

**Exploring the Causes of High Performing and Low Performing Public Sector
Secondary Schools: A Case Study**

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore the causes of high performing and low performing secondary schools of the public sector. It was qualitative research. Data were collected from three administrative officials (i.e. 1 DPI (SE), 1 CEO Lahore, and 1 DEO (SE)) using purposive sampling technique. A semi structured interview protocol was developed for DPI (SE), CEO, and DEO (SE) to collect their opinions regarding school performance. Thematic analysis of the qualitative data was done with the help of NVIVO software. The result of the present research showed that the causes which affect the institutional performance are qualified and professional officers, strong monitoring system, vision of policy makers, admin officers, curriculum, delivery of curriculum, quality of school culture, school leadership, vision and mission of school leadership, leadership practices, provision of human resources, provision of physical resources, school and community relations. The recommendations were also presented.

Keywords: School Performance, Low performing School, Public Sector

Introduction

Education plays a vital role in the development of a nation. It reduces poverty and provides essential human capital that is necessary for economic growth. Investment on education must be enhanced for the progress of the country (Risikat, 2010). International

focus is on primary education (Millennium Development Goals) and secondary education is being neglected. As a result the enrollment rate is very poor at secondary level. This issue can be solved by increasing the number of schools' infrastructure (Philip Richardson, 2011). The role of government in secondary education is not as clear as in primary education. Investment in secondary education is necessary for economic growth and poverty reduction. There can be no improvement in higher education without improving the secondary level (Ahmad & Luqman, 2012).

No doubt, secondary education is important in Pakistan because it serves as a foundation for advanced education, and consequently the nature of advanced education is impacted by optional instruction. Optional instruction is expected to increment and work on such capacities in puberty, allowing them to perform a valuable role as Pakistani citizens (Baloch & Khalid, 1990). Secondary education is helping students build abilities and skills that will enable them to: i) Assume responsibility for their benefits and rights in relation to others, and recognize the importance of discourse, cooperation, solidarity, and respect for human rights as fundamental values in a democratic society and ii) Acquire foundational information that enables students to engage in professional activities while also easing the transition from the classroom to the workplace (Shah, Majoka & Khan, 2011).

Secondary education is an important segment in every person's life. It is the key to human resource development, allowing people from all walks of life an equal opportunity for success (Farooq, Chaudhry, Shafiq & Berhanu, 2015). The success of a plan or the performance of the workers depends on the relationship between the leaders and followers. If there is harmony and transparency, the performance would have been good otherwise on the contrary in case of their absence the performance would have been bad.

Institutional performance is defined as the socially constructed conceptions of organizational performance that become firmly institutionalized as legitimate aspects of achievement in institutional fields (Modell, 2019). Previously a lot of research has been done on institutional performance. Different researchers researched various variables and a lot of different variables were studied. This research is different in a way that it is the first research in which the causes of institutional performance were discussed. As prescribed by Ghai and Vivian (2014), the causes of institutional performance are not haphazard tasks and it has always been planned and thought over. Causes of low performance of schools were given below:

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1. Other administrative and school management-related problems

The Pakistani government has been chastised for its poor educational performance. The educational system is sloppy, corrupt, and powerless in the face of the student community. There are no adequate checks in place to ensure that educational institutions work properly. At all levels, accountability is lacking. The parents share responsibility for the declining standard. Academic activities at home are recognised as the most essential source of academic support for a child. In addition to administrative and school management-related problems parental irresponsibility, contribute to low performance (Nauman, 2019).

2. Administrative Causes

A leadership team with responsibility for school leadership is one of the many different forms of new leadership trends being practiced in secondary schools (Barnett & McCormick, 2012). The quality of executive leadership can be the most critical determinant of the growth in scope and authority of an international organization. An executive leader protects and develops his position as a top man along with the responsibility of creating a new administrative power base in his/her institution (Cox, 2009). Instead of making permanent appointments, vacant seats are frequently filled by ad hoc appointments or delegating/ assigning extra charges to current officials at the administrative level. Such appointed officials either overlook or are unable to visit low performing schools in order to enhance their performance due to a heavy workload (Emma, 2020).

3. Lack of training

Data on poor performing schools is collected by district education administrations and provincial education departments, but due to a lack of institutional ability to use this data for planning and monitoring reasons, no further process is undertaken. Officials from the districts also lack a culture data driven monitoring and feedback to schools, so they are unable to provide appropriate advice. It is obvious that a school's performance is influenced by a variety of elements. The study also looked into how district officials interacted with the schools, and it found out that they were more tolerant with the low-performing ones than with the others (Nargis, 2021). It's no surprise that education administrators at the district or tehsil levels aren't well versed in school administration. These officials come from a teaching background, and as a result, they lack many of the abilities required to govern a successful education system.

4. School Management Related Causes

The bulk of these individuals began their careers as teachers before being promoted to managerial positions or becoming headmasters; they were never given specific training on how to do it correctly, and as a result, they are frequently unable to run things successfully owing to outside influences (Ahmad, 2019). To strengthen their capacity, education managers at the tehsil level require greater assistance. They lack budgetary and financial management abilities, IT-based methods to education management and school monitoring, as well as related departmental laws and regulations. They also lack pedagogy training, which will help teachers teach subjects more effectively, as well as community mobilization, which will allow people to work together toward a similar goal. The majority (87%) identified certain areas where improvements could be made, such as needs-based expenditure on teacher development programmes or enhancing community collaborations amongst schools, but only 29% had implemented them (Ghaffar, 2003).

5. Teachers' Related Causes

School offices are not worried about children's education in low performing schools; educators' unfavourable attitudes are turning guardians away. Amin, Aldakhil, Wu, Rezaei and Cobanoglu (2017) recognizes that incompetent instructors are one of the major reasons for helpless school execution in his study. In Pakistan, educators' professional development has received insufficient attention, and is exemplified by low capability and poor performance due to a lack of preparation, inspiration, outdated strategies (e.g., focusing on remembrance rather than sober-mindedness), and overcrowding. As a result, educators are seen as feeble and inert in the classroom. The 4Cs (communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and cooperation) are used to bridge the gap between home and school, allowing parents and administrators to positively support the teaching-learning process (Ashraf, 2018). When teachers value parents they are more inclined to urge them to engage. In low-performing schools, however, teachers' nasty and uncaring attitudes discourage parents, resulting in a breakdown in communication and both parties blaming each other, especially when the child appears to be a passive learner. As a result, schools struggle.

6. Community-Related Causes

Society and parents have important roles in ensuring the quality of education in schools, and this association has an impact (Townsend, 2010; Osaikhiuwu, 2014; Wolfendale and Bastiani, 2012). Community involvement in schools may be a fertile ground for growth

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that extends far beyond access. Parental and community involvement in school issues has become yet another important driver of school improvement. To solve school challenges, high-performing schools frequently enlist the help of school boards of trustees or guardians' panels (Verspoor, 2015). In fact, a child's first school is his or her mother's lap. Parents are overbearing when it comes to their children. They are free to do whatever they choose. Poor discipline is primarily caused by a lack of good child rearing. Adolescence is beyond the control of parents. However, Huq et al., (2004) discovered that high-performing schools' school executives committees were extremely concerned about keeping up with the nature of instruction, which contributed to the schools' overall instructive climate, whereas low-performing schools' local areas are less concerned about similar issues and have a significant impact on the nature of training in schools (Carron & Chau, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

In the advancement of a country education plays a vital role. Despite knowing this fact, generally across Pakistan, especially in Punjab province, most of the secondary schools of the public sector which are considered as the place where productive citizens and leaders are prepared for future careers are not performing up to the mark. These schools have significant shortcomings regarding BISE results and 14 Monthly Indicators which have been taken by the researcher to judge the performance. The low performing schools' dropout is alarming, quality and standard of teaching/learning activities are questionable. The best performers are awarded 'the star-teacher award' and appreciation certificates while the low performers are punished according to the PEEDA Act, 2006. All the untiring efforts, splendid, and visionary policies of the government could not be useful enough to achieve a high level of the standard in education. This intense and serious situation in the schools motivated the researcher to identify the causes of high performing and low performing secondary schools of the public sector. Although, the situation is not hundred percent depressing as there are some schools that are doing well, and amongst these is the one that the researcher is going to investigate for study purposes as the high performer and selected the topic as "Investigation of the causes of high performing and low performing secondary schools of public sector".

Significance of the Study

It is hoped that the results of the present study would help the stakeholders (policy

makers, school administration department, school heads, teachers, students, and community) in different ways. The results of the in-hand research may provide useful information to the policy makers regarding the extent of quality education provided by the institutions that is the foremost objective of stakeholders so that they would improve sufficiently and effectively the recruiting policy to have better results at the time of hiring head teachers and teachers. Results of the study may help educational administrative department by providing awareness about how their institutes are providing quality education or performance, and to what extent they manage the provision of quality education, where it is lacking if their institutes are performing poorly or where to take remedial measures. The head teachers at the secondary schools may also be beneficiaries by knowing the administrative and school management related factors which affect their institutional performance. School teachers of secondary level may also be recipients of the results of the present study by knowing their performance and by knowing the causes which affect their institutional performance. The results of the present study may also be helpful for students and community by knowing the extent their kids are getting quality education and what are the performance levels of the institutes in which their kids are being taught and trained. The results may provide the layout, to make other institutions, stakeholders, and policymakers abreast with all the technological, methodological, philosophical, situational, and educational trends and pathways to be followed. The present comprehensive study may help stakeholders to improve teaching as well as learning quality and at the same time the institutional performance, granting due importance to school staff and students to enhance their potential to prove themselves as the best of all others in that department. These case studies gave the snapshot of standard and substandard performer institutes to increase the standard of education. Moreover, it may provide the basis for policymaking in future to differentiate between the high performing and the low performing public sector secondary schools indicating and investigating the merits and demerits which these have. This difference may draw a line between the high and low performing institutions and may help all those who want to excel in the field of education. Policy makers, researchers and future leaders may benefit from it to improve the institutional performance. Further, the present study is expected to advance knowledge and provide basis for further research on similar topics and issues. The researchers formulated the following objectives to accomplish the current research:

1. To explore the perceptions of stakeholders (i.e. DPI (SE), CEO, DEO (SE)) about the causes which affect the institutional performance at the secondary level

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2. To explore the perceptions of stakeholders (i.e. DPI (SE), CEO, DEO (SE)) about the gaps either at the administrative level or at the institutional level
3. To suggest the ways of improving institutional performance at secondary level.

Research Questions

- 1.1: What are your views about the high performance of the institution?
- 1.2: What are the characteristics of the high performance of the institution?
- 1.3: Which key factors are playing an important role in the high performance of the institution?
- 2: Where do you find the gaps in institutional performances either at the administrative level or at the institutional level?
- 3: How can institutional performance be improved at secondary level?

Research Methodology

The current research was conducted to investigate the causes of high performing and low performing secondary schools of the public sector. Qualitative research is a less structured research methodology used to gain in-depth information about people's underlying reasoning and motivations (Yogesh, 2010). The end goal is to develop a deep understanding of a topic, issue, or problem from a researcher/ individual perspective (Jack & Baxter, 2014). It was conducted by collecting the response of administrators through special designed interviews. To answer the research questions or to investigate the causes of low performing and high performing schools, the researcher followed constructivists' approach. Constructivists guarantee that reality is relative and that it is reliant upon one's point of view, (Robert Stake ,1995 and Robert Yin (2003, 2006).

By adopting this approach, the researcher closely collaborated with participants (DPI, CEO, DEO) to collect their views based on reality for better understanding about the causes of low and high performing schools of the public sector.

From the school administration, 1 DPI (SE), 1 CEO, and 1 DEO-SE of the Lahore district were selected as the sample of the study.

In the light of the nature of the research and research objectives of the study, a semi structured interview protocol was developed for DPI (SE), CEO, DEO (SE) to collect their opinions regarding school performance. The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions based on different content regarding causes of high performing and low performing

secondary schools. After the development of the instruments, these were sent to the experts for validation. After making changes based on validation results, the interview protocol was ready for final administering for data collection. Content validity reflects whether the information asked for, were related to the research questions.

For pilot testing, two participants were selected who were not included in the sample to ensure its content reliability and validity. The researchers personally contacted DPI (SE), CEO Lahore, and DEO (SE) to take permission for a meeting regarding gathering information about the administrative process and causes of low performing and high performing secondary schools by conducting interviews. When they granted permission for meeting, the researcher met turn wise to each of the administrative respondents and gathered information about the supervisory process and causes of low performing and high performing secondary schools by conducting interviews. Conducting interviews via semi-structured protocol assisted researcher in achieving higher response rate.

For interviews appointments were made prior to the date of the interviews and suitable arrangements were done. The interviews were all recorded with the consent of the concerned participants and data were derived from these recordings to be used for this study. Before commencing the interview, the interviewees were told about the use of this research, the type of questions that would be asked and how they can withdraw from the interview at any stage they wanted without any penalties or problems. All respondents were informed regarding collected data and that it would be used only for research purposes. The final conclusions drawn from the research were not meant to falsify, discredit, or hurt any of the participants and the researcher has drawn conclusions for the betterment of the education system without any external pressure.

As data were collected from the respondents, in the form of interviews. It was prepared and organized to create initial codes to combine it into themes according to research objectives. Therefore, the following steps were taken to analyze the qualitative data:

Step 1: Developing and applying codes to explain and categorize data and given titles

Step2: Identifying themes, patterns, and relationships to generate findings.

Step3: Summarizing the data to link research objectives

Thematic analysis of the qualitative data was done with the help of NVivo software. Qualitative research with the case study design was used to collect the data which would be analyzed on the next few pages. The researchers had a pile of interview transcripts.

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Results

The aim of the present study was to investigate the causes of low performing and high performing secondary schools of the public sector. For it, the researchers collected data from education administrative officials also via conducting semi structured interview protocol to investigate the causes of low performing and high performing secondary school through their lenses. This section deals with qualitative analysis of the administrative officials:

Research Question 1.1: What are your views about the high performance of the institution?

Table 1

Administrative staff's Views about Performance of the Institution

Participants	Main Theme	Sub Theme
P1	View about performance	1. To follow 14 indicators
P2		2. Students' performance
P3		3. To follow 14 indicators & Students' performance

Three administrative officials (DPI (SE), CEO Lahore, and DEO(SE)) were interviewed individually, when the researcher explored their views about performance of the institution; one of them said that: There are certain indicators to measure the performance of any institute. The extent they meet the indicators, they are being rated accordingly. Moreover, there are different criteria for each indicator. The one which would be achieving the high level of that indicator, will be considered as a high performer, the other one which would be meeting low level of indicators, would be considered as low performer. According to this criterion, the schools which are achieving low level of these indicators are being considered as low performers, and those schools which are achieving high level of these indicators, are considered as high performing school.

Another official respondent stated this question as: The school performance can be measured on the basis of the number of students who passed the board exam. Moreover, what is the percentage of their excellent performers, very good performers, and so on. If most of their students would be excellent performers, it may be said, the school is performing high, if the majority of their students' performance would be average or low, it indicates that the school is a low performer.

In response to this question, the third of the official respondents also agreed with the first and second respondents. It is concluded from the responses of the officials that the performance of any school is measured against performance indicators and based on BISE exam results.

Research Question 1.2: What are the characteristics of the high performance of the institution?

Table 2

Administrative staff's Views about the Characteristics of High Performance of the Institution

Participants	Main Theme	Sub Theme
P1	Characteristics of high performance	Effective leadership with clear vision & mission.
P2		Conducive learning environment
P3		Set strategies for instruction & assessment

When the researcher raised question during the conversation, what are the characteristics of high performance of the institution; on the response two of them said that the associated characteristics with high-performing schools are these: foremost characteristic of high performing school is effective school leadership, secondly: one which Keeps high standards and meets the expectations of all the students and parents. Moreover, it has a clear and shared focus, vision and mission, high levels of collaboration and communication, and the set curriculum, instructions and assessments are aligned with the given standards.

The other one of them also responded this question as: The characteristics of a high performing school are that the students are achieving marks above board average or more than that. A good school is where there is effective leadership, conducive learning environment, effective teaching and learning, emphasizing on responsibilities and rights, involving parents in productive activities, and developing skilled staff.

Research Question 1.3: Which key factors are playing an important role in the high performance of the institution?

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Table 3

Administrative staff's Views about the Important Key factors for Institution's High Performance

Participants	Main Theme	Sub Theme
P1		Leadership
P2	School	Leadership styles
P3	management	Appreciation and recognition

While conducting an interview, the researcher raised the question, which factors are playing an important role in the high performance of the institution.

More or less all the respondents said that school management itself was an important factor in the high performance of the institute. Majority of education managers at the district or tehsil levels started their careers as school teachers and were eventually posted over time in management roles to become school heads. These officials have not been provided specific training on management and planning skills. Since they came from the teaching cadre, they often lacked adequate skills required for education planning, budgeting, and management; therefore they are unable to run school efficiently. If professional and managerial skill holder officers are appointed, they can raise the graph of school performance.

Respondent 1 said that “although the headship is not an easy post, and it is not easy for head-teachers to run an institute where there is not the same interest of the mutual performing outstanding. The respondent further added that: There would be lots of factors which play an important role in the high performance of the school. Firstly, the factor which is playing the most important role in high performance is “School leadership”. A good school leader lays down the fortune of the school. He/she has a vision and mission. A school leader sets his/her priorities, identifies the action, and plans for the future to improve the school's performance.

Other respondents while responding to this question said that the head teacher, who has natural quality of leadership, produces excellent results, or the one who is head of institute and is intellectual also, produces good results. The respondent further stated that:

Factors which play an important role in the performance of an institute are ‘leadership style of head teacher’. There are lots of tasks which head teachers must do. Only a single person could not do it alone. So, the school leaders of high performing institutes, adopt

‘transformational leadership’ style to perform their tasks. They transform school tasks following the rule of “Right task to the right person”. They make sub committees to perform tasks and they play the roles of monitor and mentor for its completion.

The third one responded this question as: Factors which play an important role in the performance of an institute are “appreciation” and “recognition”. The appreciation and recognition play an important role to uplift the performance of the school. The school administration and management which applies these factors (appreciation and recognition) according to their own level, improves the performance of institutions for sure. Moreover, he said another factor is ‘transparent relationships’. The leader of a high performing school builds positive transparent relationships horizontally and vertically.

Research Question 2: Where do you find the gaps in institutional performances either at the administrative level or at the institutional level?

Table 4

Administrative staff’s Views about the Gaps in institutional Performance

Participants	Main Theme	Sub Theme
P1	Gap in institutional performance	Lack of coordination between admin and management
P2		Inefficient & irresponsible head teachers
P3		Monitoring but not mentoring

While responding, the researcher raised a question in the light of said problems as, where do you find gaps in institutional performance, either administrative level or at the institutional level?

While responding to this question, one of the respondents takes a deep sigh and said: There are lots of other gaps. School leaders are not professionally qualified and could not understand their responsibilities. The key role of school head teachers is to bridge the gap between school administration and community. They manage communication with teachers, parents, students, administration. Teachers are also not motivated and have no aptitude for teaching. They know very little about teaching pedagogies at students’ level or the nature of the content. Most of the school leaders neither have the ability to resolve their problems at

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school level nor do they have empathy for them. Poor school administrative response and inappropriate school management leads to poor performance.

Two of the respondents among the administration officials said that institutions are responsible for their performance. School leaders are not playing their role in this regard. Either they do not want to bring change in this system, or they are not eligible for that post. School administrators who are playing their role, they are providing all school facilities to institutes at their level, professional development training is being conducted for their professional development. All types of funds are being provided but school leaders use it according to their insight and vision. All officials must visit their school and point out weak points at every visit, and advise them to resolve it. Officials must also point out to them how to resolve their issues, but they criticize rather than mentoring and helping them in this connection. So, institutes must be responsible for their performance.

Research Question 3: How can institutional performance be improved at secondary level?

Table 5

Administrative staff's Views about the Strategies to Improve Institutional Performance

Participants	Main Theme	Sub Theme
P1	Strategies to improve institutional performance	Responsible educational hierarchy
P2	institutional performance	Positive role of Policy makers
P3	performance	Conducive atmosphere

Keeping the chain of conversation while interview, the researcher asked, “how can institutional performance be improved at the secondary level?”. On the response, one of the administration officials said: To improve the performance of an institution, each responsible person/ stakeholder should have to perform his/her duty at their own level. Educational hierarchy is responsible to play an effective role to improve institutional performance. The policy makers also contribute to the school performance by changing policy based on previous gaps and work on selection criteria for the selection of educational officials, school leaders, and teachers etc. School administration should also change their strategies o run their schools. When they play a mentoring role along with monitoring, performance of schools will improve automatically. School performance will improve if the school leaders set their vision and mission, adopt positive mental attitude, by providing professional assistance to their

teachers, involving community in school issues, creating conducive learning environment in school, believing in teamwork, coordinating horizontally and vertically.

Other two educational administrative officials responded to this question as; policy makers play an important role in the postulation of educational goals. By conducting national achievement surveys, they can find the areas of improvement and make new policies according to their findings. By changing selection criteria or introducing an accreditation system for teachers' selection, solving schools' and teachers' issues, organizing professional training, providing, and maintaining infrastructure can contribute to the improvement of school performance. To improve institutional performance, teachers play a key role in this regard. They can improve this system professionally keeping by themselves updated, adopting problem solving methodology, creating conducive learning environment in the classroom, helping the students to understand their problems, by linking the lesson with students' practical lives, coming in the class with lesson plan and proper A.V, aids and by adopting latest assessment techniques.

Conclusion

The aim of the present research is to investigate the causes of low performing and high performing schools of the public sector. In this regard, opinions have been collected from 1 DPI, 1 CEO, 1 DEO in the selected district. It is concluded that according to school administrative officers' perception, the causes which affect the institutional performance are qualified and professional officers, strong monitoring system, vision of policy makers, admin officers, curriculum, delivery of curriculum, quality of school culture, school leadership, vision and mission of school leadership practices, provision of human resources, provision of physical resources, school and community relations.

Recommendations

Keeping in view the fore-mentioned findings, the recommendation is to produce high quality leadership which may be facilitated, motivated and trained on a regular basis to check and enhance the performance of the institutions. According to the DPI, CEO, and DEO and other stakeholders the selection criterion of the government to select educational officers or staff is not appropriate. To surmount the explored deficiencies of the public schools, the government may expedite and reform the selection criteria of admin education officers, teaching staff. Introduce licensing system especially for the selection of administrative, supervisory, and teaching staff. It may be purely on merit basis.

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School leadership plays an important role in schools' performance. Due to lack of authority they cannot take accountability measures. To increase accountability at school level, school leaders may play an appropriate role if the school education department may share power and authority with them so that they may take the right decisions at the right time. There are rules, policies and valuable planning but implementation is not according to these. Every department and officer may play his/her role effectively and efficiently to have better results and improve the performance of the institutions.

Implications of the Research

1. The researcher aimed to cater to both theoretical as well as descriptive inferences via this research. There is a lot of room for future research in this sphere. This research has critically evaluated the key differences between high-performing and the low-performing schools. Though certain specifications should be kept in mind for different schools and different areas, the general results of this research can be applied to other researches too.
2. This shall provide a fundamental ground to work on and devise models for provision of necessities for the teachers, students, administration, and other stakeholders to function at their best. Our country is quite far from the target educational reforms needed to meet the international standards; additional work in this area shall bring us closer to our targets in the academic field.

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