



RESEARCH PAPER

School Leadership and Teacher Retention: Principals' Experiences in Managing High Teacher Turnover

¹Rabia Naseer, ²Ayesha Afzal, and ³Dr. Muhammad Jamil

1. MS Scholar, Department of Education, GC Women University, Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan
2. MS Scholar, Department of Education, GC Women University, Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan
3. Lecturer, Department of Education, GC Women University, Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan

Corresponding Author: m.jamil@gcwus.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

Leadership in educational settings plays a major role in impacting teacher productivity and organizational culture. The concern regarding teacher turnover has increased throughout international institutions of learning, especially within schools dealing with challenging situations. This study aims to explore the leadership approaches and lived experiences of private school principals to overcome the high teacher turnover rates. Ten principals of private schools in Sialkot were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants and lasted 30-40 minutes. The data were analyzed through the reflexive thematic analysis. Results show different aspects that influence teachers' turnover rate, including workload, inadequate compensation, residence issues, getting married, financial constraints, and strict management. The principals overcome the teachers' turnover rate by adopting the best and most effective leadership behaviors. These behaviors include value-based leadership, supportive leadership, and different approaches for retaining teachers.

KEYWORDS Leadership Approaches, Teachers' Turnover, Teachers' Retention, Phenomenological Analysis.

Introduction

It is commonly acknowledged that leadership in educational settings plays an important role in impacting teacher productivity and organizational culture. Teachers' thoughts about working conditions and job obligations are heavily influenced by various approaches to leadership used by school principals. Because it creates cohesiveness, encouragement, and mutual goals among workers, leadership that promotes transformation more specifically has been correlated to more effective instructional methods and a positive educational atmosphere. To enable the maintenance of commitment from teachers in rigorous traditional educational settings, such leadership methodologies enhance trust as well as engagement (Alzoraiki et al., 2024; Perrone, 2022). On the other hand, teachers may find themselves unsatisfied and less reluctant to persist in their current positions as a result of unproductive or aggressive leadership styles, which will eventually affect the productivity of the school as a whole (Hastings, 2024).

The concern regarding teacher turnover has increased throughout international institutions of learning, especially within schools dealing with challenging situations. A high rate of turnover imposes unnecessary budgeting and administrative pressure on academic institutions and is inconsistent with educational stability. It has an influence on academic performance. The range of elements has an effect on turnover. These elements include job-related stress, a shortage of possibilities for career growth, and inadequate levels of leadership guidance. These issues have grown worse recently, in particular within an after-pandemic scenario where educators find themselves dealing with a more demanding workplace and psychological stress (Morton & Maresh, 2024; Nguyen et al., 2020).

The philosophy regarding teacher retention, which concentrates on an institution's ability to keep a consistent and passionate instructional staff, is directly connected to turnover. Positive work settings, engaging management, and possibilities for career advancement are usually regarded as an indication of retention. Teachers are better able to remain active in their jobs and produce a beneficial mark on the educational results of students when they are recognized and motivated by their respective principals. Teachers' feelings of affiliation and satisfaction with their employment improve significantly with supportive leadership, acknowledgement, and engagement in standard decision-making procedures (Barnett, 2017; Ghaffar et al., 2025; Ismail & David, 2024; Jamil et al., 2024).

Educational leaders are becoming more focused on establishing and putting into execution on efficient, retention-promoting procedures in order to deal with the ongoing challenge of teacher turnover. These approaches involve establishing comfortable learning settings, enabling standard career development and mentoring, and establishing leadership approaches that promote the overall well-being of teachers first. Principals are more productive in minimizing rates of turnover when they communicate effectively with their staff, give attention to their problems, and build a welcoming atmosphere. Furthermore, long-term staff involvement is substantially improved by theories of leadership that emphasize self-reliance, collaborative effort, and interaction (Al Shebli, 2023; Scallon et al., 2023). Comprehending the style of leadership of principals becomes necessary in this instance to find effective methods to deal with high levels of teacher turnover and ensure long-term academic achievement (Farahmandpour & Voelkel, 2025).

Literature Review

The connection between turnover in teachers and leadership approaches has been comprehensively examined in the available literature. It emphasizes how significant principals at school are in affecting teachers' career development. Previous literature has inquired into how various approaches to leadership influenced instructors' preferences for staying in their professions or quitting their jobs. Alzoraiki et al. (2024) looked at how transformational leadership influenced educational effectiveness and academic environment. It was revealed that positive leadership decreases intentions to quit and enhances teacher involvement (Hastings, 2024). Additionally, a link was examined between turnover in teachers and traditional ways of leading. In accordance with the research outcomes, high levels of turnover are mostly caused by inadequate management. In the same way, Mullins (2024) examined the effects of basic methods of leadership on retention in more detail, highlighting that educators' dedication and satisfaction with their jobs are significantly influenced by standards of leadership. Teachers' perspectives on methods for leading had been the core subject of Scallon et al. (2023). The results of the study indicated that cultures that hinder entrepreneurship have been established by leaders who foster collaboration as well as teamwork. All these research findings point to the crucial role of leadership skills in managing entrepreneurship issues in educational institutions.

To establish the best educational policies and institutional practices, different studies have highlighted the elements that contribute to the rate of teachers' turnover and retention. A longitudinal research approach was utilized by Räsänen et al. (2020), demonstrating the two common factors that compel teachers to leave the profession. These factors include an inadequate level of assistance and continuous negative feedback from the principals of the institution. A meta-analysis approach was used by Nguyen et al. (2020) to explore the interconnected variables of turnover. Variables like assistance and guidance by leadership, too much pressure from tasks, and workplace conditions were demonstrated by this study. The rate of teacher retention is examined by Morton and Maresh (2024) before and after COVID-19. The researchers highlighted that crises made the existing challenges more complex. The challenges that are interconnected with the assistance and guidance system by the principal have a complex association. Farahmandpour and Voelkel (2025) focused on the variables that emphasized the level of schools. The researcher used a meta-

analysis approach for this study. It highlighted that the institutional culture and behavior of the principals with the staff play a major role in planning to stay or leave the job. Another study was carried out by Kamrath and Bradford (2020). The researcher used a case-study research approach and focused on the factors that contribute to the rate of retention. The study highlighted that standard workplace settings and styles of leadership directly influence the retention rate.

Positive styles of leadership improve the teacher retention rate. Many researchers emphasize those approaches and practices that enhance the teacher retention rate. The structure of leadership following the pandemic era was investigated by Ghamrawi et al. (2024). This study discovered that the approaches and practices of leadership used by the principals enhance the teacher retention rate. The continuity of the guidance and acknowledgment from the administrators helps to reduce the teachers' turnover rate and increase the retention rate found by Ismail and David (2024). The connection between Human Resource Management (HRM) and turnover was studied by Aduna et al. (2020) in educational institutions. The significance of guidance and consistency was emphasized by Samadi (2020). The study highlighted that these factors help to reduce teachers' turnover rate. The different educational institutions were explored by Arthur and Bradley (2023), which involves managing the complexities of the retention rate. Continuous guidance by the administrators of the institutions influences the rate of teachers' turnover, as demonstrated by this study. A framework was discovered by Nguyen and Springer (2023) related to the concepts of turnover. The researchers emphasize that the behavior of the principal affects the institutional contexts and decreases or increases the turnover and retention rates. Another study related to the effective approaches of leadership was examined by Perrone (2022). This study demonstrated these approaches as the central and crucial part in retaining instructors. In general, these researchers effectively deal with the turnover and retention challenges. The studies discovered the importance of leadership approaches and practices. These approaches significantly influence institutional settings and consistency, teachers' satisfaction, and career advancement.

Research Methodology

It was qualitative research with phenomenological research design. This research design facilitates researchers to get in-depth insights and participants' lived experiences about any phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Renjith et al., 2021). To ensure meaningful and rich data, a purposive sampling technique was used to select 10 participants from private schools in Sialkot. This sampling technique allows for the intentional selection of participants according to their experience (Obilor, 2023; Thomas, 2022). Data were collected using semi-structured interviews. A self-developed interview guide was used based on relevant previous literature and the purpose of the study. It was validated by three relevant experts. The interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants. The reflexive thematic analysis technique was used for data analysis. This technique enabled the identification of the patterns and themes from the information gathered. This technique preserved the consistency and the reliability of the data while analyzing the data (Ayre & McCaffery, 2022; Nowell et al., 2017). It also facilitates researchers analyzing the gathered information systematically. All ethical considerations, including confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity were ensured in the study.

Results and Discussion

The following are the results of the study with themes and sub-themes:

Reasons for Teacher Turnover

Low Salary Packages

The participants explained that when teachers discovered inadequate compensation in an institution, they started to think about leaving the job. Dissatisfaction with the compensation decreases the motivation among teachers and increases the rate of teachers' turnover. Participant 1 pointed out salary dissatisfaction by using these words:

Teacher turnover is very common in private schools. Many teachers change schools after seeing a difference of a thousand or two thousand in the salary scale, but Alhamdulillah, they are given the best salary package in this school. Therefore, teachers' turnover is not very high in my school.

Participant 4 describes turnover due to financial problems in the following words:

Sometimes, for professional issues, they are both personal and professional. For instance, this year, two of my teachers who had been working in this school for the last 4 years left the school, because the salary they were offered was good, and they left the school because of the financial crisis.

Heavy Workload Pressure

The findings highlighted that strict accountability and workload stress are major aspects of teachers' turnover. Because of their multiple responsibilities and excessive workload, teachers experienced burnout and stress, leading to a high turnover rate. Participant 1 explained the main reasons that promote teacher turnover in these words:

I mentioned earlier that not many teachers are left in my school. But if I talk in general terms, the overall main reasons why teachers leave school include the school environment, salary package, workload, strict accountability, and many other things.

Participant 7 highlighted the workload stress and lack of career growth by stating:

I think the main reasons for leaving school are the workload, the opportunity, and personal and family reasons. Plus, there is a lack of career growth as well, which demotivates the teacher. Both personal and professional reasons also push teachers out of the school.

Personal and Family Issues

The study highlighted personal and family issues affecting the rate of turnover such as family commitments, getting married, and residence issues. These factors make it more challenging to effectively manage the turnover problem. Participant 10 explained the personal and professional reasons as: *"Teachers generally leave for a better opportunity, salaries, or personal reasons such as marriage or a change of residence. Sometimes, the workload also becomes an issue. It is a combination of reasons, I think."*

Participant 9 linked the marriage of a teacher with the teachers' turnover intentions by saying that: *"It seems to me that the main issues for the unmarried are their married life, someone is getting engaged, or getting married, so what worries them during the session is whether it is their marriage."*

Better Career Opportunities

Teachers generally switched jobs to schools that provided greater possibilities for professional advancement in their careers, as reported by respondents. Teachers felt motivated to seek other employment possibilities through these opportunities. Participant 7 described this situation as: *"I think the major reasons for teachers to leave school are workload, opportunities, family, and personal issues. And, if they don't have growth opportunities, then it also decreases their motivation."* Participant 6 described the key factors that influence teachers to leave the job:

Yes, there are lots of reasons for a teacher to leave. And because of a good opportunity, a teacher can leave the job. Or sometimes, someone's salary can be an issue. Or the workload can be a problem. And sometimes, a teacher's personal life can have an impact.

Strategies Used to Reduce Turnover

Communication and Problem-Solving

Some principals emphasized transparent communication with teachers. It enables them to gain insight and manage the problems they are experiencing. The smooth involvement of principals in conflicts and the effective resolution of their problems decreases the rate of resignation among teachers. Participant 1 explained that effective communication skills can resolve the problem in the following words:

When a teacher wants to leave school, I communicate with them, and if there is any problem, I try to solve it. And in addition, if there is a very good teacher and he is not satisfied with his salary, then I try to increase his salary at least a little bit as per his request.

Participant 2 highlights the strategies to motivate teachers to retain them in the institute as:

Yes, if a teacher is discontent and wants to leave school, we ask them to talk to us, and in that conversation, we explain to them that they are good teachers in our school, and through this kind of behavior, if they feel that they are wanted, then it works in this matter.

Professional Development and Workshops

The findings indicated that educational programs, workshops, regular meetings, and mentorship empower the principals to retain teachers. Resources for career advancement also help them to overcome turnover and increase the teacher retention rate. These actions enabled teachers to feel acknowledged and engaged. Participant 1 explained about the workshops and sessions for teachers' professional development as:

In our school, different sessions are given to teachers for their professional and personal growth, so that they can grow personally, mentally, and professionally. In addition, many training sessions or workshops are conducted for them. There are workshops for them during the winter and summer holidays.

Participant 6 talked about the training and guidance provided by the school management for their betterment: *"We provide training and guidance for them. Through workshops, through different modules. And in professional development, they get a lot of help. They are given emotional support. And confidence is boosted."*

Workload Adjustment and Flexibility

By providing a calm and encouraging workplace setting, principals seek to manage the duties of teachers. The findings indicated that decreasing turnover plans were greatly impacted by decreasing levels of pressure and stress. Participant 2 explained flexibility as an important factor:

Just like this, if they are sick, or they are asking for leave, or they are asking for a facility, then we can provide them. And sometimes it happens that we take a lot of work from them. And sometimes it happens that we compromise and make them relax.

Participant 6 gave an example according to this situation, which is as follows:

Yes, I have had a case where I have a male teacher who wanted to resign from the school. I discussed with him, and I knew the difference between anxiety and resignation. I tried to lower his stress, and I was successful in this case. To reduce his workload, I made the last two hours free, and he went home early.

Teacher Participation in Decision-Making

The findings illustrated that some principals involve their teachers in the process of decision-making to make them more committed to the organization. Principals can establish a stimulating and inspiring workspace by adopting these kinds of approaches and practices. Participant 1 described the importance of the teacher in the decision-making process: *"If we make any decision for the school, we definitely involve teachers in decision-making. " Then we, the management, share our views and make a decision considering the teachers' feedback, which is beneficial for the school."*

Participant 2 showed respect for teachers' decisions and described it as:

Yes, definitely, as you know, how many times the school closes in a year, we meet with the teachers. Their opinion is respected. As they say, we go with them. It's not that we make them listen to us. We also listen to them a lot.

Discussion

The findings of this study highlighted personal and institutional aspects, including individual conditions, economic anxiety, and job anxiety. Teachers are more likely to quit their jobs due to job discontent and the pressure of a heavy workload. Teachers' commitment is weakened by inadequate compensation. This study found that human considerations like familial commitment, getting married, and residence issues contribute to the rate of teachers' turnover. In accordance with the previous study of Farahmandpour & Voelkel (2025) and Nguyen et al. 2020), which demonstrated that both personal and institutional variables affect the teacher turnover.

Furthermore, according to Scallon et al. (2023), assistance and guidance from the leader promote commitment among teachers. It is supported by effective practices adopted by the principals. These practices involve transparent communication, emotional encouragement, teachers being involved in the decision-making process, workload adjustment, and career advancement.

This research discovered that the approaches and practices implemented by the principals encourage retention rates. Flexible work environment and encouraging behavior are included in these practices. According to Alzoraiki et al. (2024) and Ismail and David (2024), transformational and nurturing styles of leadership help to reduce the teachers' turnover rate. Welcoming educational setting, teachers' involvement, and effective

interaction are the basic terms for these styles of leadership. In general, the findings discovered that competent leadership plays a significant role in decreasing turnover. It also indicates that effective leadership behaviors and organizational assistance help to retain teachers.

Conclusion

This research concludes that the practices and behaviors of leadership directly affect teachers' turnover and retention rate. The study found that in private institutions, many aspects become challenging and badly affect the turnover. These factors include individuals' issues, excessive work pressure, external appealing possibilities, and inadequate compensation. Similarly, the results show that principals can play a constructive role in improving the rate of teacher retention. It is possible through transparent communication, equity in the decision-making process, opportunities for career advancement, and effective leadership behavior. Some practices help to retain teachers in a school for a longer period, including a positive workplace environment, transparent communicative settings, and a value-based environment. Consequently, teachers' turnover can be reduced by using effective leadership.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following are the key recommendations:

- Schools should ensure fair and equitable compensation by offering competitive salaries and improving remuneration structures to enhance job satisfaction and reduce teacher turnover.
- School principals and teachers should maintain open and effective communication channels.
- Work responsibilities should be distributed fairly among staff members to help minimize stress, prevent burnout, and promote overall well-being among teachers.
- Schools should continue to provide professional support, recognition, and opportunities for career advancement to strengthen teachers' commitment, improve job satisfaction, and enhance long-term retention.

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