

What Works in Education in Pakistan, and Why? The Case of PDCN's Whole School Improvement Program in Gilgit-Baltistan of Pakistan

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Abstract

This inquiry is part of a country-wide study conducted to explore What Works in Education in Pakistan, and Why? The Whole School Improvement Programme (WSIP) of Aga Khan University-Professional Development Center, North (AKU-PDCN) offered in Gilgit-Baltistan is one of the seven cases chosen based on its best practices in teacher professional development and school improvement in the mountainous and rural Gilgit-Baltistan of Pakistan. Three schools representing the public, private and AKESP systems were selected for this study. The findings emanating from the three cases have been structured and discussed under the themes of 'Teachers Professional Development,' 'School-Community Relations,' 'Monitoring and Evaluation,' and 'Gender.' The cross-case analysis, however, reflects three overarching themes of 'Role of Leadership in School Improvement,' 'Role of Continuing Professional Development of Teachers,' and 'Community Participation.' There is tangible evidence to support the claim that WSIP is an effective and viable model of school improvement in the context of Gilgit-Baltistan, and elsewhere.

Key Words: school improvement, teachers' professional development, community participation, leadership.

1. Introduction

This report is part of a larger study looking at seven cases across the geographical spread in Pakistan. These are cases of best practices in schooling and have been identified on the basis of various factors including schools reputation, students' examination results, research evidence (Porter and Toutkoushian, 2003) (where possible) and geographical spread across Pakistan. The main question which holds the cases together is What Works in Education in Pakistan, and Why? The research design team selected Aga Khan University-Professional Development Center, North (AKU-PDCN)'s Whole School Improvement Program (WSIP) as one of the seven cases to find an answer to the major research question. WSIP was included in the study for two reasons: (i) it was in high demand as an effective school improvement program implemented in Gilgit-Baltistan, and (ii) it met the critical criterion of representing a remote, rural and mountainous region of the country. Of the three schools included in the research project two were WSIP project schools and the other was a non-WSIP government school in the project for comparative purposes. The Whole School Improvement Program (WSIP) offered in schools in Gigit-Baltistan is a school improvement model "which gives insights into, and attempts to influence aspects of school culture, technology and politics" (Kanji 2001).

With the aim of improving students' learning opportunities in schools, WSIP recommends taking the entire school as a unit of change, and working with all the key stakeholders influencing the school culture. Various research studies support the assertion that the interrelationships among different aspects of school improvement have a critical role in enhancing or constraining students' learning outcomes (Hopkins, 1996; Stoll & Fink, 1995). In WSIP, during first year of intervention, PDCN works intensively with the schools focusing on classroom-based mentoring of teachers (e.g. planning and teaching with teachers and providing them with constructive feedback for their professional growth) and conducting weekly professional development workshops to improve teachers' pedagogical and content-knowledge.

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Since the capacity building of various stakeholders is also an integral part of WSIP strategies to achieve the overall goal of improving students achievements, Professional Development Teachers (PDCN's faculty and the change facilitators) also work with both the school-based and the outside school communities, including students, teachers, non-teaching staff, parents and other community members, to help them understand the significance of education and realize the need of their participation in the process of school improvement. School improvement research suggests that the dual nature of school improvement must be understood for long-lasting impact; i.e. there has to be simultaneous effort on improving teachers' capacity and improving the factors related to school environment. For instance, Hargreaves (1994) contends: "There is little teacher development without school development." During the subsequent two years, PDCN provides ongoing professional support to schools. The follow-up support includes at least one monthly visit by the PDTs to see and address the issues related to institutionalization of the WSIP strategies, and assist schools in addressing the emerging school development needs. In addition, the follow-up also envisages bringing all the project school teachers together for a daylong conference during the last year of WSIP and provide schools a forum to discuss their achievements and challenges. Thus, this model reflects an integrated, holistic approach to school improvement.

Research has been conducted to study WSIP's impact as a whole or to gauge the impact of a key component (leadership) of WSIP (Shamim, 2003; Madhani, 2003). Findings of these studies have provided rich insights into the processes of school improvement, the interrelationships in the various dimensions of the programme and the factors that need to be in place to ensure sustainability of the programme. This study builds on earlier research by extending the scope of the study to locate WSIP in a larger context. For example, it shares useful insights on teachers' professional development by closely looking at the profile of the public and private schools representing the WSIP and non-WSIP schools. The case studies start with a brief historical background to nestle the school improvement saga into the wider context. The research findings have been organized under the themes of 'teachers professional development,' 'school-community relationship,' 'monitoring and evaluation,' and 'gender.' The article concludes with a cross-case analysis delineating the three overarching themes emerging from the analysis.

2. Methodological Decisions Taken

Sampling of the project schools was undertaken in two stages: first stage involved identifying 15 schools that met the criteria given below:

- Equal representation to government and NGO schools;
- Male and female schools;
- Students performance (grade 5 exam data);
- Students drop out; and
- Teacher attendance rates.

Second stage involved using the following criteria to narrow down the sample and to identify the final three research project schools:

- Willingness of school to participate;
- Maximum information available;
- Intuitive feel/reputation for a school that works;
- Evidence of initiative and innovation.

Of the 15 schools included in the initial shortlist, the following three schools meeting the criteria were selected as the final research project schools:

1. Al-Karim School Hunza. (Private +Co. Ed.+ WSIP)
2. D. J. Primary School Yarkote, Gilgit. (AKESP +Co. Ed + WSIP)
3. F.G. Boys High School Salimabad, Hunza (Govt. + Boys +Non-WSIP).

The three schools were studied in-depth, spending approximately one week (minimum) in each school, with possible second (shorter) visit after analysis of data. The data was gathered through interviews (of teachers, headteachers, students, and parents), classroom observation, and student and teacher assessment tools.

3. AL-KARIM SCHOOL HUNZA

3.1 History and Background of the School

The history of initiatives for schooling of children in Aminabad dates back to 1946 when the Aga Khan Education Services, Pakistan (then called the Diamond Jubilee Schools system) established its first primary school in Aminabad, the only school then in the entire region of upper Hunza. Aminabad, therefore, has the honor and privilege of becoming the source of inspiration for and nurturing the educational upliftment in the entire valley of upper Hunza. Because of the increasing enrolment and lack of accommodation for students in school, request was made to the government education department to open a school in the village. Thus, when the government education department established its first primary school for boys in Aminabad in 1970, the AKESP school was dedicated only for female students. Presently, there is a secondary school for boys and a secondary school for girls established by the government, and a co-ed. primary school supported by the Aga Khan Education Services, Pakistan (AKESP).

Although these schools have been contributing immensely to provide the school going-age children of the village an access to education, however, due to numerous systemic issues such as lack of accountability mechanisms and insufficient material and human resource provision, they couldn't come up to the expectations in providing quality education. It was with reference to the deep realization for the need of quality education that the Aminabad community thought of establishing an English-medium institution entirely dedicated to quality education and which served as a leading, model institution positively influencing the teaching and learning processes of other schools in the region. Having agreed in principle to establish the Al-Karim Model School, Aminabad, the Ismaili Council met again on May 31, 1991 to discuss the practical initiatives to be taken to achieve the goal of establishing the school. In their meeting they recommended to form an education committee to initiate planning for the school. With their unanimity of agreement, the Council members proposed RaiSalimuddin to lead the education committee, who had by then emerged as a highly respectable leader working for the cause of education in the entire region. Initially, Al-Karim School was started on September 21, 1991 in a rented building. In the beginning, 76 students enrolled and four teachers were employed to run the school. In December 1991, the Al-Karim School's Education Committee was converted into The Aminabad Educational and Social Welfare Society and Mr. Salimuddin was unanimously appointed as the first President of the society.

3.2 Teachers Professional Development

In order to improve the quality of education provided to students at Al-Karim Model School, BoG and the school principal took various initiatives since the beginning of the school. For instance, one of the Voluntary Service Organization (VSO) representatives called Sophie Rees was employed on September 1992 to work as a teacher and master trainer for the school teachers. She trained the teaching staff of Al-Karim on teaching and learning methodologies specifically in language development. She also executed the plan to follow the Oxford textbooks instead of Punjab text books. Sophie's placement in the school and her initiatives to improve the quality of teaching and learning was seen by the school parents as a big achievement, which, in turn, boosted school community's morale and motivation to work for school.

Following Sophie's departure, another VSO teacher and master trainer, called Caroline Peterson, joined Al-Karim School during April 1995. Caroline's contributions to improve the quality of instruction in school were remarkable. She helped the school in initiating Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) program and trained the teachers to teach the ECED classes. In addition, she worked with the school teachers in improving their skills in developing, using and preserving the teaching and learning resources. Carol worked as a role model for the teachers setting high standards of professionalism for the teachers to emulate. Meanwhile, another native English speaker called Kay Colley came to serve the school for six months, and then came Richard Harris in April 2000 to serve the school as a VSO Science master trainer. Richard worked to develop the professional skills of the Science teachers for about a year and left the school in April 2001. Although due to the 9/11 event the initiative of inviting the native English speakers to school changed, the impact of these volunteer teachers' contributions on the quality of teaching and learning has been enormous.

Likewise, Al-Karim School's teachers and the principals were given opportunities to attend the professional development programs offered by various organizations in the Gilgit-Baltistan. For example, teachers and the principals were sent to attend the various teachers' professional development courses offered by the Hunza Educational Resource Project (HERP). In addition, as part of teachers' professional development initiative, Al-Karim Model School requested for the Whole School Improvement Program (WSIP) of AKU-IED's Professional Development Center, North (PDCN) in 2003. Furthermore, Al-Karim Model School teachers were also given opportunities to improve their knowledge of information and communication technology.

Learning computers also became mandatory for all teachers as during May 1999 BoG took the decision to make the school record electronically available. Therefore, orientation programs were organized for teachers to improve their computer-related skills. Establishment of the computer laboratory and computerization of school records were seen by the school community as two very important innovations which added to the good reputation of the school and, as a result, strengthened community's trust and belief in the school as a successful, high quality educational institution. Al-Karim Model School's initiatives for teachers' professional development also included developing 'Teachers Portfolios' and establishing the 'Language Club.' Likewise, the Language Club initiative was taken by the school to encourage both teachers and students to improve their communication skills in the languages of their interest. Resources were placed in the Club to help teachers and students improve their four language skills, i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing.

3.3. School-Community Relationship

An eye-catching statement in one of the briefing papers on Al-Karim Model School reads:

"The secret of school's success lies in the sense of ownership and participation of the local community in the development and progress of the school." (emphasis added). Al-Karim Model School is a highly successful model of the school community members helping themselves and developing a vision of education for their future generations. After more than two decades of the initial thoughts conceived by the local community during 1985 towards establishing a quality school for their children, Al-Karim Model School has emerged both as an exemplary model of community participation and a source of inspiration for many in the country and elsewhere. Thus, the school delineates how the communities can supplement efforts of the state and those aspiring to disseminate the light of knowledge. For having the real sense of ownership of and partnership with the school, Al-Karim School's community has always extended its full cooperation to the school, be it in form of doing the manual work for school construction, demonstrating the deep-rooted value for acquisition of knowledge as their religious obligation, or supporting their children in excelling in their academic achievements.

For instance, having agreed in principle to establish Al-Karim Model School, the local community in a big gathering showed its resolve and motivation to happily encounter all the challenges which might come their way in making their dream of establishing a quality school come true. To that end, the community unanimously decided that each household in Aminabad would contribute Rs. 1000 to purchase the land for school construction. Some of the community members contributed more than their share and half an acre of land was purchased for Rs: 500,000 to construct the building. In addition, they also offered their unskilled labor and accepted the responsibility of providing the locally available material free of cost. Men and women, young and old, all contributed to the cause of the school according to their individual capacity: ladies of the village took up the challenge of providing food to the workers and the other community members working voluntarily on different committees provided their services to school. Appreciating parents' interest in school, one of the teachers commented that "I believe that the strongest point of Al-Karim Model School is that the community owns the school, as they have literally worked on each and every brick of the school." He further added that because students are with the parents for 18 of the 24 hours, parents' impact on children's character building is much greater than that of a teacher.

3.4. Monitoring and Evaluation

At Al-Karim Model School, there is a multi-layered mechanism put in place for monitoring and evaluation of school activities. Although the president BoG and the school principal have a pivotal role in what goes on in school, management of the school is fairly decentralized. There are various committees formed at the BoG, teachers and students level, and each of these committees is accountable in making specific contributions towards the effective management of the school. For instance, BoG's overall responsibility is to ensure the smooth operation of the school to achieve the institutional goals. In particular, BoG meets teachers both to know the progress and the challenges that confront them. Responding to the question of how does the monitoring and evaluation of teachers take place, one of the teachers said that teachers' classroom performance is appraised by four different groups: first the school principal observes teachers in their classes two to three times in a year to see their performance, for which he usually uses an observation checklist. Second, monitoring teacher development is a core principle of the WSIP program. Hence, the professional development teachers (PDTs) would come regularly, to monitor teacher development and provide support in areas of need. Third, school is an affiliate of the Hunza Educational Resource Project (HERP), one of master trainers of HERP visits the school for teachers classroom observation. Lastly, the BoG members also pay at least one visit to each teacher in classroom.

The average of all the three observations makes the annual assessment grade of a teacher. Another teacher added that the main focus of these classroom observations is on the teaching methodology, level of content knowledge, classroom management and the professional attitudes of teachers.

3.5. Gender

Al-Karim Model School's community has had a deep-rooted longing for education and it is a staunch believer of equal opportunities of education for their daughters and sons. Aminabad community's initial inspiration to open Al-Karim Model School came from the establishment of the Aga Khan Academy, Hunza, which provides quality education to the highflier female students of the Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral. The level of gender sensitivity of the community can be judged by the fact that right from the beginning attention was paid to the participation of females at the BoG level. For instance, five out of total fifteen members of the BoG are females. Thus, there has always been conscious effort at various levels to ensure equal participation of males and females in managing the school as well as in other social and religious activities in the community. BoG and the school staff emphasized equal opportunities of access to quality education for both boys and girls of the school community, Al-Karim School, as a result, worked as a co-education institution since its inception.

At the time of data collection, 42 percent of school's total enrolment (437) was of females, while 12 of the total 22 teachers were female.

3.6. Reflection and Commentary

More than a decade later, one can easily see that Al-Karim Model School has made great strides in achieving its goals. One of the several evidences of its quality education can also be seen by the fact that several of school's graduates have got admissions in highly reputable educational institutions of the country. The school community has also demonstrated sustained value and interest for knowledge, and has always shown intrinsic willingness to cooperate with the school. Al-Karim School's BoG has emerged as one of the most effective governing bodies working for the cause of education in the Gilgit-Baltistan. Likewise, BoG's mission of empowering women and enhancing their roles has gone a long way as at the school as well as on all other committees, women have equal opportunities to express their voice. Therefore, Al-Karim Model School has over the years emerged as a center of excellence for the other educational institutions in the area to emulate.

Furthermore, amongst the several insights gained from the data, Mr. Salimuddin (BoG president)'s inspirational role in establishing and giving direction to Al-Karim Model School emerged as one of the most distinct overarching themes of the data. He has led the BoG with his utmost devotion and deep-rooted love for the cause of knowledge, on the one hand, and, for the overall welfare of his people, on the other. People not only shared the sacrifices he made for the school but they also enjoyed describing his selfless services. According to them, he served the people of his village with his knowledge, time and money, when needed. As a leader he was a true role model for his people, and according to some, it was his total commitment for his people which inspired them most of all. One of the teachers said that leaders usually serve their people when all other circumstances are favorable for them, but Salimuddin's case is quite different as he has served us when he was healthy and is still serving us when he has become frail as a result of his ill health, and is bed-ridden.

4. AKESP Primary and Community Middle School Yarkote, Danyore, Gilgit

4.1. Historical Background

A neighboring village only 10 kilometers in the north-east of Gilgit, Danyore is one of the most thickly populated villages in the Gilgit-Baltistan having a population of 18000 people. Danyore consists of several smaller settlements (*muhallas*), and Yarkote is one of them. Currently, there are 95 households in Yarkote having a population of 848 people. D. J. School Yarkote was initially established in 1970; however, during 1988 Yarkote community agreed to send their children to D.J. Girls Middle School Danyore when AKESP suggested merger of D. J. Primary School Yarkote with D.J. Girls Middle School Danyore in order to upgrade the latter as a secondary school. Consequently, Yarkote School was closed in 1988, and based on the criterion of increased student population D.J. Girls Middle School Danyore was up-graded to secondary level during the same year. However, during 1991 the decision of combining the two schools had to be reversed because by then D. J. Girls High School Danyore had emerged as the largest school of AKESP system in Gilgit-Baltistan creating accommodation problems for students in the school. Thus, D.J. Primary School Yarkote was reopened in 1991 and it was during the same year that the local community constructed the school building consisting of 12 classrooms entirely on self-help basis.

AKESP, the largest NGO providing education mainly to female students in Gilgit-Baltistan, came up with the concept of 'community schools' during 1990s. One of the several features of the 'community schools' concept was that since up-grading schools was an increasingly expensive undertaking for the institution, it decided to strike a deal with the communities suggesting that AKESP would provide the technical and moral support to the up-graded sections of schools whereas the local communities would hire teachers, provide them with salaries and address the management related issues locally. Emulating many AKESP schools in the Gilgit-Baltistan, Yarkote community also bought into the idea and decided to upgrade its primary school to middle level in 1999. That is why the Yarkote School is called the D. J. Primary School and Community Middle School Yarkote, Danyore. Out of the eleven teachers working in school at the time of data collection only four were AKESP teachers and the rest were community teachers. Likewise, there were 236 students enrolled in the school at the time of data collection.

4.2. Teachers Professional Development

One of the significant features that characterizes Yarkote School as a successful educational institution is the continuing professional development of its teachers. Building teachers' capacity is one of the top priorities of the school development plan of Yarkote School. It was indeed good to know that all teachers are professionally trained and yet the school management constantly hunts for professional development programs for its teachers.

Discussions with the teachers revealed that besides the long-term professional courses from the government college of education Gilgit and the Allama Iqbal Open University, Yarkote School teachers have availed chances of professional development courses offered by the AKESP and AKU-PDCN. Yarkote was a WSIP project school of PDCN during 2004, and since then the school has shown great progress in both the academic and administrative domains. Most of the teachers interviewed endorsed the fact that WSIP was helpful in improving their pedagogical skills, especially enhancing their understanding of the 'activity-based' and 'learner-centered' teaching approaches. Similarly, they repeatedly mentioned the fact that besides assisting them in teaching methodology, WSIP also upgraded their content knowledge of the subjects they taught. Moreover, WSIP's contribution in improving teachers' understanding on their ability to use the low-and no-cost teaching materials was appreciated by almost all teachers. Discussing the significant contributions of WSIP, teachers also mentioned the professional development sessions conducted by the facilitators. They said that the professional development workshops were very informative as, on one hand, those workshops covered the generic teaching and learning related themes and, on the other, they addressed the emerging specific needs of teachers.

Discussing the factors that contribute to teachers' professional development at Yarkote, some teachers said that the sense of teamwork among teachers facilitates their ongoing professional learning at school. One of these teachers seemed to enjoy her remarks when she stated that there is a culture of sharing and generosity among teachers. According to her, teachers don't hesitate in seeking help from each other. "I have seen even experienced and more senior teachers seeking help from their less experienced and junior teachers" the teacher remarked. This teacher also seemed to be proud of the excellent resource room they have established at the school. She added that all the teachers sit together at the beginning of the academic year and develop the resources related to various concepts in the textbooks. The school resource room is extremely rich and helpful for teachers in getting the essential instructional aids.

4.3. School-Community Relationship

As it is elsewhere, the concept of community participation in education is gaining momentum in the government and the private sectors in Gilgit-Baltistan of Pakistan. However, AKESP has emerged as the pioneer of introducing the concept of community involvement in schools in Gilgit-Baltistan. For the last three decades AKESP has gained the experience of managing the schools with the assistance of its salaried staff and the volunteer workers appointed at the various levels of the institutional hierarchy ranging from the school management committees up to the chairman of the board of directors at the national level. The volunteer workers appointed for three years are selected from the local school community. Thus, the Village Education Committees (VECs), earlier called the school management committees, are the most common form of community's participation in the day-to-day school matters. In fact, the role of these school committees is similar to that of a bridge linking school and the wider school community. AKESP has developed job descriptions for the school committees and they are briefed on their roles and responsibilities immediately after their selection. Since the communication to and from the local community is routed through the school committees, cooperation of parents and other community members with the schools, therefore, largely depends on the motivation and functionality of the school committees.

During the data collection, there was an active village education committee comprised of 12 members (eight men and four women) representing the local school community at Yarkote. Most of the teachers appreciated the role and contributions of the school committee. Teachers liked the idea of selecting the VEC members from the school parents. "Because their own children are at the school, they take genuine interest in school performance," commented one teacher. Since Yarkote School is a D.J. primary and community middle school, the committee members have a significant role in hiring the community teachers, deciding on their financial packages, and addressing their leave cases. Besides, they also keep an eye on the regularity and punctuality of all school teachers, be they AKES or the community teachers. In addition, the committee is expected to work with the school teachers in addressing the non-academic issues of the school. Teachers appreciated the fact that the committee members always assisted them whenever they were requested to meet parents to resolve their children's issues. For instance, if a child remains absent without information to school, the committee members meet his/her parents and motivate them to make the child regular in school.

Teachers shared that usually committee members are contacted when the students don't deposit their monthly tuition fee on time. "Committee members do a great job in meeting the parents and collecting students' tuition fees from them. Otherwise, collection of tuition fee from students at the end of each month used to make the teacher-student relations very antagonistic," the teacher added. Our discussions with the headteacher also revealed that the current as well as the previous VECs of the school have played a significant role in community mobilization. Construction of 12 classrooms purely on self-help basis is a great achievement of the Yarkote community and demonstrates their deep-rooted resolve for their children's education. Each and every household not only contributed a specific amount of money for the school construction, they also participated in the manual work of the project. Interestingly, the village women also contributed their share by giving both the financial and in kind donations, as well as participating in the physical construction work.

4.4. Monitoring and Evaluation

D.J. Primary and Community Middle School Yarkote, Danyore is managed by two groups of people: AKESP, basically responsible for the primary section of the school, and the VEC, managing the middle section of the school. As a result, there is a two-tier monitoring mechanism to manage the daily affairs of the school. Although AKESP is primarily responsible for the monitoring and supervision of its primary section, it also provides professional support to all teachers, as well as organizing examinations for all classes, including the community section classes. For example, the professional development provided through WSIP includes the process of monitoring teacher learning and growth through a systematic procedure of PDTs' visits to the school and classrooms. While these visits last for the period of the WSIP implementation, sustainability is ensured through mechanism of community participation and support. Yarkote School's VEC is, however, responsible for the monitoring of middle section teachers, which includes hiring of the teachers on the vacant position, keeping an eye on teachers' regularity and punctuality, act as a bridge between the school and community, and cooperate with the headteacher to ensure the smooth operation of the school.

4.5. Gender

Conversations with the various stakeholders revealed that education for boys and girls was seen as a significant investment by the community. Responding to the question of whether the parents have any preferences for the education of their sons and daughters, a mother in a group of parents said that she prefers the education of her daughters more than that of her sons. Explaining the reason she said that today's girls are tomorrow's mothers therefore if the mothers are educated, her children and her entire family can become educated easily. Furthermore, the ex-chairman of the school committee said that the community has established the school for both boys and girls of the community. He also wished that 100% of the boys and girls of the community should attend the school.

4.6. Reflection and Commentary

Yarkote School building is not only visible on top of a small hill in the north-west of Danyore, it is also recognized and well-known for its academic stature and quality in Gilgit-Baltistan. The School has emerged over the years as one of quality schools in AKESP system in the Gilgit-Baltistan. During the last three years the school's annual examination results have been above 93 percent, with an increasing number of students scoring 'A' and 'B' grades. The school's particular characteristics such as teachers' sense of professionalism and commitment, community's unflinching support for the cause of the school, students' continued high academic performance, and people's increasing demands for their children's admissions in school, have earned a good name for the Yarkote School.

As a result, the School has emerged as an educational institution liked and highly respected by all stakeholders including students, teachers, parents, and the central office. Yarkote School's high academic standing and its credibility in the eyes of AKESP was also endorsed by the fact that Ms. IqbalBano, one of the Yarkote teachers, was selected for the Best Teacher Award for 2005 in Gilgit. The best Teacher Award is given to teachers who excel in their performance, dedication and creativity and are recognized as sources of inspiration for other teachers. Discussions with various people on the factors contributing to the success of the school brought several dimensions to light. For instance, the School Management Committee Chairman attributed the excellent performance of the school to the commitment of and the collegial relations amongst the teachers. In particular, he expressed his gratitude to the teachers who devote their personal time during vacations to assist the slow-learner students. The teachers and the headteacher, on the other hand, showed their high regard for the contribution of the school management committee's chairman and members, who devote their time and energy voluntarily for the cause of school improvement.

5. F.G. Boys High School Salimabad, Hunza

5.1. History of the School

The credit of opening the very first school in Hunza valley goes to the then Imperial government of India which, having negotiated with the local ruler, established government primary school SalimabadHunza in 1912. The British, the then rulers, motivated the local ruler (also called Raja) by assuring him that the graduates of the school will be given preference for jobs in government offices. A Hindu teacher, called Mumby hailing from Kashmir made the history of becoming the very first teacher of Primary School Salimabad, Hunza. However, WazirInayatullahBaig was appointed the school teacher when the Hindu teacher left Hunza due to acclimatization problems. It could be his heavy engagement in too many tasks for the State that WazirInayatullahBaig's role as teacher was taken back by the ruler and was given to Raja Ghani Khan (also called Gari Khan), son of Mir Nazim Khan. Since Ghani Khan was notoriously strict and harsh to students, only 20 of the total 40 students could continue their study in school. During 1928, Raja Gari Khan died and Mohammad Najat, a resident of KhuramabadHunza and a graduate of High School Kashmir, was appointed as incharge of Salimabad High School. In the same year AkhonTaighoon was also appointed as a new teacher for the school. School records illustrate the fact that Afiyat Khan and Skandar Khan served as incharges of the school during 1939 and 1940 respectively. It was with the up-graduation of school to middle level in 1959 that Dad Ali Shah became the first headteacher of the school. However, since then many teachers and heads have served this school; some of them are still remembered for their dedication and commitment, others for their lack of professionalism.

The current Boys High School Salimabad used to be the only middle school till 1970 and students from all over the region came here to get education. The school situated in the heart (capital) of Hunza valley has indeed worked as the 'heart' for Hunza, as almost all families of the region have benefited from the educational facilities available at the school. The School is honored for producing thousands of professionals of high caliber who, in turn, earned a good name for their alma mater. Thus, it will be befitting to call F.G. Boys High School Salimabad, which shone for many decades as the only school on the horizons of entire Hunza, the mother of all other educational institutions that followed it in the region. Since early 1990s the Hunza valley, like many other places in the Gilgit-Baltistan, witnessed mushrooming of many English-medium schools. Consequently, enrolment of Salimabad High School fell drastically, at times endangering the very identity of the school. The magnitude of the system, lack of accountability at various levels of the organizations, and government's lower priority for education sector made the educational change process an up-hill task. Consequently, government schools in the Gilgit-Baltistan bore the brunt of these systemic challenges, and so did the Salimabad High School. However, the period starting from June 2003 in school's history marks a significant era highlighting serious efforts made to revamp the deteriorating image of Salimabad High School. As the new head of the school, and also a former alumnus of Salimabad High School, Mujahid Khan accepted the challenge of rebuilding the school's image.

5.2. Teachers' Professional Development

The data suggested that because teachers' lack of professionalism was one of the huge hindering factors in school improvement, Mujahid paid immediate attention to his teachers' professional development. Discussions with Mujahid and his teachers revealed that despite their professional qualifications, teachers mainly relied on the traditional, 'teacher-centered' approaches in classrooms, which, in turn, encouraged students' memorization skills and endangered their creative thinking skills. Likewise, physical punishment was rampant which often damaged the friendly relations between teachers and their students. Discussions with a group of students also revealed that teachers only relied on the lecture method to teach textbooks.

It was to address these and many other school improvement challenges that Mujahid took an initiative of developing links with a local non-governmental organization (NGO) called the Hunza Educational Resource Project (HERP), which was established by some of the local educationists to work as an umbrella organization for all the EM schools in Hunza valley. HERP assisted EM schools working in the valley with instructional resources and ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers. Salimabad High School's teachers appreciated HERP's contributions in enhancing their professionalism. Most of the teachers concurred that they gained useful insights on various teaching methods, specifically on how to make their teaching 'learner-centered,' and 'activity-based.' Likewise, as part of his initiatives for teachers professional development, Mujahid also introduced teachers to the concept of maintaining 'class diary,' which contained information related to students daily attendance, a brief description of the lessons taught, and students home assignments; and he signed teachers class diaries daily. Besides searching for teachers' professional development programs, Mujahid also pursued opportunities for his own capacity building.

It was basically as a result of his repeated requests that he got admission in the Certificate in Education: Educational Leadership and Management (CE: ELM) of AKU-IED offered at PDCN. As a result of his active participation and enthusiasm for learning Mujahid proved to be a source of inspiration and knowledge for his CE: ELM course mates. Implementing his learning from CE: ELM, Mujahid used the tools of action research and school development plan to improve his school. In an effort to broaden teachers' views of the need for school improvement, he also managed to bring all his teachers to AKU-IED/PDCN in Gilgit. Based on his requests, PDCN also accommodated some of his teachers in different professional development programs conducted at PDCN. To summarize, there are several initiatives which Mujahid took to bring about change and improvement in the school. These include: sponsoring teachers for professional development programs; asking teachers to maintain daily diaries; introducing flag of honor system; encouraging parents' participation in school affairs; revitalizing the school management committee; and searching constantly for his own professional development.

5.3. School-Community Relationship

Community participation emerged as a major cross-cutting theme from the data as both teachers and the head repeatedly mentioned the need for parents support to improve students learning. In the focus group discussion teachers referred to the concept of educational triangle where parents, teachers and students represent each of the three angles respectively. They argued that if the desired input of parents is not there, efforts made by teachers and students also don't yield the required results. According to some teachers Salimabad High School is different from what it was like five or ten years back; but the school community still has a very low opinion of the school for its past shortcomings, some of which included maladministration, irregularity of students and teachers, nepotism in recruiting staff, and lack of professionalism and demoralization of staff. Sharing her feelings one of the parents stated that government has been kind enough to allocate so much resources to schools, but parents take this facility for granted. She suggested that parents must extend their full cooperation and assist the school in achieving its goals. Another parent also suggested that the school needs to prepare students in such a way that in the years to come students are able to support their parents, to contribute to the overall development of their nation, and to grow with high moral attributes.

Besides his several other initiatives, Mujahid's efforts to enhance community participation in school also included reactivating the school management committee (SMC). Although SMCs had been established at F.G Boys H/S Salimabad to fulfill the government requirements, the school head reactivated the existing committee. With some of his new committee members on board, the SMC Chairman at the time of data collection had been leading the committee for the last four years. The continuity of the SMC Chairman and some other key members during the two terms of two years each indicated the continuity of motivation and initiatives for school improvement. Chairman's admiration for the commitment and motivation of school head also reflected the deep-rooted affiliation and bond between the school and the wider committee. Discussions with the Chairman revealed the fact that he is well informed of the accomplishments as well as the challenges confronting the school. Mujahid's other initiatives to bridge the gap between the school and the wider school community also included organizing mothers' days and parents' days in school. According to Mujahid, the co-curricular activities were useful in terms of boosting students' and teachers' morale, as they actively involved them in school affairs. He also invited the school community to be part of the functions and see the school improvement initiatives taken by the school.

5.4. Monitoring and Evaluation

A significant number of Mujahid's initiatives taken for school improvement and the various concerns came from the teachers, students and parents pertain to monitoring and evaluation of the school.

One of Mujahid's key school improvement initiatives was up-gradation of students' minimum benchmark to pass examination. For instance, with the consensus of various key stakeholders such as teachers, the school management committee and the district office, he up-graded the minimum passing mark from 33 percent to 40 percent. Moreover, since the use of unfair means and cheating in examinations had become a growing curse, Mujahid took it up as a school reform agenda. In order to tackle this issue, he first established a committee to work for and monitor the examination process. Following Mujahid's advice, the examination committee took the decision that those caught using unfair means in both home and end-year examinations would be dealt with strictly. This initiative, according to Mujahid, proved to be quite helpful in addressing the menace of cheating in examination.

Another issue which came out quite strongly was about the frequent, untimely and unnecessary postings and transfers of staff from schools by the district office. These postings and transfers take place for various reasons, including political interference in the management of the system, punishment to staff breaching rules and regulations, and institution's policy of transferring staff after every three years. However, because transfers of staff generally result in dislocation of staff from their home stations, they bring anxiety, frustration and demoralization to them. In other cases too frequent transfers are also detrimental in creating learning communities in schools, and, thus, they dilute the efforts of improving the schools as units of change. Some of the teachers also endorsed the fact that in transfers often not much attention is given to the staffing needs of a school. For instance, the number of teachers posted in is less the number of teachers posted out. This situation often confronts schools with numerous management problems and monitoring of school becomes quite a challenge.

Lastly, one of the initiatives taken by Mujahid Khan to improve the monitoring and evaluation of his school improvement activities was the proper documentation of school records.

On the one hand, he computerized all his school records so that they are easily accessible, and, on the other, he constituted a committee to streamline and upgrade the otherwise messy documentation system in the school.

5.5. Gender

F.G. Boys High School Salimabad, Hunzais a boys school but the teachers and students attending this school come from a context where a lot of investment is made in the education of both boys and girls. For example, the Aga Khan Development Network institutions operating here for decades have always encouraged people to see education of their sons and daughters as their number one priority. Significance of female education emerged as an overarching themes as most of the parents who participated in the research considered it more beneficial and important. One of the parents argued that although both sons and daughters are equal in all respects, however, if parents' economic circumstances permit education of one of the two, it would be wiser to prefer daughter's education. She reiterated that because a son can even do some manual work in his life to make a living, it is important to equip daughters with proper knowledge so that they could play their constructive roles in the upbringing of their families.

5.6. Reflection and Commentary

Federal Government Boys High School Salimabad illustrates a glorious historical background spanning a century in illuminating each and every house with the light of knowledge. The district management considers Salimabad High School as a 'successful' school, although it has experienced numerous successes and challenges since its establishment. It was included in the research sample for comparative purposes—to see if there are any differences between the factors contributing to the success of WSIP and the non-WSIP schools. Data was collected to develop a deeper understanding of the key factors that contributed to the successful image and reputation of the school; and particular attention was paid to find answer(s) to what really contributes to the success of a non-WSIP school in the context of the Gilgit-Baltistan of Pakistan. The data repeatedly revealed Mujahid's role, as school's head, emerged as one of the strong factors shaping the image of the school as a quality institution. Although Salimabad High School was the first school ever established in the region and, therefore, attracted the talent from all over the valley for a long time.

However, it couldn't face the challenge when other English-medium schools started emerging in the area confronting it with a competitive situation. Different headteachers who served the Salimabad High School before Mujahid tried their strategies to reinvigorate the deteriorating image of the school but most of these efforts couldn't come to fruition. However, with Mujahid's arrival as the 14th head of Salimabad High School, one can easily trace a new beginning in the reformation process of the school.

Mujahid's credibility as an effective and initiative-taking school head was already well established within the department. The data gathered from various sources endorsed the fact that right from the inception Mujahid employed a multi-dimensional approach for school improvement. First of all, he conducted a needs analysis of the school, asking both the school staff and the wider community to share their suggestions to reestablish school's credibility as a progressive school coming up to the expectations of various stakeholders.

As part of his initial efforts to develop a deep understanding of the challenges faced by the school, Mujahid conducted a series of meetings with both his teachers and students as well as with parents and the key community members. As a visionary, he concentrated his efforts on developing the vision and mission statements for his school. The vision statement stated: "To develop a civilized, enlightened and peaceful society in Hunza." Whereas, school's mission statement reads as follows:

To nurture the academic and intellectual potential of the youth in the constituency and enhance their skills, boost up their morale, socialize them through different curricular and co-curricular activities, engender in them the norms and values and enable them to reach their maximum potential for their development as respectable and valuable assets of the society.

6. Summary of the Three Case Reports

A critical examination of the various findings emerging from the three case studies shows that there are various factors contributing to the success of these schools. Despite the fact that these schools operate in considerably varied socio-cultural contexts, the three major themes that cut-across the findings of these schools are Role of Leadership in School Improvement, Role of Continuing Professional Development of Teachers and Community Participation in Schools. What follows is an analysis on each of the three overarching themes.

6.1. Role of Leadership in School Improvement

Leadership has long been recognized as one of the strong factors contributing to, or impacting, the school improvement process (Potter & Powell, 1992).

However, the nature of leadership emerged in this study is distinct for being more encompassing and multi-dimensional. Various forms of leadership were found facilitating school improvement in all three schools. A critical analysis of the commitment and influence emanating from various dimensions reflected four major aspects of leadership. For instance, PDCN, District (or Central) Offices, Headteachers (or teachers) and the local Community (or parents) emerged as sources of inspiration and facilitation for school improvement. Nevertheless, schools varied in terms of the degree and nature of the commitment and influence that emanated from each of the four major dimensions. Furthermore, data gathered from Al-Karim and Yarkote (the two WSIP schools) reflected PDTs influence in inspiring and motivating teachers, heads and the school communities for school improvement. Most of these stakeholders repeatedly appreciated PDCN's leading role in reaching out to these schools and facilitating the improvement process. In Salimabad (the non-WSIP school), PDCN's leadership role was not as strong as it was in the WSIP schools. However, its influence was not completely absent either. Since the headteachers of this school had been a graduate of CE:ELM program, PDCN's influence had been instrumental in the design and implementation of school improvement endeavors in this school.

Likewise, the teacher educators (TEs) of AKES, P were found influencing the process of school improvement in DJ Primary School Yarkote. The teachers here narrated that the AKES teacher educators (TEs), who were subject-specialists, mentored them in improving their content and pedagogical knowledge. In addition, AKESP also motivated teachers by organizing Teachers' Recognition Days and giving teachers prizes and shields for best performance. Yarkote teachers also endorsed the fact that the TEs appreciated school's progress and guided various visitors to school to show them the good performance of teachers. The school committee chairman and teachers were also appreciative of AKESP's commitment and facilitation in improving the quality of education in school.

Moreover, another leadership dimension impacting the improvement process across all three schools was the role of headteachers. Be it in the WSIP or the non-WSIP school, head's vision and influence was instrumental in shaping the fate of the schools. For instance, Al-Karim teachers and the community members commended the role of principal whose commitment and love for his profession became a source of inspiration for teachers, students and the community. Similarly, Salimabad head's role emerged as the most influential in restoring the image of the school and putting it on the course of progression. Mujahid Khan, famous in his organization as a "doer" and as a "change-agent" (Mangin, 2007) did his best in recreating the image of the school as a progressive institution.

It was very evident that Mujahid played a pivotal role in motivating his teachers to work as a team for school improvement. It was his leadership which inspired teachers to make a difference, despite so many socio-political and institutional odds for school improvement, and succeeded in revitalizing the image of Salimabad. The Yarkote School head, too, demonstrated his deep-rooted motivation for school improvement and, thus, together with his teachers he helped the school to rise up to new heights of fame and respect. He reversed the situation of stagnation in the school and led the staff in the process of school improvement.

The final dimension that was found as a source and form of leadership influencing the process of improvement in these schools was the school community and/or the parents. Although, ‘community participation’ emerged as a cross-cutting theme in all three schools, some individuals or groups of people, however, were found initiating and leading the entire process of school improvement. These individuals had a vision and mission of changing the lot of their communities through education and, therefore, set their personal examples when it came to devote their time, knowledge, and other material resources to achieve the goal. Chairmen of Yarkote school committee and the Al-Karim school committee were distinct in terms of leveraging the school improvement process through their leadership.

Therefore, ‘leadership’ emerged from the cross-case analysis as an overarching theme. However, it is noteworthy that in view of its more comprehensive and encompassing nature the notion of leadership emerged from this study is quite distinct from other studies. The insights we have gained from the nature of leadership emerging from our research include: (i) leadership can emanate from different sources and come in different forms, and yet it can exert its influence to facilitate the school improvement process, (ii) school improvement architects will have to understand that leadership emanating from one source (e.g. heads or education offices) might not eventually withstand the pressures coming from various dimensions. Therefore, (iii) taking a more holistic and integrated approach, efforts should be made to unleash and develop the leadership potential of all the people having a stake in schools.

6.2. Role of Continuing Professional Development of Teachers

Another distinct theme emerged from the data is the role of ongoing professional development of teachers in all the three case study schools. Almost all teachers availed the opportunities of professional development in and outside their schools. In the two WSIP schools teachers and heads were unanimous in attributing their schools’ success to WSIP and admiring it as the most significant school-based professional development program. For instance, Al-Karim teachers thought that WSIP’s impact on their school was deep and far-reaching. They thought that WSIP introduced them to many useful innovations including inviting parents to observe teaching and learning processes in their children’s classrooms, and bringing teachers of other schools together for their professional development sessions. These teachers considered PDCN as “their” institution which, among other things, helped them understand the significance of developing a vision and working together for school improvement. Likewise, Yarkote teachers appreciated their access to PDCN’s human and material resources contributing to their learning. In addition, teachers and heads in these schools also appreciated the idea of PDTs working with them in schools as their colleagues and mentors. Teachers said that PDTs care and input in classrooms and during professional development sessions, was based on teachers needs rather than on what PDTs wanted, and thus, their contributions were highly relevant and useful for teachers. Similarly, most of these teachers commended PDTs care and affection for them.

It was clear from the data that all three case study schools provided their teachers with professional development opportunities outside their schools. These courses were organized by various educational institutions such as PDCN, AKESP, government education department, HERP and AKU-IED. However, these schools differed with regard to organizing formal school-based professional development courses. Both the WSIP schools continued conducting monthly school-based professional development programs. In the non-WSIP school no formal professional development sessions were conducted per se. Likewise, teachers’ stories reflected that they also ensured their ongoing professional development through their individual initiatives such as self-directed learning and reflection. These informal and self-directed initiatives were taken by the teachers of all three schools. Thus, the insights gained from this research on the significance of ongoing professional development of teachers is that: (i) ongoing mentoring of teachers is essential to sustain the school improvement initiatives, and, (ii) although outside-school professionals development opportunities are important, it is at the end through igniting teachers’ motivation for self-directed learning and through school-based professional development that teachers are able to relate theory to practice and practice to theory.

6.3. Community Participation

The success achieved by all three case study schools can also be attributed to the interest of their communities in and exemplary cooperation with these schools. Thus, community participation emerged as the third cross-cutting theme from the data. However, it is important to note that the scale and nature of the community participation varied considerably in these schools. For instance, since AKESP had a long and well-established system of community participation ranging from the school committees, at the grass-root level, to the regional and national board to supervise and formulate policies for education. Therefore, in order to understand the scale and nature of community participation at Yarkote (AKESP), it is essential to know the stimulus coming down from the top level of the organization. Emulating the system of community participation in AKESP schools, government education department also introduced the SMCs in schools in the past. However, these SMCs varied considerably in their motivation and ability to act as bridges connecting schools and wider communities.

With reference to Arnstein (1969) and Bray (2003) we also noted that the nature and scale of community participation in the Gilgit-Baltistan ranged from parents' willingness to merely sending their children to schools to having the total sense of ownership of schools. In between the two extremes, there are other degrees of participation. For instance, Al-Karim School was found enjoying almost total participation of its community. Each community member, whether male or female, was enthused with the sense of ownership for school and considered himself or herself as an equal partner to ensure the smooth operation and quality of the school. The entire community made financial contribution and did physical labor for the construction of the school. In the Annual General Meeting, the entire community participated to listen to school's progress and to give their feedback for school improvement. As a result, there was unflinching commitment and motivation to accept responsibility for their school and to provide ongoing support to school. Therefore, the community had the authority to formulate policies for the school and over the years developed the total sense of ownership of their school.

However, the analysis reflected the fact that community participation in the government (non-WSIP) school was lower than what it was like in Al-Karim (private) and Yarkote (AKESP) schools. However, the three schools varied in terms of their community participation. For instance, because of its active and visionary school management committee, the Yarkote committee always provided moral and material resources and gave feedback for improvement.

On the contrary, Salimabad needs to make more serious efforts to see the school community as their true partner for school improvement. Thus, to summarize our learning on the community participation we can say that (i) in order to work as full partners with schools, communities will have to own the schools, getting systematically involved in the processes of decision making and policy formulation for schools, and (ii) that each and every member of the community matters for schools and, thus, opportunities must be provided to hear their voices and utilize their potential for school improvement.

7. Conclusion

As part of a nation-wide study to investigate 'what works in education in Pakistan, and why,' WSIP was selected as one of the cases trying to find answers to the major research question. An in-depth analysis of the data gathered from the three 'successful' schools in Gilgit-Baltistan of Pakistan assisted us to gain context-specific insights on the major factors facilitating school improvement. Three major findings emerged from the data: first, 'leadership' emanating from various school stakeholders is essential to initiate and sustain the process of school improvement. Second, continuing professional development and mentoring must be an integral part of school improvement agenda, just 'one-shot' events for teacher development wouldn't work. Third, the notion of community participation must be enhanced up to the level of communities working as real partners with schools. Merely dysfunctional SMCs existing in office papers are a hindrance rather than a facilitating force for school improvement. Finally, we have also developed an understanding that WSIP is a viable school improvement model in the context of the Gilgit-Baltistan, provided the institutional and political will is there for improvement.

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