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### Phenomenological Exploration of Educational Leadership

#### Abstract

*As educational phenomenon, educational leadership is one of the most important aspects of educational institutions throughout the world. It leads all human, academic and financial resources in accordance with institutional vision and mission to reach the desired targets. This study explores educational leadership as a phenomenon in the public sector universities and Madaris of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Through purposive sampling techniques 11 educational leaders were selected from these institutions. To explore the different aspects of leadership in these institutions through the perceptions and live experiences of respondents, the selected educational leaders were interviewed. The collected data were analyzed following Moustakas' phenomenological analysis approach and the live experiences were presented in results and analysis section. The results reveal that university leadership are strictly adhered to the government policies in accordance with their institutional vision. Similarly, Madaris leadership base their leadership to seek the pleasure of Allah and accountability following consultative approach.*

**Keywords:** Educational Leadership; Vision; Mission; Issues; Leadership Attributes and Practices

#### Introduction

Leadership is the process of influencing the members of a group to reach pre-desired targets of an organization (Coleman,& Briggs, 2002). This process is systematic in nature following formal and informal approaches of communication, inspiration and motivation (Gul, Malik, Juman,&Hussain, 2019). There are multiple factors that affect the process of influencing the followers by the leader. These include the contextual factors, that is when the core goals of an organization are designed according to the well and demands of the followers. On the contrary, the imposed targets are accomplished with negative re-enforcement. Experts viewed leaders' position in such situations having the impact positive as well as negative. In certain situation, where the followers found the determined targets are in accordance with their expectations get positive re-enforcement and vice versa (Yeung, Ong, Davies, Gao, & Perkins, 2012).

Leadership is not a new phenomenon, as it has been studied for centuries in academia and in other fields of life (Bass, & Stogdill, 1990). Initially leadership was started a source for expansion and industrial development in the era of industrial revolution- that provided space for the Great man theory, X and Y theories, Behavioral theories, transactional, transformational and situational theories. All these theories have been developed due to the inability of one theory in a new emerging context. Therefore new theory was felt to be developed to cope with new situation by the theorists

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(Derue, Nahrgang, Wellman, & Humphrey, 2011). Furthermore, in educational context, authentic leadership, entrepreneurial theories of leadership are popular and are considered as most effective and reflective theories to lead the educational institutions towards the achievement of educational goals (Saeed, & Ali, 2018). In Islamic perspective the purpose of leadership is the establishment of sovereignty of Allah that is; God through following the teachings of Islam (Rauf, 2010).

From the definition perspective, leadership is always a dynamic phenomenon and majority of the experts have different opinions about the nature of the definitions of leadership. According to Bennett and Murakami (2016) if hundred people are asked for a definition of leadership, we will have hundred definitions as everyone has his/her own imaginative perspective about leadership. People express different attributes of an effective leader according to their own context and imagination. The explanation of leadership began with heroic personalities and thus we have name of popular personalities in leadership positions like; Napoleon, Ibrahim Linkon, Nelson, Quaid-e-Azam and Mao Zedong. In fact, people believed in leaders according to their belief system. To conclude, leadership is a dynamic attribute that starts from influences/inspiration and ends at the achievement of pre-determined goals (Scott, 2009).

Furthermore, the review of research studies reveals a wide variety differences among the theorists, explaining the complexities of leadership (Cherkowski, 2012). Sometimes it has been conceptualized as a behavior, trait of individual personality, where as it has been accepted as information-processing aspect while others considered it a rational standpoint. Likewise researchers have studied leadership following quantitative and qualitative research designs and the results explained the construct of leadership differently. After a long two hundred years research studies the experts have come together on the components of leadership on which they were agreed that include;

1. It is a process not product.
2. It involves influencing through communication.
3. It is evident in groups.
4. With some common goals that brings the individuals to a group.

These components enable define leadership as *a process through which the leader influences the group members to achieve the common goals.*

Another important dimension that is common among leaders is the power they have in the form of influencing the followers. There are five major bases for this power that includes;

- a. *Referent power*- referred to the liking of the followers such as teacher liked by students has the power to influence them;
- b. *Expert power*- refers to the knowledge and competence of the leader which is believed by the followers, and which impress them to follow the leader;
- c. *Legitimate power*- assigned to positional leadership, for example Court judge or other job authority;
- d. *Reward power*- associated with the capacity to punish or reward others, such as the position of employees supervisor, and

- e. *Coercive power*- that refers to punish or penalize the followers such as a team coach in sports, who sits a player on the bench for coming late (French, Raven, & Cartwright, 1959).

These power bases further affirm the contextual nature of leadership. Jago (1982) viewed that leadership is contextual and phenomenon that exists in the interactions of leaders and followers. The contextual nature of leadership further make it difficult to put leadership into a single construct and lead it a multiple, dynamic and diverse nature, where the expectations get changed from context to context and from place to place. Besides that, other common factors have been identified in research studies of leadership which make the concept of leadership easy (Scott, 2009). Furthermore, leaders in every field of life face different types of challenges. All these create a state of mental dissonance among the practitioners and leadership students. Furthermore, in Pakistan multiple systems and types of education prevailed with different goals and with different types of leadership. The elite class private education system, government sponsored educational institutions and religious institutions all together have different goals and leadership perspectives. These three major types of education systems have negative effect on educational outcomes for the future generation (Idris, Hussain, & Saeed, 2017). Among all conflicting goals and differences in procedures and other systems of these educational institutions, the common element is leadership of these institutions. The nature, practices and challenges to leadership in these institutions, to a certain extent are common. This study was designed to explore the nature of leadership, role and productive practices and issues of leadership in higher educational institutions.

### **Statement of Research Problems**

Leadership is the most important function to run, develop and sustain an organization. It directs the energies and resources of an organization to achieve the set targets. This study is about the phenomenological exploration of leadership in Madaris and universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Therefore, it is significant to discover the important dimensions of Educational Leadership through studying leadership practices, knowing leadership perception for the role, responsibilities and competencies required to lead higher education institutions.

### **Research Objectives**

The researchers have specified the following targets for the present study;

1. To explore the perceptions of Educational Leadership about leadership in education with the help of their live experiences in Madaris and Universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.
2. To explore the perceptions of leadership about the performance of leaders in Madaris and Universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
3. To explore solutions to major issues and challenges faced by leadership in Madaris and Universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were designed to guide the study in right direction for achieving the set objectives for the study;

1. How leaders in Madaris and Universities perceive educational leadership?

2. What should be the important practices of leadership of educational leadership?
3. How to resolve issues and challenges of Educational Leadership of Madaris and universities?

### **Beneficiaries of the study**

First of all, this study is significant for the researchers as various aspects of Educational Leadership in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region have been explored that can support further research. Different types of recommendations can be made on the basis of this study. People, who are presently responsible for running the institutions, can direct their roles in the light of findings in the current study. This study benefits leadership in Madaris and universities, Higher Education Commission (HEC), Higher Education Department (HED) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, as the results may orient the leaders and policy makers about the problems and issues of Educational Leadership. It also shows the way out to issues and problems to educational leadership and various opportunities that may be utilized for the betterment of higher education. Further, the results may update policy makers in government, HEC, Madaris boards etc about the issues and opportunities in these Madaris and universities can ultimately facilitate leadership in these institutions. The interviews data can be seen and deal as a direct feedback from the relevant people in these institutions.

### **Research Methodology**

Qualitative research design was followed in the current study to explore the perceptions and live experiences of the respondents on the nature, practices and issues faced by the leaders of Madaris and universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Leadership as a whole was considered a single phenomenon and efforts were made to explore leadership with special focus in the context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is the province of Pakistan with approximately 98% Muslim population.

Two types of higher educational institutions were selected to explore the research phenomenon that is educational leadership. These include public sector universities and Madaris of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa registered with Wifaq-ul-Madaris of Pakistan. The respondents selected for this study were on leadership positions such as head of the institution, head of faculty or head of academic department. Total number of respondents was 11 both from universities and Madaris.

In phenomenological studies, different tools are used for data collection to explore the live experiences of respondents. These include interviews, focus group discussions, observations and document analysis. In this study open-ended interview protocols was used to collect data to answer the research questions. These interview protocols were divided into three sections, the first section reveal the background information of the respondents, second section contains two preliminary questions and six main questions cover the third section. Before the final data collection, these interview protocols were administered to group of six experts to estimate the content validity and afterward appropriate changes were made.

Furthermore, the data were collected from the respondents in their respective institutions. The collected data were analyzed following Moustakas' (1994) method of data analysis. According to (Creswell & Clark, 2017) there are four basic steps of this method of analysis which include; *the epoche*, *Phenomenological Reduction*,

*Imaginative Variation, and Synthesis.* Through following these steps, it makes ensured the actual phenomenological exploration of the study constructs.

### **Results and interpretations**

The data collected through open-ended interviews were transcribed in the words of respondents to minimize the chances of researchers' epoche which was followed by the phenomenological reduction-through the method of horizontalization method. After this, the data were structurally described through the method of imaginative variations and finally textual and structural description was made to explore the research phenomenon. These steps were followed and a critical presentation on the bases of the mentioned approach was conducted. However, here in this paper only the presentation of the major aspect of data was carried out.

### **Results**

#### **Live experiences and attributes of Universities and Madaris Leadership**

After the interview through the method of Moustakas' (1994), the responses from Madaris and universities showed top priority to organizational vision and mission. Leadership activities are highly influenced from institutional vision and mission. As one respondent from Madaris viewed that:

*“It is of paramount significant to lead according to the institution vision, and I believe that Raza-i-Elahi (seeking the pleasure of Allah) is the ultimate vision for every leader. Leader has to inculcates skills and attitudes among students and staff members according to the teaching of Islam, where equity and equality are simultaneously important. Furthermore, this approach to leadership responsibility is directly leads to the social stability, honesty and successful life here in this world as well in the life hereafter. We leaders in Madaris are working under a disciplined and planned program; however, we are accountable to all the stakeholders as per our procedure. But in real sense, leader is actually accountable to people for the pleasure of Allah Almighty”*

Similarly, university leadership explained that leadership is all about influencing and motivating the followers towards the institutional goals which are nested in its vision and mission. Furthermore, a respondent from university added that:

*“My university vision is to provide quality education with relevance; we work on the competitive nature of education where the graduates can compete in the real life situation and can positively contribute into the economic, social and political development of state. Therefore, the innovative and modern approach of teaching learning process and a congenial learning atmosphere is adopted.”*

The University leadership was found in role modeling, adopted incentive based approaches, giving guidance and feedback to teaching faculty and other staff members, capacity building of the followers through workshops, trainings and refresher courses, focusing on team building and accountability at each level as major attributes.

Likewise, the major attribute of Madaris leadership included-the most knowledgeable, competent, good character, ethical principled, broad minded, motivational in nature,

resilience, team work, and piety and visionary. These attributes were found mostly common among the leaders of Madaris and universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

### **Leadership practices of educational leadership of Madaris and Universities**

In response to leadership practices, a university expert opined that educational leadership of universities has serious focus on the punctuality of the followers; they considered it a foundation component for a successful leadership model. Punctuality, these respondents viewed, ensures positive and productive practices and activities of educational leaders. Furthermore, followers' punctuality depends on the leaders' own role. Leaders should perform with full equality and justice in the academic and administrative roles, as one respondent viewed that:

*“I strongly believed in equality and justice among the followers and therefore, the accountability system of university is enough to ensure the punctuality and work progress of the followers. A fair system based on justice ensures job satisfaction of the followers and it is the only and a sure-enough source of their motivation.”* Furthermore, another respondent revealed that: *“respect, recognition and provision of opportunities ensures professional growth and conducive work environment for the followers. These practices by the leadership lead towards the effectiveness of leadership. On the other hand, positive approach in leadership role by the leaders makes him/her a trustworthy person for the followers. The belief of followers on their leadership is a crucial need for leaders' success.”*

The abovementioned approaches in their roles and practices by the university leadership ultimately strengthens their position. Although consistent positive approach by the leadership in universities is not an easy job. Hurdles, of course come on straight path. Multiple elements involve with ongoing leadership. Good and bad, positive and negative thinking exist everywhere. To a great or some extent monetary benefits, professional jealousy, power struggle and institutional loopholes etc exist. Along with all hurdles and issues, a good leader can win the trust of followers.

Likewise, the educational leadership of Madaris practice regular consultation with followers. In Madaris, leadership ensures and practices honesty, trust, sacrifice, good working environment, foresight and team work. Mutual consultations between the leaders and followers lead towards the consensus and agreement on the common goals of the institution. It also eases the workload of the leader. Furthermore, leaders' honesty and trust of followers on leaders is an important indicator of successful leadership. One of the respondent was of the opinion that;

*“In Madaris it common that people in these institutions believed about their leaders to be the most knowledgeable, competent, resilient and foresighted. All decisions, especially on the academic matters are taken with consultation of the followers (teachers). Furthermore, leader's sacrifices in terms of low income/salary and giving a lot of time for the cause of institution, and their constant efforts in the development of institution and good working environment make them distinctive among all. In Madaris, leadership role is more demanding than any other organization. Dedication, commitment and full devotion are the mandatory attributes of Madaris leadership. All these efforts of leaders in Madaris aim to achieve pleasure of Allah and success in life hereafter.”*

Furthermore, Madaris leadership mostly leads the all including administrative activities through consultative process with the consultative board and other staff members of the institution. The process of consultation ensures authenticity and validity of decision making at Madaris. Proper implementation of the institutional decisions can only be done through consultation before announcing any decision. It leads towards job satisfaction of the team members and ultimately gives proved useful results.

### **Problems and issues to leadership of Madaris and Universities**

Leadership is often exposed to and faced different kinds of problems, hurdles and issues in doing their due role. To overcome different types of problems and issues, leadership needs to keep team members satisfied and motivated through consulting them in decision making, plan activities for their capacity building, ensures a regular incentives and rewards system for them, recognition of their performance on regular basis and accountability system to be implemented. One respondent from university suggested;

*“One of the most frequent and disastrous issues that currently universities are facing is the inconsistency of government educational policies particularly disturbing universities’ autonomous status and freedom in the affairs of academic and administrative matters. This unnecessary and undemanding interference by the government representatives affect overall performance of universities and its independent nature. Different political and pressure groups in administration, teaching staff and students are the main focus of leadership to deal with in universities. A good leader in takes risks with good intentions. A good leader in university engages each and every group by earning their goodwill through kindness and caring attitude towards them. It is not necessary for a leader to accept every demand from these groups, but to keep listen everyone with full attention, giving time to everyone, feel them ownership of the organization through different tactics is enough for smooth running of an organization. Furthermore, universities are also facing financial constraints for their operational activities, cuts on the research grants and scholarships have also negatively affected the role of leadership. Leadership of universities are working on the entrepreneurial activities through the office of research innovation and commercialization (ORIC), but still unable to cope with the financial issues.”*

There are other issues such as; political pressures, poor infrastructure, collaboration with the stakeholders and degree programs to be in accordance with the market demands. Some issues are directly related with the federal or provincial government to be resolved by them through providing financial support etc. However, capacity building of the heads of educational institutions is the most urgent need in the present ever-changing world with nonstop changing conditions. Almost all heads of educational institutions i.e. in both Madaris and universities, have never attended a comprehensive formal training in the field of leadership and other related issues pertained with the role of leadership.

Similarly, leaders of Madaris are also facing various problems and issues while leading their institutions. Some issues like financial limitations, political pressures and social demands are similar as faced by the leadership in universities. Furthermore, the new trends as outcomes of modernization and globalization demands more changes in the traditional way of education and administration in Madaris. One of the respondents concluded that;

*“Government interference in the academic activities and their pressure on Madaris leadership has increased their worries about the future of these institutions. They are doing a noble job as providing free education with free accommodation to a large portion of population in Pakistan. Madaris are already working on the inculcation of modern needs of education and to meet the demands of society. However, they are making efforts not to affect their own priorities on the cost of social demands. Furthermore, Madaris leadership believe that they are ahead of government funded educational institutions in terms of attracting a number of foreign students, overall competence of students with low expenditures and international recognition extended to these Madaris are sign of encouragement for them. But still they are working hard to compliance to the emerging demands and trend in religious education.”*

Besides abovementioned issues, Madaris are almost completely dependent on charitable sponsorships. It is the responsibility of leadership in Madaris to satisfy the financial needs of institution. However, both universities and Madaris leadership face almost similar types of issues like in the field of academics, financial resources, facing different pressures from within and from outside etc. In response to these issues, many leaders from Madaris have build up permanent solution for sustainable existence to meet the financial needs of institution. Both type of leadership are resolving their institutional issues with the help of different strategies.

### **Conclusions**

Expert leaders in their interviews reveal that university leadership can only lead in the Pakistani perspective as per educational policies of the government along with the established vision and mission of the institution. Along with this, focus on inculcation of necessary life skills and development of positive attitude is also important. Students can be prepared for real life challenges through competitive learning environment and this is the prime duty of Educational Leadership.

Educational leader needs to take care of staff members through incentives based mechanism for enhancing performance and productivity. However, constant supervision and proper mechanism for accountability through performance appraisal is also important element of leading an institution. In Madaris, along with above stated responsibilities, leadership follows consultative approach and promotes Islamic values.

It was concluded that university and Madaris leadership if ensures justice and equality among the team members, can create a conducive working environment. In various universities and Madaris, leadership of these institutions are working on the capacity building of their teaching faculty and other staff members through workshops, trainings and refresher courses. These activities on the part of leadership can provide real support to the role of leadership in these institutions. “In larger context, this will also prove beneficial for the concerned organizations as the productivity of the concerned employees will improve many folds in quantitative as well as qualitative terms (Ul Islam, S., & Ali, N. 2013).” Furthermore, both leaderships considered leadership as a situational and contextual phenomenon. Similarly, it is believed that leader should be knowledgeable, competent and innovative to lead institutions according to the demands and needs of the current situation.

The financial need of Madaris and universities is one of the big issues for today's leadership in these institutions. However, different types of strategies have been adopted by a number of leaders of these institutions to meet these needs. A number of options exist for educational leaders to provide sufficient financial resources for the survival and development of their institutions. Many of the problems and issues of leadership from Madaris and universities are similar. Like provision of enough resources for the sustainable development of institution, leadership trainings, ensuring up-to-date and market based curriculum, the availability of smooth disciplined academic environment, to produce excellent graduates in academics as well as with ethical and moral excellence etc. The unpredictable and inconsistent policies of different governments are serious concerns for Educational Leadership. This uneven approach to education by the government further worsens the overall position of leadership in these institutions as every government comes with new policy. However, instead of all the stated hurdles and issues, leadership can be effective and successful, with the support of vision and wisdom.

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