

## **Collaborative Managerial Roles of AEOs and its Impact on the School Performance at Elementary Level in the Punjab**

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of the research paper was to explore the collaborative managerial roles of Assistant Education Officers (AEOs) and its impact on the performance of elementary level public schools in the Punjab. Qualitative design was applied and all stakeholders including i.e, CEO, and DEOs were interviewed individually and in depth Focus Group Discussions with Deputy DEOs, AEOs, head teachers and teachers of all public sector primary and elementary schools were conducted to dig out the facts. Respondents were selected using a purposive sampling technique. The thematic analysis indicated moderate level impact of collaborative managerial roles on school performance. Hence, all stakeholders including Assistant Education Officers, heads and teachers should take ownership, responsibility and employ more efforts to enhance school performance.*

**Keywords:** *Collaborative Managerial Roles, School Performance, Elementary Level*

### **Introduction**

The aptitude to collaborate with others is being considered more imperative in today's contemporary educational scenario especially in public school reforms. Leaders must establish standards and foster an environment that encourages professional development. At the school level, advanced "adaptive", "collaborative" and "transformational" leadership abilities are needed. In an inclusive school system, it is argued that working together is an essential component for educational cooperation. This article also offers a description for collaboration with respect to of the goals, values, tasks, and circumstances that influence activities.

The idea that head teachers' managerial skills influence educational quality, school growth, and student learning has received growing amounts of support from theory and research over the past fifty years. However, recent researches have concentrated on figuring out how teams of educational managers contribute to schools' enhanced performance and student achievement in the present-day setting of worldwide education reforms.

School performance within a healthy school climate is directly related to how well teachers perform in and outside their classrooms. Consequently, effective communication among

teachers, head teachers and AEOs is the heart of creating and maintaining a healthy school climate. The vertical and horizontal communication in schools creates healthy school climate which is indispensable for collaboration to take place and crucial for enhanced school performance (Rafferty, 2003).

In the last few years, the public sector elementary level schools in the province of Punjab are working dynamically on changing and enhancing systems that pave the way for quality of education and augment the performance. Previously, District Teacher Educators (DTEs) were providing on the job training to the teachers in classroom instruction in a systematic umbrella of continuous professional development (CPD) at elementary level. Their posts were abolished and they were adjusted at schools.

In this context, roles and responsibilities of Assistant Education Officers (AEOs) in Punjab were transformed through a paradigm shift and they were assigned supervisory roles along with managerial responsibilities. They are now supposed to work on quality of education by doing classroom observation on tablet based Android App COT (Classroom Observation Tool) and mentoring teachers before and after the lessons. They are also supposed to collaborate with head teachers, teachers, parents and community for overall improvement of school performance as portrayed in School Improvement Framework (SIF) and data being shown on monthly, quarterly and annually data pack reports generated by PMIU through their monitoring mechanism (Shah, 2009).

To accomplish objectives at elementary level, to work on quality education, and to employ procedures that can prompt critical thinking and achievement, these resourceful and multitalented mobile administrators designated as AEOs need to acquire information, skill, morals, ethical quality, inventiveness, orderly reasoning, and great expert code of morals so they can provide great, proficient, and successful school organization and management. As an efficient school manager, an AEO has a grave level of influence; he can involve his capacity in school organization, accomplishing efficiency, goals and affecting change through capability, vision, great independent direction, relational abilities, morals and profound quality, and colossal performance.

At present, AEOs are providing managerial as well as academic support to head teachers and teachers by mentoring, facilitating in order to enhance their administrative as well as instructional roles and responsibilities. They are expected to work together with head teachers, teachers and school councils to make sure that all policies and targets related to schools are adhered and are being achieved to improve overall school performance. The researcher detected through rigorous literature review that the current state of research exploring the effect of collaborative management at elementary school setting was not sufficient in providing basis for increased school performance. Therefore, the school performance variable required to be investigated meticulously at elementary level. In a transformed elementary level public school setting where highly inspired, well educated and trained Assistant Education Officers (AEOs) are working collaboratively with extremely motivated and equally educated and trained heads and teachers for the purpose of positively changing public sector schools through implementation of innovative strategies.

The new Continuous Professional Development (CPD) program is also supporting them through capacity building programs with are using blended learning approach and consists of

both face to face and online refresher courses. These interactions are extremely subtle in nature and imperative to distinguish among collaborative managerial practices that support in creating positive school climate. This situation required to be explored rigorously so that the prevailing scenario might be comprehended and suggestions for improved school performance might also be incorporated.

### **Research Questions**

1. To what extent collaborative managerial practices are there at elementary level.
2. How collaborative managerial roles of AEOs impact school performance at elementary level.

### **Literature Review**

Collaboration is when individuals work jointly in a systematic way to accomplish the most appropriate team goals even if they do not have similar interests. Educational managers are gradually more turning to the collaboration strategy amongst stakeholders in order to influence successful school change (Jamali et al., 2015). But one has to keep in mind that collaboration may also be used for the achievement of specific goals whereas, collaboration is not a goal, other than a means to achieve specific results.

Collaborative managerial practices are characterized as an assortment of diverse administrative procedures which edify a feeling of cohesion and teamwork among educational managers and the teachers inside a school. It may be extensively perceived as the demonstration of cooperating collectively to achieve a shared objective within stipulated time period. Collaborative managerial roles are a vital attribute of any successful school (Rubin, 2009). When school stakeholders respect and acknowledge each others' abilities and collaborative roles, everyone moves forward and a positive school climate is created. Collaborative management presents teachers with the opportunities so that they can develop their skills all the way through augmented management prospects. This also makes them feel being valued (Goddard et al., 2015). Collaborative Management is a vast term and discussed differently in varied contexts. In this study the researcher outlined six dimensions after extensive literature review and detailed discussion with experts. The details of dimensions used in the study are i.e, Interpersonal Relationships, Task Effectiveness, Collaborative Teaching Practices, Enhancing Authentic Collaboration, Enhancing Specialization and Routine Procedures. Successful school managers promote collaborative societies. Schools need committed, esteem drove, capable and profoundly energetic school managers who can support thoughtful practice and encourage discourse and participation among all school staff and with different stakeholders (Crowther et al., 2009). Students also acquire collaborative managerial skills and how to actively participate in democratic environment when they observe their teachers functioning in a collaborative setting. A more potent social concept of initiative has emerged as a result of new educational management models' perception that adequate information combined conditions rely less on the valiant actions of a few individuals at the top and more on collaborative administrative practices dispersed throughout a hierarchical recommendation system (Hempsall, 2014; Uhl-Bien, 2006).

Hoy et al., (2002) advocated that a solid school environment is permeated with collaborative managerial practices executed by educational managers, head teachers, teachers and community who are connected with each other and foster trust, respect and care. Best

practices for learning incorporate having educators, school staff and educational manager all add to a positive school climate exemplified by trust and caring connections (Donaldson, 2006).

According to Gray (2013), those who are in charge of communicating and interpreting goals to all parties involved are at the core of every successful school reform plan or transformation force. Likewise, AEOs play a crucial role in mediating creative projects and practices that have a big impact on student performance in elementary level schools. Elementary level Schools have also turned to the innovative approach of collaboration (Irfan, 2021). In the rapid changing educational situation in the province, the basic job of public school teachers has become augmented and now gone are the days when low qualified and non - prepared educators ran public sector educational systems. The new educational plan and ongoing drives demands a great deal of collaboration and teamwork from public sector teachers and educational managers in completing the commitments of nation building (Bogo & Vayda, 2016). Hasan (2019) affirmed that mentoring teachers is the core responsibility of educational managers in contemporary era. They should identify the barriers to learning by discussion with teachers in the respectful manner.

### **Methods & Materials**

The methodology used for this investigation was qualitative. In-depth information is obtained through the utilization of these kinds of research projects (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). According to Creswell (2002), ethnographic designs are qualitative research methods used to characterize, examine, and interpret the common patterns of behavior, beliefs, and language that emerge over time within a culture-sharing community.

### **Population and Sample**

Target population included all district, tehsil marakiz and school level management of School Education Department (SED) Punjab i.e., CEOs, DEOs, Deputy DEOs, AEOs, heads and teachers of elementary level public sector schools in the Punjab. Accessible population included all CEOs, DEOs, Deputy DEOs, AEOs, heads and teachers of elementary level public sector schools as the study was delimited to Sargodha district due to constraints of time and resources.. All one hundred and fifteen (115) male and female marakiz in seven tehsils of district Sargodha were included in sample. Each markaz consisted of ten to fifteen primary and elementary level schools. Purposive sampling technique was used to select participants of focus group discussions from AEOs, head teachers and teachers from primary and elementary schools of district Sargodha. The sample was divided into two groups; male and female.

### **Instruments**

For qualitative data collection semi-structured, open-ended interviews and Focus Group Discussions were used in this study.

1. Interview Schedule for CEO (DEA) and DEOs (M/F) (1+2)
2. Focus Group Discussions with Dy. DEOs (M/F) (7+7=14)
3. Focus Group Discussions with AEOs (M/F) (7+7=14)
4. Focus Group Discussions with Head Teachers (7+7=14)
5. Focus Group Discussions with Teachers (7+7=14)

The researchers personally conducted interviews and focus group discussions. The detailed introduction of the study was discussed to extend rapport. It was ensured that the

participants respond positively and share their experiences regarding actual situation. The answers to the questions were digitally recorded and transcribed afterwards. Data generated from the interviews and Focus Group Discussions were coded thematically.

## **Results**

### **Results of Interview Schedule-I**

#### **Interview with Chief Executive Officer (DEA), Sargodha**

In depth interview was conducted from worthy Chief Executive Officer (District Education Authority) Sargodha. He looked highly optimistic and inspired from this new approach of collaborative management. But he considers that still our schools need a lot of changes by practicing more collaboratively by division of tasks. He articulated realistically, *“Collaboration plays a significant role on School Performance at elementary level in public schools and since the induction of new Assistant Education Officers through competitive mode, the overall positive change in lower management level can be seen. The schools are improving significantly especially in quality of education and service delivery.”*

He as an experienced educationist was hopeful but he added that still there is a lot to do to make our institutions child friendly and learning oriented. AEOs should focus more on collaborative aspect. They should build rapport among head teachers, teachers and community. He was of the opinion that AEOs should plan tasks and prepare to-do lists, prioritize tasks and delegate responsibilities, be flexible in scheduling tasks, try to manage and adjust in change, always be involved but be patient, continuously communicate and coordinate with all stakeholders.

### **Results of Interview Schedule-II**

#### **Interviews with District Education Officers (M/WEE)**

In depth interview was conducted from worthy District Education Officer (Male-Elementary Education) Sargodha. He stated that this new approach of collaborative management will definitely bring desired change in public schools at elementary level. However, he believes that still our schools yet to be changed collaboratively by using more efforts towards open school climates. He stated, *“The effect of collaborative managerial roles of AEOs and head teachers has also given teachers the opportunity to improve and demonstrate powerful agreeable and collaborative practices to help a positive and viable school climate which is suitable for all stakeholders where everyone can make progress by developing professionally.”*

Worthy District Education Officer (Women-Elementary Education) Sargodha was also interviewed. Although she appreciated the efforts of AEOs and head teachers in this regard yet she also looked concerned about the effect of collaboration if it is not professionally handled in following words, *“Establishing these sorts of groups which foster collaboration is considered the supernatural. On the other hand, if one fails to do so it properly and they are not organized well, they may cause more problems at school. Then you will have to spend most of your time to solve these problems. Mentoring requires expertise to handle things professionally”*

### **Results of Focus Group Discussions (DY. DEOS-M/WEE)**

In order to collect in-depth information and to gain better understanding of their perceptions about the effect of Collaborative Management on School at elementary level, focus

group discussions were employed to collect data from participants. Highly fruitful discussion sessions were held. The main purpose behind the detailed discussions from members was to draw out wide-ranging views, their perceptions about all variables and reflections about their experiences. The discussion comprised of questions on all six dimensions of Collaborative Management, and consolidated results of school performance retrieved from PMIU.

The main themes that emerged from focus group discussion were guided by research questions formulated on all objectives. One Deputy District Education Officer explained his satisfaction in following words: *“As educational managers, we are acquainted with the fact that working in collaboration is significant for school performance. We always encourage and motivate our lower management to ascertain such roles at schools. Actually, we all perform these kinds of stuff but we do not name it as collaboration”*

One of the Deputy District Education Officers was contented with overall school performance due to Collaborative management of AEOs but he had some reservations regarding head teachers, especially in managerial roles. He proposed, *“Building a constructive, credulous, and collaborative environment is the need of the hour which gives truly charismatic and empowering freedom to all stakeholders.”*

One Deputy DEO stated, *“Mentoring must encourage course of action and growth by assessment of the levels of learning, not a propagation of a manager's plan. A quality guide sets up new instructors with superb educators, paying little heed to content, so they gather instances of good instructing practises.”*

New instructors need a guide, however not simply somebody who is similar grade level is needed to be a coach. They require somebody who makes senses, character insightful and knows the intricate details of the school's way of life. Somebody, who can instruct about hierarchy of leadership and systems for getting things done. One member shared, *“I accept that correspondence is an unquestionable requirement”* Imparting adequately can mitigate issues that can possibly mess with the structure culture.

Collaborative teaching practices were being practised in most of schools. Resultantly school performance was improving as shown in data packs. They articulated that they were trying new material and methodologies in their classroom. They were comfortable trying new things to deliver their subject material. It was noted that Participants with less experience were more tentative about going outside of their comfort zone, while experienced teachers indicated that new ideas and activities helped them a lot in maintaining their liveliness for teaching. In a nutshell, the majority of focus group discussion participants agreed that they were highly satisfied with the progress of public schools after the innovative and participative ways of managerial practices which foster collaboration.

One Deputy DEO suggested when asked how AEOs and head teachers can improve collaboration, *“The top level management needs to consider arranging refresher workshops for all stakeholders on building collaboration for the successful supervision of the schools. This will help cultivate the connection among teachers and educational managers and encourage passion for acknowledgement of one another's skills and capabilities.”*

Another Deputy DEO recommended, *“The educational managers should consider arranging formal and informal gatherings or get-togethers for head teachers and teachers to discuss issues regarding collaboration They must be given ownership and confidence that they are on the board in all affairs of schools and their presence is being given due weight-age.”*

### **Results of Focus Group Discussions (AEOS-M/WEE)**

In order to collect in-depth information and to gain better understanding of their perceptions about the effect of Collaborative Management on School Performance at elementary level, focus group discussions were used to collect data from participants *i.e.*, Assistant Education Officers (AEOs). Highly fruitful discussion sessions were held. The main purpose behind the detailed discussions from members was to draw out wide-ranging views, their perceptions about all variables and reflections about their experiences.

AEOs were generally in agreement that the school performance was improved due to positive school climate. Head teachers and teachers' Knowledge, Skills and attitudes were also being changed positively. Most of AEOs elaborated the fact that they felt positive change in themselves and others who developed traits required for positive school climate.

They stated that they cluster educators into groups when a significant preference is going to be taken. I accept educators' capacity to show their initiative limits. At the point when staff contribution in significant choices is given, they feel much better. All in all, inspiring them to participate in dynamic interaction helps them in general. I get great outcomes by setting up these groups.

AEOs precisely argued, *"Our role involves doing so many routine things. That's why; we have a heavy work load. From time to time, we cannot do anything except for paperwork (daak), rushing to different meetings and answering phones."*

Most of them remarked, *"Although we know that building collaborative relationships is important and it brings all staff closer which have same goals. We establish these relationships at schools of course. In fact, we do these kinds of things but we do not name them as collaborative practices."*

There seemed to be complete consensus among all participants that positive school climate is significant and improves school performance dramatically. They told that their knowledge and skills increased, their attitudes changed and they feel more confident and committed. In short, it was concluded that collaborative practices of AEOs and head teachers provided public school teachers a golden opportunity to enhance their abilities as educational managers and foster positive school climate in order to improve quality of education.

A young and energetic female AEO stated that she congregates head teachers and teachers into teams during Teacher Forum Meetings (TFMs). Teachers of different capacity show their true colours and in this way they experience collaboration. She was exited to tell others that she gets great outcomes by building up these teams.

Another AEO stated, *"Building up these sorts of groups is viewed as sorcery. Be that as it may, it doesn't work as expected by and by. At the point when they are not coordinated well, they might cause more issues at school and afterward you should invest the greater part of your energy to tackle these issues with them. To thoroughly understand setting up these networks doesn't ensure their prosperity"*

Most of the AEOs were of the view that they have to complete a ton of tasks every day. Often their schedule is too hectic and time consuming. They frequently do administrative work, answer telephones and surge from one school to another and from one office to another office. In this mode, they don't have ample time and energy for different things like setting up joint effort to foster collaboration.

One of the experienced AEO remarked, *"These days, I have no time left from my every day responsibility. I can't characterize my line of work in an organized way. In fact, I profess to oversee. At the end of the day, we do our essential managerial assignments."*

Another AEO uncovered same scenario in the following words, *"My position as an AEO necessitates undertaking numerous tasks simultaneously by maintaining high standards. Hence, I have a weighty work schedule. Now and again I can't do anything aside from daak (information) work, hurrying to various meetings and attending to telephone calls."*

Most of the AEOs suggested their desire for their school head teachers that they should create a collaborative school climate where all members of the school staff feel involved. Many of the teaching staff doesn't bother to collaborate themselves. They need mentoring, facilitation and support.

### **Results of Focus Group Discussions (Heads)**

These statements from heads were self-explanatory that most of the teachers need proper guidance, mentoring and guidance after their classroom observation. AEOs regularly perform classroom observations on tablet based App Classroom Observation Tool (COT) especially designed by PITB for them and they also do follow ups, on-the-job facilitation and mentoring. But it is observed that mostly teachers in public sector do only those activities which they are asked seriously and assessed properly.

Most of the heads responded that they tried to support teachers in implementing collaborative practices but accepted the reality that they do not reinforce, reward and evaluate specific collaboration related outcomes in a desired manner due to different constraints.

Heads remarked that the parents were conscious and concerned about the future of their kids in public schools but they now agreed that they see them improving. They remarked that are to some extent satisfied with learning in public schools. Schools are improving but still a lot of work is to be done. Parents and community also have a big role to play in this regard. Parents often point out about the excitement of their kids when they were praised and more involved by trained teachers in schools but complained that teachers do not use these activities consistently. But still they are hopeful for improved school performance.

Most of the AEOs also quoted that during their visits the students were hesitant but when they made them relaxed, they uttered some facts that were heart touching and had hidden messages for our policy makers. They remarked that before the twice visit of AEOs who remain in school for most of the day during visits, teachers don't took our classes seriously. But when they were guided and supported by AEOs they changed their classroom layout into a U shape. They played with them and spoke English. They involved them and they started taking interest in studies.

Heads further explained that teachers started praising students more and made their pairs and groups. But the alarming thing was their disappointment when they specified that no one knows who stops them; they again become the same in other days as they were before when no officer is visiting the school.

### **Results of Focus Group Discussions (Teachers)**

The majority of teachers also agreed that collaborative management also had positive effect on participants as it improved quality of teaching & learning, stronger peer relationships, greater job satisfaction, less stress on the job, increased results and student learning outcomes, students as confident learners, improved attendance, decreased dropouts, increased students' and their parents' satisfaction and it also increased school performance score measured by PMIU.

These findings are in line with a recent meta-analysis by Robinson and her colleagues (2008) which suggest that "leadership makes a difference" in the quality of education in schools and it is becoming more widely accepted among scholars, decision-makers, and practitioners.

**Conclusion**

It is concluded that majority of the AEOs pointed out that teachers and head teachers need to have more ownership of schools. They must change their attitudes, learn more skills, and enhance their knowledge. Besides new CPD program implemented through AEOs in collaboration with EOs, SED and QAED should launch professional development programs for public school teachers which are based on collaborative practices, school climate and how they both have an effect on schools' performance. There must also be some evaluation mechanism to grade teachers' performance as well which should be depicted in evaluation reports. Incentives and perks should also be given to extraordinary performing teachers and their mentors.

The participants generally agreed that they have seen positive outcomes from on the job mentoring of AEOs. It illustrates that if properly implemented, collaborative management and creating positive school climate is highly productive for public school teachers and head teachers and ultimately it enhances school performance. They further stated that they are expecting more encouraging results in near future. AEOs were hopeful that they would be able to transform schools under their jurisdiction by collaborative managerial practices if the top management considers it important and give AEOs ample time for this significant task. So, it can be concluded that desired outcomes from collaborative management and school climate can be seen where implemented.

During interviews and focus group discussions it was suggested by almost all higher officers (CEO, DEOs and Majority of the Deputy DEOs) that mentoring from AEOs (on the job facilitation and professional development of teachers) must be given due significance and ample time. AEOs should make their visits more productive and result oriented by implementing collaborative practices. They should try their best to change the overall school climate to enhance school performance.

Majority of the AEOs suggested that they need support from CEO, DEOs and Dy DEOs (Reinforcement, Encourage, Reward) in implementation of all collaborative managerial practices to make the climate of schools open or positive to increase school performance. They seemed committed but looked concerned about their excessive workload and irrelevant assignments on daily basis. They consider it a big hindrance in achieving desired results regarding collaboration, positive school climate and improved schools' performance.

In a nutshell, their majority agreed that the most crucial element in transferring knowledge and skills on the job and school performance is collaborative managerial support and mentoring. Therefore, it is suggested that AEOs should recognize their role to work in close collaboration with head teachers, teachers and school councils in order to plan, develop, implement and track progress of systems and frameworks that enhance school performance.

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