Epistemological Beliefs and Practices in High Schools of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Teachers' Perspective

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Abstract

This paper describes teachers' perceptions about the epistemological beliefs of the administrator, about school setting and what are the effects of these practices on effective school culture. Open-Ended interview questions were constructed to collect data and distributed among a sample of respondents. 16 teachers from 16 schools with one teacher from each school were selected randomly through convenient sampling technique. The study was guided by two research questions: How teachers perceive administrative beliefs and practices? How epistemological beliefs of administrators affect their practices? Themes and categories were examined to determine what administrators' epistemological beliefs are and what administrators perceive they do in their schools to enact their epistemological beliefs. The study also concluded that better beliefs and practices of school principals have a very effective role in the school setting. The research design used for this study was qualitative approach, which further involved case study based on data grounded theory.

Key Words: Epistemological Beliefs and Practices, School Culture, Administrative Role, Political Pressure, Lack of Resources, Proper Parental Involvement

Introduction

Beliefs are powerful to find out about one's thinking and behavior. It is the state of mind. Totally rooted ideas about the world, about things, and about us are beliefs. One's thought and practices, as well as one's opinion about truth, are meaningfully influenced by them. There are many types of beliefs in which epistemological beliefs are more important.

BelginTanriverdi (2012) stated that epistemology deals with the nature, origin, methods and limits of knowledge. Such beliefs impact the growth of knowledge because they are associated to knowledge and other beliefs they perceived not any

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statistically major change in epistemological groups across gender groups and found that epistemological beliefs are connected to learning methodologies, purposes, and approaches.

Benjamin Walter (2009) defined the epistemological beliefs as beliefs about the Knowledge, its nature and its acquisition and further explained the five independent epistemological beliefs from literature such as stability of knowledge, structure of knowledge, source of knowledge, acquisition of knowledge and speed of knowledge acquisition. Each of these elements ranges from naïve beliefs to more sophisticated beliefs.

Wong and Chai (2010) explained that the current concept of knowledge is centered on the popular views of the scientific method and epistemological beliefs are unjustifiably limiting. They defined the Etymology of epistemology as the Greek term episteme which in Latin translates into Scientia and provide the latest word for science.

Chung and Tsai (2005) observed that teachers believed that epistemological opinions have strong impact on thinking style, learning methods and knowledge gaining. The results of the field were dejected that agree the reports which show that students motivated by a constructivist incline the use of foster cognitively assets to get higher goals in learning than as compare to those who only have simple opinions of epistemology.

Schommer (in Deryakuku 2002) stated that epistemological beliefs form the knowledge that exists in one's mind, knowledge about something or someone that exists is true, and which can be changed over time depending upon one's personal life experiences. The current period of instruction based leadership and responsibilities, relationship between principals and teachers play a key role. Principals and teacher relation defends on many factors (Edgerson, Kritsonis and Herrington, 2006).

Epistemological beliefs are prominent elements in making the cognition of administrators It has been observed that epistemological studies have shown that epistemological beliefs touch various phases of learning. Studies have been shown with respect to age, effects on comprehension, specific domains, study strategies, and epistemological development. The theories will be discussed of this study form epistemological beliefs into categories going from basic beliefs, which include simple knowledge and dualistic thinking, to more complex thinking, which includes integration of knowledge (King and Kitchener, 2004).

He justified his point of view by citing Matthews & Crow, (2003) who described the efficient school principal as a leader should appreciate, maintain, create, and alter the school environment. Alexander defines domain particularity as the restricted knowledge one possesses relative to a particular area of study. Beliefs relative to knowledge in one domain, such as mathematics, could possibly differ from beliefs relative to another domain such as history (Beuhl and Alexander, 2001).

Sergiovanni (2006) planned the institutional leadership model for the first time and acknowledged five basic aspects of instructional leadership, i.e.: cultural, educational, symbolic, human and technical.

Research Questions

The following were the research questions for this study:

1. How do teachers perceive administrative beliefs and practices?
2. How epistemological beliefs of administrators affect their practices?

Population

Populations of the study constituted all female teachers selected from government Girls High Schools both from rural and urban areas from District Mardan of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Sample

I selected 16 schools through convenient sampling techniques and 16 teachers were selected randomly. I selected the sample of this study based on nearness as a convenience sample because being a female it was not easy for me to interview all staff and to travel in far-flung areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Data Collection

The data were collected through a semi-structured open-ended interview about the epistemological beliefs and practices and the teacher's perception of such beliefs and practices. Each interview began with the discussion of knowledge, simple and complex learning to carry on the interview. All of the interviews were audio tape-recorded and then were transcribed in order to find themes and commonalities of beliefs and activities translated in the school.

The semi-structured interview gives the best-suited impression to put away descriptive visions (Bogdan and Bicklen, 2003). According to Okoli and Pawlowski (2004), follow-up interviews may harvest additional data; therefore, in-person face to face follow-up interviews were conducted.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Interviews were conducted to explore and judge the epistemological beliefs and practices of school administrators. According to Merriam (2009) data analysis is "the process of consolidating, reducing, and interpreting of data and to make sense out of data what people have said and done, and what the researcher has seen, observe and read.

I used the qualitative data gleaned from the written open-ended questions for the two research questions to generate categories, identified themes, and recurring patterns. The main purpose of using qualitative measures in this study to capture the teachers' perceptions about the epistemological beliefs of the administrator, about school setting and what are the effects of these practices on effective school culture.

The purpose of both the research questions was to ascertain the teacher's perception about the administrative beliefs and practices of administrators and to know about the major challenges and obstacles faced by the teachers at different stages inside the school such as challenges in crafting school vision and in school's goals setting, and those obstacles due to which administrator not able to support teachers and students for their learning. To arose more in-depth beliefs of teachers I asked few questions, the following are the responses of participants.

Item No. 1: What is knowledge? What is your definition of Knowledge?

To obtain different views about knowledge from teachers. I asked a question from participants that what is knowledge? Or what is your definition of knowledge?

. Aisha said that Knowledge is any meaningful information all have and the sum of what is known. A magical power does not mean to get degree but to bring changes in personality, attitude, and mentality of a person and also in environment.

Miss H, Miss Si, Miss S, Miss I and Miss K said that knowledge is an awareness that comes through experience, education, and surroundings and which brings positive changes in the behavior of human beings. Miss S further said knowledge is a key to open the locks of unsolved things. Furthermore, Miss I said that there is no great adventure that can be performed without knowledge.

Miss Y explained the knowledge with the famous saying, knowledge is power" through which they can change the world and to learn how to differentiate between right and wrong. she further said that Knowledge is awareness and understanding of someone or something, understanding of things which were not known before, anything we have; any information does not matter from where it received.

Miss D also agreed with Miss Y at some points and said that Knowledge means to know about something through experience observation, reading either in formal institution or in informal. It is a formality of something e.g. facts and skills

etc. to understand something theoretically or practically for developing skills. It is also the name of change in character and we also learn through knowing how to differentiate between right and wrong.

Miss N and Miss S both said that knowledge means all that is known either about a topic, a person or about an environment and by using all available resources. Furthermore, Knowledge is gaining something for a lifetime; it is facts, information, and skills that everyone acquired through experience or education.

Bushra agreed to all groups at different points, she said knowledge is awareness, understanding, a positive change, and power too, through knowledge we learn everything, it is only knowledge which differentiated human being from other creature and just because of "Ilm" ALLAH made us khalif on this earth.

. Rana said that knowledge is the state of awareness and understanding which they gain from experience or from study means knowing something or having information about something. It is the power which they gain practically or theatrically, the real power comes from knowledge and which distinguishes man from animal.

Furthermore, Miss N and Miss M both said that Knowledge is understanding and awareness of something either form daily life experiences or form education.

It is concluded from the responses of participants that Teachers believed that Knowledge is awareness, understanding which comes through experiences, education and from surroundings and which bring positive changes in the behavior of human beings.

Item No. 2: What do you think about the role of Teacher in Achieving the School Goals?

In order to know about the role of the teacher, I asked what you think about the role of the teacher in achieving the school goals.

Almost all the interviewees said that the teacher plays main role in goal achievement; she is a facilitator, character builder, personality developer, guide, role model and backbone of education system. Miss A further said that it is a teacher who develops prosperous nation. Only they are capable to get better results, bring changes in the personality of students. The teacher is a facilitator and knows how to get better output from students.

Miss Si said that a teacher has an active role in the achievement of school goals, she remains active in the classroom and guides students in their learning process. In short, they can say she is a guide, supporter, counselor, and leader. Miss S said she thinks teacher plays a prominent role in achieving school goals e.g. by involving students in co-curricular activities, through assessment and also through counseling with week students.

Miss H and K both said that teacher is a resource provider, an instructor, curriculum specialist and also classroom supporter. K further said that School has

three main items teacher, students, and content. All three items are necessary for each other but the teacher with the cooperation of principal serves the main role. She is resource provider, facilitator, leader, guider as well as counselor too.

However, Miss S said that the role of the teacher is to develop modern ways of teaching to know the problems of students and school as well and to solve it. Miss B said that teachers play 100% role in achieving the school goals but with the cooperation of principal, teacher and principal without each other is nothing it is teamwork.

Miss R further said that Teacher has a basic role, just like the role of the soul in a body without soul a body can't survive that's like learning is impossible without teacher. The school system can't be run without teacher.

Miss N said that the teacher role is like a nucleus in a cell. It is best opportunity for every teacher to improve their skills for betterment of school. Furthermore, Miss M said that Teacher plays a vital role in the achievement of goals, only teacher can create classroom environment and mentor and nurture the students.

It is concluded from the responses, that teachers depict a key role in goal achievement: they are facilitators, character builders, personality developers, role models and backbones of the education system.

Item No. 3:   Does the Leadership Behavior of Principal have any Impact on Teachers?

To know about the leadership behavior of principal I asked the teachers that, does the leadership behavior of principal have any impact on teachers?

Miss A, P, and Si said that Yes, it does, Principal's personality reflects all other staff if she is punctual, regular, active and dutiful then all the staff either teaching or non-teaching all will be punctual, regular, active and dutiful too.

Miss Y said that definitely the leadership behavior of principals has great impact on the performance of teachers on the hand of satisfaction of teachers. Her good and cooperative behavior leads to the good and cooperative behavior of teacher. So it is very much necessary to have proper knowledge about management, leadership, and administration.

Furthermore, Miss M said that yes, the leadership behavior of the principal has great impact on teachers, the principal leads the staff on such path which directly goes toward the success of school and school discipline.

However, Miss S and Miss B both said that Yes, absolutely it has a great impact on teacher but this impact may be good or bad, positive or negative. Sometimes it makes very bad and negative impact on teacher. For successful administration an administrator should keep faith in their staff and should avoid all types of negativity and never let grouping of teachers.

Miss K said that Yes, it does and very positive impact, it is her leadership role that all the staff is punctual and dutiful, all these are due to her/ his leadership

behavior. The whole environment is based on the leadership behavior of the principal, she is a good leader that's why the whole environment is productive and positive, she encourages women having a lot of leadership qualities and also encourage us to do the same.

Furthermore, Miss R said that, of course it does, it has great impact on teachers if the leading person is not fulfilling and performing her duty well then the system will be hanged there and will not run smoothly because all staff follow their leader, principal if she will be on time and performing duty well then we all will do the same.

I came to the conclusion that all the respondents believed that the Principal's personality reflects all other staff if she is punctual, regular, active and dutiful then all the staff either teaching or non-teaching all will be punctual, regular, active and dutiful too.

Item No. 4: How does the Principal's role affect their School Culture? What do you believe about it?

To know the teacher's view about the principal's role either it affects their school culture or not, I asked how does principal's role affects their school culture? What do you say about it?

Miss A, Miss S. and Miss M said that Yes, the principal's role has positive effect on their school culture; she is well-disciplined person and also maintained discipline in school. She implements the rules and regulations according to the situation, which the subordinates have to follow.

.Aisha further said school culture means school environment, everyone has their role and responsibility but the principal is the head of an institution that's why her leadership qualities can lead us like the crew on the ship and other all have to play their role for the smooth cruise of the ship in the sea.

. Hina said that their principal always discusses Islamic topic in morning assembly, which not only effect on teacher's behavior but also on student's behavior. Miss Y said that yes, it does, she is the head of the school and the whole environment of the school depends on her attitude. She should adopt democratic attitude in her dealing and should show a little flexibility, cooperation with staff and to be friendly with staff for the sake of positive culture.

Furthermore, Miss Y, Miss D, Miss N and Miss R said that the principal should be friendly, flexible and cooperative because friendly and fixable behavior can create calm and friendly environment for teachers as well as for student. Furthermore, positive behavior, soft and decent use of languages, well-organized instructions and healthy criticism all these create very healthy and positive school culture.

Miss Y further said that the principal is the head of the school and the whole environment of school depends on her attitude. She should adopt democratic attitude in her dealing.

However, Miss D further said that the Principal's role has great impact on school culture, she assumes a wide range of roles to support school and student success whether these roles are assigned formally or informally which build the entire school. So principal should be friendly and cooperative because strict and criticizing roles in spite of giving quality education can spoil student's futures.

Furthermore, Miss R said that school culture can be well-disciplined only in the presence of good and well qualified principal his/ her role has direct effect on teachers and indirectly on students. Miss P and Si both said that the principal is the main key to school. She is the role model for all.

. Palwasha further said if she is well qualified, punctual, well-disciplined and has leadership qualities it will automatically affect school culture. She always tries to accommodate students according to their culture. Miss Si I further said that they follow her instruction as well as students too. If we don't follow her instruction and show any resistance it will affect school culture negatively. The right principal can make a school community and bad principal is the worst nightmare for the school.

. Sana said that yes, it does the principal get up, her personality, punctuality, rules and regulation, good behavior, school discipline everything does matter. All these have positive effect on school culture.

. Ishrat said that definitely it does if a principal is interested in promoting school culture she must arrange such types of activities to educate the students about it. . Bushra said that their principal is very caring person and her role has very positive effect on their school culture. There is no negativity, no favoritism in their school. She deals all equally and provides equal opportunity to all, she never put extra burden on anyone always give work according to the caliber. That's why their school culture is very positive and they must say that all the credit goes to their principal.

Furthermore, Miss K said that school culture is totally based on the principal's role. They most say that their principal changed the whole structure of the school. The school I can see was never like this. It is all about their principal's devotion to this institution she created a very positive culture. She is in real words a very nice personality.

However, Miss N and Miss M both said that if the principal is punctual, hardworking then the staff will be automatically punctual and hardworking and if she is not taking any internet in school matters then the teachers will do the same. Miss M further said that the whole culture of school is running around the role of principal, if she is punctual and hardworking then all will be.

I came to the conclusion that respondents believed that the Principal's role has a positive effect on any school culture; a well-disciplined person can maintain

discipline in school. If she is punctual, friendly, cooperative and hardworking then all the staff will be.

Findings

1. Teachers proclaimed that Knowledge is any meaningful information they have and the sum of what is known, knowledge is an awareness which comes through experience, education and from surroundings and which bring positive changes in the behavior of human beings.
2. Almost all the participants said that the teacher plays main role in goal achievement; she is a facilitator, character builder, personality developer, guide, role model and backbone of education system. She is the source of knowledge for students, to make their concept clear about certain topics, students give first priority to their teacher's view whatever they say either right or wrong therefore teachers should be very clear in their knowledge.
3. Teacher has an active role in the achievement of school goals, she remains active in classroom and guide students in their learning process. Principal's personality reflects all other staff if she is punctual, regular, active and dutiful then all the staff either teaching or non-teaching all will be punctual, regular, active and dutiful too.
4. The principal's role has positive effect on their school culture; she is well-disciplined person and also maintained discipline in school. She implements the rules and regulations according to the situation, which the subordinates have to follow. She should adopt democratic attitude in her dealing and should show a little flexibility, cooperation with staff and to be friendly with staff for the sake of positive culture.
5. Most of the participants expressed their opinion that principal monitor them by regularly visiting the classes, by observing lessons and teaching methodology, they regularly check the student's diaries and they also keep a close interaction with students. She also assesses them inside the classroom. Two participants said that their principal does not cooperate them. She never takes any interest that what is going on in the school and among the staff arranges staff, so how she cooperates. She is an autocratic and very rude person; she never gives attention to their suggestions.

Discussion

I conducted an interview with teachers which helped to examine how the teachers perceived the administrator's beliefs and practices.

Teachers proclaimed that Knowledge is an awareness that comes through experiences, education, and surroundings and which brings positive changes in the

behavior of human beings. Knowledge exercised in school is descriptive knowledge and procedural knowledge also known as theoretical and practical. They also use library, general discussion, experiments, and co-curriculum activities in their school. They use textbooks, internet, and experience and also preview knowledge about that thing from other sources.

Teachers depict a key role in goal achievement: she is a facilitator, character builder, personality developer, guide, role model and the backbone of education system. She is the source of knowledge for students, to make their concept clear about certain topics, students give first priority to their teacher's view whatever they say either right or wrong therefore teachers should be very clear in their knowledge.

The teacher has an active role in the achievement of school goals, she remains active in the classroom and guide students in their learning process. Principal's personality reflects all other staff if she is punctual, regular, active and dutiful then all the staff either teaching or non-teaching all will be punctual, regular, active and dutiful too.

Teachers faced so many challenges like, over crowed classes, the lake of space, time and resources, long absentees of students and lack of interest from parent's side. There should be encouragement for intelligent students and some stipends for needy and talented students so they can continue their education without any obstacles.

According to Day et al. teachers always focus and devoted to their professional decision/judgment and they don't get excited only because of institution achievement where they serving (Day et al. 2001).

Recommendations

The following recommendations were deduced from this study:

1. It was observed that teachers were reluctant to traditional positivist teaching. There should be subject wise training to improve their methodologies for the sake of better demonstration to students and to keep her updated about new teaching approaches.
2. Teachers expressed their opinion that the principal does not cooperate with them and never takes any interest that what is going on in the school and among the staff members. The principal should transform their autocratic attitude into more democratic in order to establish mutual harmony and friendly relationship among staff.
3. It was observed that there is no proper parental involvement in school as well at home. The education department can provide classes and training in order to revolutionize the significance of their collaboration in their children's

academics that will help parents to improve communication between schools and parents.

4. Teachers mentioned some factors that negatively affect school culture like political pressure and lack of resources. Schools can be authorized enough so that administrators can smoothly and effectively carry out their practices in order to satisfy better student's academic achievement and quality education.

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