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Challenges Faced by Head of Departments (HoDs) and Strategies used to Improve Faculty Performance in Public Sector Universities of Punjab, Pakistan

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to assess the challenges faced by Heads of Department (HoDs) while improving their faculty performance and examined the strategies they used to overcome these challenges. For this, researchers purposefully selected the twelve HoDs from various departments of three different public sectors universities of Punjab, Pakistan. Data was gathered by conducting semi-structured interviews which was prepared after reviewing of extensive literature. After collecting the data, these interviews were transcribed into English and verbatim transcribed. Researchers used the thematic analysis to analyz the collected data. This study found that HoDs faced various challenges as immature attitude of newly recruited faculty member, irresponsible behavior of faculty, induction and pedagogical trainings of faculty members', insufficient teaching resources, low morale of teachers', unnecessary absenteeism, poor interpersonal relationships, communication gap and discrepancies between HoD and teachers'. Second, HoDs also described the strategies they used to overcome these challenges including provide guidance to newly recruited faculty member, organized pedagogical content knowledge training, disciplining irresponsible faculty member, provide accessibility to pedagogical resources, structured induction training, conduct instructional meetings, installation of biometric attendance system, arranged seminars and formal dinners to motivate faculty members'. They also struggled to maintain very good interpersonal relations and overcome communication gaps with them. Based on the findings of the study, the current study proposed a well-structured pre-service training for newly recruited faculty members', access to ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers', encouragement to take professional courses on regular basis and improved working relations with faculty members' by the heads. In addition, it is also suggested that HoDs should take training in administration of academic departments.

Keywords: Challenges, Strategies, HoDs, Work Performance and University Level

Introduction

Heads of Departments (HoDs) are responsible for providing high-level leadership in the University system. They are accountable for ensuring that the goals and objectives of their departments and the institution are fulfilled. The head is responsible for a variety of responsibilities, including, but not limited to, defining the highest level of job performance for their respective disciplines, ensuring that the department complies with these standards, and having meetings with the departmental personnel (Bush, 2008). Leaders influence the team to achieve the goals. It's connected to how leaders influence their colleagues and subordinates (Bambi, 2012). A leader influences colleagues with the same goal. Leadership might be small-team, university/school, or societal. Literature showed that academic and non-academic staff personnel are critical to higher education institutions' goals.

Successful leaders have a vision that is built on their personal and professional values. They frequently express their perspective and urge their employees to do the same. The institution's

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ideology, structure, and operations are all aimed toward achieving one single objective. Moreover, the behaviour of the individuals is the most essential factor. A leader's style is defined by the way they behave when trying to influence others. There are examples of both authoritarian and empowering behaviour. Group members are more likely to achieve their goals when they are given clear instructions, objectives and assessment techniques, timelines, responsibilities, and examples of how to fulfil them. One-way communications are important for directing actions since they set out what to do, how it should be done, and who is responsible for it. While cooperative behaviour helps people or groups feel at peace with themselves, their colleagues, and the environment. Supportive behaviour is exemplified by several exchanges and reactions that reflect emotional and social factors. Supportive behaviour is exemplified by actions such as soliciting feedback from others, resolving problems, expressing appreciation, sharing knowledge, and demonstrating an awareness of the situation. There is a large amount of work-related activities that is helpful. Leaders build strategies after addressing employee concerns. Leaders that use this method focus their communication on achieving goals and meeting employees' emotional and social needs. The department leader supports their personnel. The training approach requires the leader to motivate and solicit the employees' views.

Effective leadership of HoDs is one of the most important factors in organization improvement (Bush, 2003). As a result, greater expectations are placed on HoDs to serve as intellectual resources or catalysts for teaching and learning issues, with the goal of providing students with a high quality education (Beerens, 2007). In the most recent decades, there has been a significant shift in the traditional responsibilities that heads are expected to performed. This transformation has resulted in administrators spending more time in classrooms than in offices, despite the fact that the learning and achievement of students continue to be the primary priority (Mendels, 2012).

Research study suggested that the HoDs are however faced numerous challenges in their task to provide middle leadership. For instance, Harris and Jones (2017) argued that the intermediate leadership role in institution is particularly demanding as it receives pressure from both the top and the bottom of the organization. This also showed that middle level leaders require specialized training and assistance in order to reach their full potential. In addition, Hirsh and Bergmo-Prvulovic (2019) remarked that the responsibilities of middle-leaders are time-consuming and difficult. Researchers' further noted that educators who are in middle-leading roles frequently experience feelings of isolation as well as disagreement with their colleagues (Hirsh and Bergmo-Prvulovic, 2019). Moreover, the development requirements of middle leaders are frequently disregarded, and as a result, these individuals are ill-equipped to carry out their jobs and assume their duties (Thorpe and Bennett-Powell, 2014).

Literature revealed the relevance of a profound interest in the performance of employees and the heads of departments at universities level. Hence, a key function for the departmental head is to help the institution achieve its goals. The quality of the university as a whole is the responsibility of university authorities. Having a strong emphasis on mutuality reduces the likelihood of leaders using coercive or unethical methods to influence their followers. Consequently, it increases the likelihood of leaders and their followers working together for the greater good (Rost, 1991). Most of the university's budget goes toward training teachers and non-faculty personnel and upgrading the campus's physical facilities each year. Many studies have examined the relationship between an employee's degree of job engagement and their productivity as a teaching or non-teaching employee. Performance evaluation is a way to make work better, and improving a job in a way to make it easier and more effective to reach your goals. The head of the department is very important to the institution's goals because he or she is in charge of creating an environment that affects the attitudes, levels of motivation, and actions of the staff. Delegating tasks to subordinates is an important part of being a good leader because it gets people involved and boosts productivity (Aldoory and Toth, 2004). Over the past 100 years, many studies in the field of management have focused on the idea that leadership is one of the most important things that affects how well an organisation works. It builds a culture of trust, helps employees feel more confident in themselves, and helps them grow as people (Bass and Avolio, 2000).

Heads of Departments (HoDs) have several responsibilities at departmental levels. Ashiomu (2009) described these responsibilities including; addressing concerns regarding colleagues, students, the department and visitors. The chair of department must direct, guide, coordinate, and evaluate teachers' and activities to guarantee quality education and departmental effectiveness. The department

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head must be innovative in managing people and material resources. Besides, the head of department's position is the most challenging and demanding one at the department level because they serve as an intermediary between the university's deans, departments, and administrators. Heads of departments face plenty of challenges and constraints that impede their ability to effectively lead their organizations (Bennett, 1982). Research study also highlighted the importance of heads and employees in the organization and the way they deal with them in attaining organization goals and objectives (Okoroma, 2007). According to the findings of many studies, the issues and difficulties that the head of the department or the leader of the institution has been facing have been extremely critical, complicated, and significant.

In short, the provision of a quality education inside universities is impossible if the numerous departments that are responsible for the education of the students are not effectively managed. Given this context, the researchers set out with the aim of determining some of the most main challenges that stand in the way of efficient administration of academic departments in universities located in Punjab, Pakistan. In addition to this, it also focused on determining the alternative strategies used by these universities heads in order to overcome the challenges that were identified.

Research Objectives

The study was designed:

1.   To explore the challenges that Head of Departments (HoDs) face while improving the faculty's performance.
2.   To investigate the strategies that Head of Department (HoDs) use to overcome the challenges.

Methodology

This study was entirely qualitative and researchers' used an interpretivist approach. Because we believed that the concerns related to challenges faced by HoDs in improving their faculty performance and strategies employed by the heads could be best understood by listening to the respondents' individually - rather than quantifying the kinds of views that they held about the problems. Researchers' purposefully selected the twelve HoDs from various departments including, education, special education, mathematic, business, information technology, physics, zoology, chemistry, English and management sciences from three different public sectors universities of Punjab, Pakistan. Researchers' gathered data by conducting semi-structured interviews which was prepared after reviewing of extensive literature review. Bryman & Bell (2019) described that semi-structured interview yield reliable results. Researchers' follow the necessary ethical considerations like, seeking permission from relevant body, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity of the participants' and institution before we could engage the participants in the study. After collecting data, these interviews were transcribed into English and verbatim transcribed. Researchers' used the themetic analysis (Braun et al., 2019) to analyz the collected data. The main themes emerged during analysis process were described in the data presentation and findings section.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Findings

Challenges faced by HoDs from Faculty Members

The given figure shows the eleven themes related to the challenges that the heads encountered while manage the work performance of their teachers';

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Figure 1: Challenges faced by HoDs from faculty members

Teachers' immature behavior

Data revealed immature attitude of faculty members when departmental head evaluated their performance.

The below response is presented as evidence.

> *Sometimes newly recruited faculty members or teachers are not really professional and there are many flaws or ambiguities in their work (it can be either in paperwork, record handling, or while delivering the lectures in class). These ambiguities create huge tension in the entire system, due to the faculty's irresponsible behavior and flaws in their assigned work (Respondent (R6).*

Insufficient training regarding pedagogical content knowledge

According to the results obtained, the instructional staff does not have enough substance. This issue was summed up quite well by one of the responders, who said:

> *Pedagogical content knowledge basically describes the kind of knowledge about the latest technologies and frameworks to improves or enhance the teaching skills. It can play and essential role in overall performance of and individual employee. But unfortunately there is no proper training regarding Pedagogical content knowledge (R4).*

Unawareness about technological knowledge

Another participants described that unawareness regarding technologies is one of the main issue that mostly faculty members faced such as *"most the faculty members are unaware of today's technologies, and lack of technological knowledge affects the performance of a faculty employee" (R1).*

Insufficient resources

Participant answer this by saying,

> *Sometimes faculty members are highly dedicated and passionate towards their job responsibilities. But they complain for not having much resources to express or deliver their knowledge to students during the class lectures (i.e. unavailability of labs and other practical spaces (R 10).*

Indiscipline and irresponsible behavior of faculty

One of the participants shared her experience,

> *Most of the employees are irresponsible and indiscipline as they do not follow the rules and regulations. They arrive late to department, do not performs their duties on time and in most*

cases, they may not deliver the lectures properly. Sometimes they do not submit their assigned work (i.e. paper checking and record handling (R7).

Another participant stated that,

Sometimes faculty members are not attentive during the meetings to plan how the things will work and we will get our required results by performing our responsibilities well, this negligence causes a major flaw in achieving the goals (R10).

Low morale of faculty

One of the respondents declared,

Sometimes, most of the faculty members do feel demotivated due to some kind of inconvenience (funds and resources) or it can be due to unethical behavior from students, so the teachers feel morally down. Its HoD's responsibility to motivate these demotivated faculties (R8).

Teacher unnecessary absenteeism

Sometimes teaching staff create some unnecessary problems.

One of them answers this by saying,

Sometimes faculty members are not regular as they should be. They asked for the day offs without reporting any valid reasons. Their personal problems become the barrier between their job and responsibilities, which causes inconveniences for both HoD and other faculty members (R9).

Poor interpersonal relationships and a communication gap

It is believed, based on the collected data, that there are many standards and values in each connection that differs between persons and society. As a result, it is probable that proving yourself by blaming others' would provide the greatest results.

One of the head of the department explained that,

In some cases, faculty members do shows personal grudges and issues towards HoD which causes major human relations issues and creates a communication gap between HoD and these faculty. In this scenario, some faculty members show negligence in performing their duties and responsibilities (R7).

The evidence suggested that,

Employees sometimes don't show up the good relations with their colleagues and do have grudges for each other among them, which causes communication gaps or confidence lag among the entire team and causes barriers in achieving the required results (R11).

No Induction training

The data pointed out that faculty do not have proper induction training to perform their professional responsibilities.

One of the participant said,

The newly recruited faculty members are not professionally trained for their positions as there is no proper criteria and the body is working on it currently. So, the HoD has to teach every little thing to them about their duties and responsibilities, which is a very time taking procedure for both HoD and that employee (R10).

Discrepancies between HoD and teachers

Good and trustful relationship between head and teachers are very important. It gives better feedback and results about the working performance of teaching employees.

As one of the respondent, answer this by saying,

We know that the relationship between HoD and teachers are very important to run the whole system in general. But there are some problems have been observed where the senior teachers don't follows the instructions given by the HOD and want to in their own way, which causes lack of coordination and confidence between them (R12).

Improper balance of learning needs of students

The individual who was sharing their thoughts stated,

The learning abilities varies student to student, sometimes it's hard for teacher to keep the balance between the excellent students and average students. Because some students needs more attentions to learn the things as compare to an excellent student, but while being attentive to these type of students teachers do ignores the other students directly or indirectly and unable to keep the balance in learning needs among all the students (R5).

Strategies to Manage Faculty Performance

This figure showed the themes related to the strategies that the heads of the department used for the better, accurate and skillful work performance of the employees (faculty).

Figure 2: Strategies used by HoDs to Improve Faculty Performance

Be attentive in training sessions

Data showed that the faculty should be attentive during training sessions.

A participant reported,

> *The newly recruited employees should attend the training sessions properly so they have complete knowledge about their jobs and responsibilities. They should asked the as much question as they before joining their job so they can perform well even in the tough times (if needed)(R6).*

Attend Pedagogical content knowledge training

Participant described,

> *All the newly recruited employees should goes through pedagogical content knowledge training, so they can have solid grip on the teaching skills. Pedagogical content knowledge basically describes the kind of knowledge about the latest technologies and frameworks to improves or enhance the teaching skills. It can play and essential role in overall performance of and individual employee (R2).*

Disciplining irresponsible faculty

One of the respondent expressed their opinion about the less significant obligations that are assigned to workers by expressing the following,

> *If an employee isn't disciplined and showing up the irresponsible behavior towards their duties, the HoD should generates the warning letter against him to make realize about his negligence. In the worst scenario if the employee's behavior is still irresponsible then HOD has right to call an inquiry on him and he can take the decision according to rules passed by HEC (R7).*

Planned seminars and formal dinners for faculty

One of the interviewees shared their perspective as follows,

> *HoD can arrange get together personally and can deliver a casual motivational speech just to make his team work enthusiastic. Besides this HoD can formally arrange the seminars or formal dinner to make the bond stronger with his team, so, he can pull out their 100% potential to achieve the goals (R8).*

Installation of biometric attendance system

One of the participants was kind enough to share their strategy with the group and said:
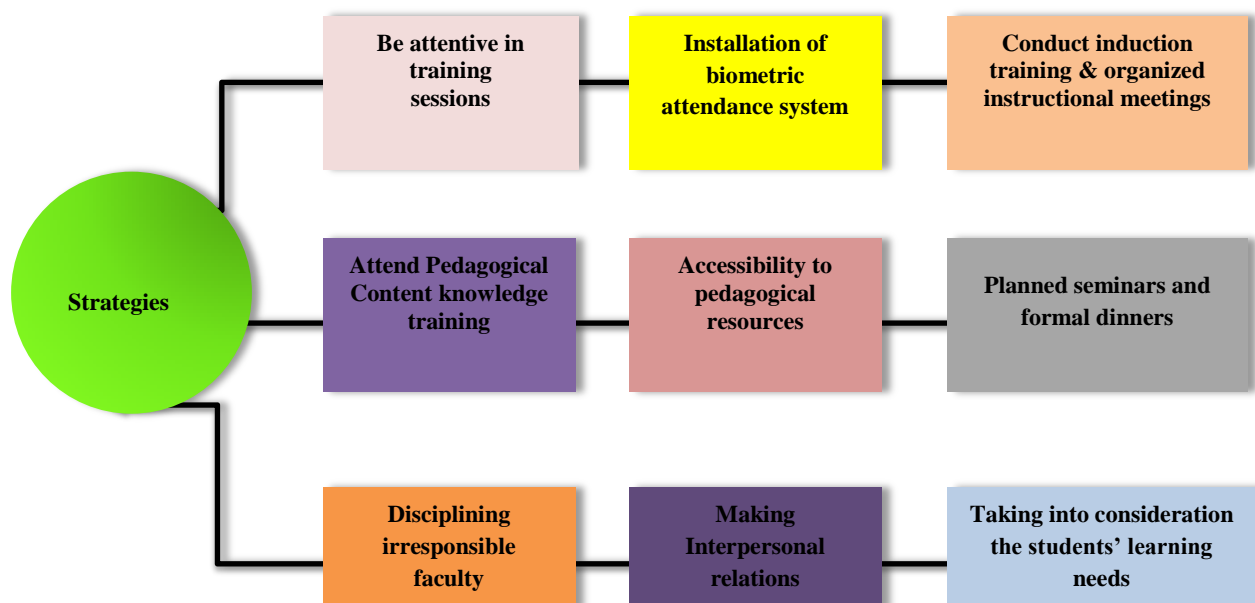
> *Biometric attendance devices should be installed in every department to avoid the absentees of faculty members. Every faculty member should be punctual if he wants to mark his*

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attendance on time otherwise he will be mark absent. It can play a vital role even in maintain the discipline of the department (R9).

Accessibility to pedagogical resources

One of the respondent used this strategy to overcome the challenges and enhance the teachers teaching methods by giving them appropriate resources.

Participant reported,

Govt. should provide all the possible resources (labs and other practical spaces) to the department of university, so the HoD and other faculty members can deliver more of their knowledge to the students. Moreover it will also help the HoD to get the required results along with his other faculty members (R10).

Conduct induction training

Participant stated,

The newly recruited faculty members should be trained professionally in pre-service training sessions for their job positions. So, they can have a broad knowledge of what they're going to do while being on that position and what their powers are. A newly recruited employee can work and perform his responsibilities accurately after having the pre-service training sessions (R3).

Organized instructional meetings

The majority of those who responded were of the opinion that it is necessary to pay attention to issues of this kind during group meetings.

Participant described,

All the employees should be attentive during the instructional meeting with HoD while making the plans and understanding their responsibilities properly. Employees should be free to ask any questions regarding the plan (if any). Later if there is any negligence found from any employee there should be a penalty for that individual employee (R10).

Making Interpersonal relations

Every single person who participated in the survey discussed a variety of potential solutions to the problems that they've had to solve because of their workers.

One interviewee stated that,

All the staff members should share a good bond among them. HoD can play a vital role in making the coordination more strong between all the staff members. HoD should allow the employees to have casual chit-chats in the break or after the working hours, it can be beneficial to make their bond stronger as a team (R11).

Another participant reported,

If there is some interpersonal issues between the HoD and any individual employee, the HoD should address them personally. It has been observed that sometimes an employee do have personal grudges for HoD, in such cases HoD should arrange a in person meeting with that employee and sort the issues they're having with each other. So they can work together to achieve the goals in the future (R9).

To paraphrase what another responder had to say,

Seniors faculty staff should be allowed to share their opinions without any kind of hesitation, but the final decision should be taken by the HoD and everybody should respects and follow his decisions with being egoistic including the senior faculty members. It will make their coordination and confidence even stronger between them (R4).

Taking into consideration the students' learning needs

Some other respondents said that ensuring that basic requirements are met, would successfully address a large number of issues.

Participant reported,

The learning abilities varies student to student, but the teacher should keep the appropriate balance between excellent students and average students. If any student want the extra time and attention, the teacher should compensate him from his own free time, but should not ignore the other students (R12).

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study explained the challenges faced by Heads of various departments of three different public sector universities of Punjab, Pakistan. The majority of the participants stated that they often

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faced immature attitude of newly recruited faculty members' toward their assigned duties and indiscipline and irresponsible behavior of faculty members. Participants also discussed that teachers' do not have induction training, training regarding pedagogical content knowledge as well they were unaware their own technological abilities. A number of research studies discussed that insufficient and inappropriate training of teachers' (Bambi, 2012) lack of pedagogical content knowledge (Van Deventer & Kruger, 2003 and Acheson & Gall, 2010), lack of pre-service training and lack of trust were the main challenges that heads encountered. In the same way, insufficient or non-existent professional development, lack of support from the school head, lack of understanding of their role (Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007; Rosenfeld et. al, 2008 and Kydd, Anderson & Newton, 2003) were also described as challenges by different researchers in their studies.

Some of participants' reported that lack of sufficient resources, low morale of teachers', unnecessary absenteeism of faculty members' all are the problems that they tackled. Research studies described that absence of teaching resources, demotivation of teachers, teachers' absenteeism, and too much paperwork were the problems that majority of heads faced (Jaca, 2013). Few of the participants expressed that poor interpersonal relationships, a communication gap and discrepancies between HoD and teachers' and improper balance among learners' learning needs were the issues that they encountered. HoDs' efforts are affected by challenges, which in turn impact their role's success. As, Lumpkin (2004) noted that a departmental chair has several obstacles, including developing a team of personnel with diverse viewpoints and competencies who can work effectively to achieve common goals. Lumpkin (2004) suggested that the HoD display excellent instructional leadership role in order to do this.

HoDs also mentioned the strategies they used to overcome these challenges for example, they advised newly recruited faculty members' to pay close attention during the periods of training. They should attend the pedagogical content knowledge training. Participants' also mentioned that being a head they struggled to implement these strategies such as disciplining irresponsible faculty member, provide accessibility to pedagogical resources, organized induction training and conduct instructional meetings and through installation of biometric attendance system. Participants' also described to motivate their team or faculty members they arranged seminars and formal dinners for faculty. They struggled to maintain very fair interpersonal relation and overcome communication gaps. They also advised their faculty that our student is top priority and we all take into consideration the students' learning needs.

The findings of this study consistent to numbers of research studies for instance Kanwar (2000) stated that heads of schools should not only be kept abreast of the most recent developments in educational leadership best practices and methods, but they should also work to change their attitudes in order to develop more realistic abilities. Onyango (2001) argued that teachers' are the most essential human resource. He said that teachers should be competent and dedicated towards their work. Leaders and teachers' expertise is crucial to institutional achievement. This indicated that performance is determined by the amount of teaching experience and overall efficacy of individual teachers. Teachers must be professionally competent and experienced in instruction and assessment tools. Cameron & Green (2015) explained that head teachers must identify long-term goals and establish means of attaining them. Institution must be capable to produce disciplined and capable people who can help improve the nation.

Conclusion

Based on the findings and subsequent discussion, this study came to the following conclusion that first, there were numerous challenges met by Heads of Department (HoDs) related to immature attitude of newly recruited faculty, irresponsible behavior of faculty, induction and pedagogical trainings, teaching resources, low morale of teachers', unnecessary absenteeism, poor interpersonal relationships, communication gap and discrepancies between HoD and teachers'.

Second, HoDs also mentioned the strategies they used to overcome these challenges as guidance to newly recruited faculty, organized pedagogical content knowledge training, disciplining irresponsible faculty member, provide accessibility to pedagogical resources, structured induction training, conduct instructional meetings, installation of biometric attendance system, arranged seminars and formal dinners to motivate faculty. They struggled to maintain very good interpersonal relation and overcome communication gaps. They also advised their faculty that our student is top priority and we all take into consideration the students' learning needs.

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Researchers', therefore, recommended that a well-structured pre-service training should be organized for the newly recruited teachers' by the department Head. Faculty members should have access to ongoing professional development opportunities while on the job. Heads should encouraged their faculty members' to take professional courses on regular basis. Specifically, heads should struggled to improve working relation with their teaching to enhance better academic performance of their department. Moreover, university administration should train HoDs in professional management skills and competencies.

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