

Community as A Factor Affecting the Role of District Education Officers in Effective Functioning of Government Secondary Schools

Nematullah Chandio

nematchandio@gmail.com

Lecturer in Education at Sindh Muslim Govt. Arts & Commerce College No.1, Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan

Rida Zohra Balal

rida14tl39@gmail.com

High School Teacher at Government Girls High School Makli District Thatta, Sindh, Pakistan

Oojala Tasneem

oojala.danish@gmail.com

High School Teacher at Government Girls High School, Hyderabad, Sindh, Pakistan

Dr. Abdul Sattar Gopang

a.s.gopang@gmail.com

Professor, Chairman, Department of Curriculum, Faculty of Education, University of Sindh, Pakistan

Corresponding Author: * Nematullah Chandio nematchandio@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores the role of District Education Officers in ensuring effective functioning of government secondary schools in District Shikarpur, with a focus on community involvement. Data collected from 05 Education Officers, 04 school heads, and 16 teachers of secondary schools in district Shikarpur using semi-structured interviews. The data reveal a complex interplay of factors, including law-and-order situations, tribal clashes, and community attitudes, which significantly affect EFS. While community involvement can positively influence school functioning, unawareness, and irresponsible attitudes can hinder progress. The study highlights the critical role of Education Officers' vision and position in making schools functional and efficient. Ultimately, this research emphasizes the need for community engagement, parental cooperation, and support from local authorities to improve educational outcomes. The findings suggest that a collaborative approach between education stakeholders, community members, and local authorities is crucial for ensuring effective functioning of government secondary schools not only in District Shikarpur, but also across Sindh on larger scale.

Keywords: Community, Effective Functioning of Schools, Education Officer,

BACKGROUND

Education is crucial for a society's growth and economy. It provides skilled workers, boosts industry, and brings positive social and economic changes. Quality education leads to a quality economy and improves individuals' lives. Effective school management is vital for quality education. School leaders play a key role in providing quality education, but they are influenced by their working circumstances.

Effective administration and management are directly linked to education quality. Managers of educational institutes are responsible for creating a congenial school environment and providing facilities for effective teaching and learning. The education system is structured in a hierarchical manner, with a high degree of centralization. This can lead to bureaucratic inefficiencies and poor resource allocation, hindering policy implementation.

District Education Officers (DEOs) play a crucial role in implementing policies and plans at the district level. Their responsibilities include general administration, human resource management, monitoring and evaluation, and community involvement.

Community role has been identified as an essential tool for achieving the goals, minimizing the impact of the issues and maximizing the outcomes of an establishment or policy on condition that if the community is effectively engaged and leveraged in proper way. Community cohesion has become a new buzzword for the modern world and according to the perspective of the international development agencies, community cohesion and involvement can be achieved keeping broad the cultural and religious aspects.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Community engagement in educational institutions is increasingly becoming a vital element in achieving sustainable development goals. Engaging communities not only fosters knowledge towards educational institutions but also helps address local challenges and issues while delivering and achieving those goals (Dr Adil et al., 2024)

UNICEF emphasizes that community involvement is crucial for ensuring quality education for all children, and encourages parents and communities to participate in education decision-making processes, ensuring that education programs are tailored to local needs and contexts (Meresman, 2014).

Biswajit Das says that quality education is crucial for a child's all-round development in our country. Parents and community play a significant role in this process. Parents fulfill the child's diverse needs and their involvement is essential for quality education. Studies show that parental involvement improves a child's education and increases their chances of success. Therefore, parents' active participation is vital in providing quality education (Das, 2020).

Community cohesion is a growing priority in today's world, with international development agencies emphasizing its importance. Achieving cohesion involves embracing diverse cultural and religious aspects to foster inclusive community involvement. Due to larger distances in schools, the community does not allow their children, especially girl-child, to travel such distances for mere sake of education (Lall, 2017).

Community involvement in schools helps achieve shared goals and improves educational outcomes. It can enhance student performance, increase resources, and foster a sense of ownership. Community partnerships support teacher development and promote community engagement. This collaboration builds trust and invests in the school's success. Effective school-community partnerships lead to overall school improvement (Shazia, 2022).

The community can significantly contribute to various school-related factors, including creating a supportive home environment, providing educational assistance, helping prevent dropout rates, and participating in school funding. By doing so, the community can act as a vital link between government initiatives and community needs, ensuring that educational programs are effective and relevant (Putnam, 2003).

Education is the backbone of any society and its economy. Education provides man force, boosts industry and brings in positive changes in the social and economic spheres of the society. It is proven across the globe that the quality education is responsible for producing quality of economy and improves quality of individuals (Astakhova et al., 2016). However, the quality and effective schools are the agents of quality education, which cannot run without effective management whose role is vital in several aspects (Day et al., 2016).

The effective management and administration of schools have remained a very crucial, and therefore has remained a question for its targeted achievement due to several internal and external elements (Bellei, 2020). Although it has been observed empirically that the school leaders are crucial role player in the provision of quality education and developing and maintaining the nature and quality of pupils' learning experience, but they are always strongly influenced by the circumstances in which they work. The education quality is directly proportional to the effective administration and management. According to a research, managers of educational institutes are responsible to make the school environment congenial and provide facilities for effective teaching learning process (Suleman et al., 2011).

Officers in education then execute the policy and plan among the schools at the last tier of the management. It is envisioned as a hierarchical structure with a high degree of centralization, characterized by a top-heavy approach (at the sector and division levels) and a leaner presence at the grassroots level (district and school). This configuration is prone to bureaucratic inefficiencies, ineffective resource allocation, and poor personnel management, which can hinder the successful implementation of policies (Yusoff et al., 2018).

The devolution of authorities and devolution of power at the district level have further enhanced the role of District Officers in education. He/she has to perform variety of functions and roles in the education at district level. General administration of the district, Human resource management, Monitoring and evaluation, planning and development, quality assurance, co-curricular activities, financial management, procurement and community involvement are some of the key roles that the District Officers in education play (SELD, 2017). After the 18th amendment, the education subject moved to the province of Sindh, which is headed by a minister and a secretary. The secretary is further coordinated by the Directors at the division level who forward the policy and plan to the district education officers for the implementation. Meanwhile, the District Officers in education then execute the policy and plan among the schools at the last tier of the management.

Research gap

In Sindh, during 2020-21, 47,551 schools were monitored, revealing:

1. 33,348 functional schools
 2. 12,000 non-viable schools (permanently or temporarily closed)
 3. Only 49% of functional schools had basic facilities like water, electricity, toilets, and boundary walls.
- This highlights the crucial role of District Education Officers in ensuring quality education and effective school functioning, which is the focus of this investigation in Shikarpur District. During the data collection phase from the selected population, the community appeared to be one of the important factors that contributes in the effective schools.

Research objectives

1. To examine the role of District Education Officers in effective functioning of schools in secondary education in district Shikarpur
2. To investigate the elements which affect the role of district education officers with relation to the effective functioning of schools

Significance of the study

The research provides comprehensive empirical insights from the point of district education officers for the role the community plays and the challenges it shoots off in the functioning of the secondary schools in district Shikarpur. By identifying the community as one of the important factors that contributes to the effective or ineffective functioning of schools, the study can help DEOs and other education stakeholders take target-oriented actions to improve school management and overall educational outcomes. The study

provides an understanding of the communal stakes, strikes and issues related to their behavior towards students, teachers, school and education as a whole, and leads towards the rectification of the policies and practices to engage community and utilize their potential in the school development and functioning.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study used qualitative research with an exploratory design to understand the perceptions and experiences of district education officers, school heads, and teachers (Mills & Gay, 2019). The study applied Grounded Theory, a technique that helps develop theories based on collected data (Saunders, cited in Makri & Neely, 2021). Grounded Theory involves collecting and analyzing data to develop ideas and theories that are grounded in evidence (Haris, 2014). This approach allows researchers to understand people's behavior and relationships without preconceived notions, letting the data guide the research (Noble & Mitchell, 2016); (Harris, 2015).

Data collection methods

This qualitative research collected participants' views through semi-structured interviews to gain new insights (Bolderston, 2012). The interviews used 21 open-ended questions to gather opinions and views (Creswell & David, 2018). The researcher made conscious decisions to adjust questions and separate relevant from irrelevant data. This approach helped develop a theory grounded in the data. The goal was to explore participants' experiences in-depth.

Population

The population of district education officers, heads/principals and teachers at secondary level in District Shikarpur is given below.

Table 1

Population of education officers, heads/principals and teachers at secondary level

S. No	Designation	Number
1	District Education Officers (General)	01
2	Deputy District Education Officer	04
3	Assistant Education Officer	04
4	Taluka Education Officers	08
5	Heads/Principals	64
6	Teachers	2,368

(Directorate General Monitoring and Evaluation, 2021)

Sample of study

For this study, the purposive technique of sampling was used because purposive sampling. A sample of 20 to 30 participants can best fit for data of multiple contexts, if the two indicators-Representativeness and Redundancy of information-are taken care of (Mills & Gay, 2019). Keeping these in view, the researcher chose the following sample.

Table 2

Sample for the study

S. No	Designation	Number
1	District Education Officers (General)	01
2	Deputy District Education Officer	01
3	Assistant Education Officer	01
4	Taluka Education Officers	02
5	Heads/Principals	04
6	Teachers	16

Research instrument

The research was carried out using in-depth semi-structured interviews which are open-ended questions. There were three different types of interview protocols for three distinct groups of participants (teachers, headmasters/principals and education officers respectively) having 21 open ended questions.

DATA ANALYSIS

The study used thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes in the qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews (Naeem et al., 2023). This approach helped gain new insights and understanding of the data, differing from other methods like grounded theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis allowed for a detailed examination of the data, revealing underlying meanings and concepts. By analyzing the data thematically, the study aimed to provide a rich and nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences. This approach enabled the researcher to identify and interpret the themes that emerged from the data.

Objective 2: To investigate the elements which affect the role of district education officers with relation to the effective functioning of schools with reference to Community as an element

When the data of dysfunctional schools, the schools with incomplete facilities and poor academic results of students, mentioned in the problem statement of the current study, were shared with the participants for their views, their comments sparked data insights that centralize community and education department including EOs playing their due role jointly for EFS.

EO3 told that: *Brother, these schools are closed due to many reasons. One reason is law and order situation. There are many schools in rural areas which are not functioning because there are tribal clashes. The teachers and officers cannot go there for the fear of life. What can DEO do? He will not go to the places where tribal clashes are going on. It is the matter of the government to control law and order situation. A DEO will just report to the government.*

There are mixed perceptions of EO1 and EO2 on the role of community.

I told you some schools were closed in my circle. I put efforts and restarted those closed schools. High school Budhal Faqeer was reopened with my efforts, villagers support and teacher's role. The schools closed in rural areas are because of law-and-order situation. We call it NO-GO areas. There is a high School in Sher Ali Jatoti or if you go to the side of Khanpur. There the teachers are robbed, that's why these schools are closed.

There is a village Kutan in our district. As a TEO, I visited it along with the help personnels given by a powerful political person. I saw that there the boys were wearing bullet belts, now in that area who will go there? If anyone is doing duty for the bread and butter of the family and he is kidnapped, the family

will be in big trouble. Now tell me how will a poor teacher pay the ransom money and get released (EO2, EO1).

The remarks of EO4 are given below:

Whatever difficulties we face are presented there. Like law and order near a school or illegal occupation of a school, they are solved there. A school was illegally occupied. We informed DC and he evacuated the said school with the help of police.

The second scarcity is the scarcity of the cooperation of the parents. No parent is ready to take care of their children. If the parents cooperate, our schools will progress. A teacher established a library in Village Gaheja where he invited me on the opening ceremony. A news reporter asked me: sir the schools are made animal locks. I replied: when the people of the village and member of civil society are not awake, this thing will continue. If they wake up, then no school will be closed and turned into animals' lock.

If you can see the ground realities so you will find that it is we people who are breaking the walls of the schools are you are taking away the metallic property of the school so it is we who can run the school properly. Who will come then the dacoits will come and they do this all no. We don't consider the schools as our home. (HM1, HM2)

The following are the comments of secondary school teachers:

The external involvement such as involvement of reporters, and other social sectors should not be allowed in the proper functioning of the school. The problem is that if the community does not cooperate or watch on the activities of their children who learn bad things in bad company. With these bad habits the child comes to the school. So, when the problem happens the community people charge on the school. In achievements of the school the community of the school does not appreciate us. The solution is that the SMC must conduct a meeting with the community members.

The politicians of the area have stopped visiting the schools. With their visits in the schools, there will be impact on the institutions. There will be quality education. If the political person reaches his hometown, there will be fear across the area that maybe he visits the school. There can be a big impact on the attendance, neatness and environment of the school.

There is political pressure on DEO where certain politically influenced people get work done and the management gets weaker. They do not think that the school will be closed but the DEOs/TEOs transfer them on the pressure or for the sake of the money. (JEST1, HST1, HST2, HST3)

DISCUSSION

The comments of teachers, schools heads and education officers bear witness that involvement of in tribal clashes is not only a blow on the functioning of schools in the areas, but it is serious strike on the future of their children too. The tribal clashes and other law and order situation make it difficult for education officers to implement policy and procedures and operate the schools as per standards.

The political involvement in school operations indicate not only misuse of the allocated public power for the welfare of the same public but also incorporate non-viable environment for the education officers to sustain education and school effectiveness. The findings in the PhD thesis of Naheed Anjum, published in a journal, depicts the similar scenario of political pressures (Anjum et al., 2019).

The tribal clashes, use of school premises, properties for personal gains and demolishing of schools are another disturbing factor for the EOs to maintain the effectiveness of the schools in district Shikarpur. The limited authority of EOs and capability issues cause worsening of the physical condition and quality of the schools. Naheed Anjum also argues that role of community, such as lack of interest, ownership, poor coordination by socio-religious sectors, is hindering the development the society and educational programs (Anjum et al., 2019). The findings of Syed Manzoor H. Shah suggest that they (DEOs) do not enjoy full cooperation from the community while executing different educational activities at district and institution level (Shah & Muhammad, 2012).

The community involvement is one of the key roles that the District Officers in education play for the education sustainability and in the achievement of the educational goals. (SELD, Job Description of District Education Officer, 2017). The illegal occupation of school buildings, breaking of the walls and furniture, burgling of the furniture and personal usage of school material by community members indicates unawareness of the importance of education and careless attitude of community towards schools. There has been no social proof of educational success of students around the community, which could create the awareness and importance of the schools. As per the data insights from teachers and school heads, the education officers have not played any significant role in creating education awareness and ownership for the schools in the given community.

FINDINGS

1. Law and order situation, tribal clashes, and community's irresponsible attitude create hindrance for education officers in efforts to bring effective functioning of the secondary schools.
2. Education Officers (EOs) face challenges in implementing developmental programs due to community's uncooperative attitude.
3. Education officers consider community involvement as crucial for effective functioning of schools and positive relationships between EOs, teachers, and community members can lead to successful school outcomes.
4. Lack of community awareness and appreciation for education contributes to school dysfunction.
5. Politicians' visits to schools can positively affect school environment and quality education.

SUMMARY

The study reveals that community plays a significant role in the matters of schools. While some community members hinder EFS efforts of education officers due to tribal clashes, law and order issues, and irresponsible attitudes, others have shown positive involvement in supporting schools. EOs' vision and position are crucial in making schools functional and efficient. The findings suggest that community awareness, appreciation, and cooperation are essential for successful EFS initiatives.

WAY FORWARD

Establish Community-School Partnerships: Develop formal partnerships between schools and community organizations to promote mutual understanding and support.

Empower Local Leaders: Identify and empower local leaders to carry out EFS initiatives and facilitate community engagement. Develop strategic plans to resolve communal riots and clashes for long lasting and national interests

Contextualized Solutions: Develop context-specific solutions that address the unique challenges faced by education officers in ringing EFS in different areas.

Legal Support: Provide legal and law-enforcement support to EOs when required in order to sustain schools functioning.

Community Awareness: Organize public awareness on larger scales through seminars, village gatherings, social and electronic media and in religious places for gaining quick and long term support and ownership from the community

By implementing these recommendations and moving forward with a collaborative and community-driven approach, it is possible to improve the effectiveness of schools and promote Education for Sustainability (EFS) in the region.

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BIOGRAPHY of AUTHORS



Author: Nematullah Chandio is an educational leader and manager with over 20 years of both national and international experience in teaching and administration. He holds master's in English degree from Shah Abdul Latif University and MPhil in Education from the University of Sindh. His recent credential comes from University of Michigan in Leadership and Management course. He has made significant contributions as a Principal at The Educators School System and The Smart School System, as well as a Project Manager at The Crest College. Currently, he is serving as a Lecturer of Education in College Education Department, Government of Sindh. He has skilled in leadership, public relations, and effective



communication. Chandio speaks English, Urdu, and Sindhi fluently.

Co-author: Oojala Tasneem is an award-winning High School Teacher in District Hyderabad, where she has been educating students in English and Biology since 2014. Currently, she also serves as the District STEAM Focal Person for Hyderabad, promoting science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics education. Her excellence in teaching has garnered international recognition, including an award from UNESCO in 2023 during a teaching competition among nine SCO countries. She was also nominated as the Best Teacher in Sindh for 2024 by STEDA. In 2022, Ms. Tasneem has attended the prestigious Teacher Exchange Alumni (TEA) training program in the U.S.A., fully funded by the U.S. State Department.



Co-author: Rida Zehra is currently serving as a Junior Elementary School Teacher (JEST, BPS-14) at Government Girls High School, Makli, Sindh, Pakistan. She is pursuing her MPhil in Education, with a strong interest in educational development, teaching methodologies, and student motivation. Her professional experience in the public education sector has provided her with practical insights into classroom management and learner engagement. Rida is passionate about promoting quality education and empowering students through innovative and inclusive teaching practices. Her academic and professional journey reflects a deep commitment to improving the standards of education in her community.