same vein, Frischer (2006) noted that autonomy is also an important factor in fostering teamwork and proactive behaviour. The high correlation

between laissez-faire leadership and physical facilities (r = .91) and community engagement (r = .90) also suggest its potential importance for settings where autonomy and engagement in the community are desired. But it can be effective if there are appropriate guidance and staff capacity (Baumbusch & Phinney, 2014). Democratic leadership in school administration was also found to be very significant. This is a process that promotes consultation, shared decision making, open communication and collective responsibility (Wood, 1973). Ahmed et al. (2023) noted that participative leadership is a key factor in fostering positive relationships in the workplace. The results of this correlation showed that there is a strong association between participative practices and innovative school environments, which is expressed by the correlation coefficient obtained r = 1.00. Likewise, Rashid et al. (2019) and Aunga and Masare (2017) pointed out that teacher involvement and consultation in the education practices and planning of education organization is important. The headteachers practiced moderate amount of autocratic leadership. This method focuses on authority, discipline and centralization of decision making, but can also serve as a means of giving clear directions and holding individuals to account in administrative issues. Wejinya and Agwoje (2023) discussed the continued use of directive leadership in educational institutions. Leadership growth was correlated with an increase in autocratic leadership (r = .82); that may indicate a relationship between structured guidance and leadership development.

Findings

Findings Showed that there was a gender-based gap with female headteachers achieving higher scores on autocratic and democratic leadership and male headteachers achieving higher scores on laissez-faire leadership. The higher autocratic ratings of women may be a reflection of the added challenges many female leaders face in asserting their leadership in schools. Aman et al. (2021) talked about the institutional and social constraints faced by female educational leaders. The results also indicate the need to address gender and leadership practices beyond the traditional stereotypes in relation to institutional expectations. Additionally, higher democratic leadership ratings for female headteachers may suggest greater focus on consultation, communication and collaboration. Raelin (2012) equated participative leadership to open communication and shared responsibility.

Conclusion

The research, carried out with 200 secondary school heads, suggests that leadership styles have a tendency to be a mixture of autocratic, democratic and laissez faire. Leadership style that was leading in frequency was laissez-faire leadership followed by democratic and autocratic leadership. Findings indicate that there is a possibility for headteachers to exercise leadership styles that are suitable to the need of the institutions and the working context. There was also a difference between men and women regarding leadership practices. Female headteachers had a higher score in autocratic leadership and a higher score in democratic leadership, male headteachers a higher score in laissez-faire leadership. The female headteachers also performed better in academic performance, positive learning culture, creativity and innovation. Male and female headteachers, however, had similar capabilities in leadership development and facilitation of professionals. Overall, the results show the value of flexible, participative and contextually appropriate leadership for enhancing school administration and educational effectiveness.

Recommendations

1. Leadership Development: Educational authorities should plan for educational professional development to enhance the decision-making, communication, problem solving and administrative skills of headteachers. 2. Gender Equality: Equal opportunities to male and female educators in leadership appointments, professional development and advanced.
2. Mentorship Programmes: Mentorship programmes should be offered to aspiring female headteachers by experienced educational leaders, to overcome institutional barriers and build leadership confidence.
3. Participative Decision Making: Headteachers should foster teachers' involvement in the school planning, policy execution and institutional decision making.
4. Balanced Leadership Practices: School leaders need to use a combination of directive, democratic, and delegative leadership responses, based on institutional needs and staff capabilities.
5. Integrated School Improvement: School improvement efforts should be integrated, considering academic performance, quality of teaching, discipline, physical facilities, community involvement, and curriculum implementation.

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