Teacher collegiality and teacher professional commitment in public secondary schools in Islamabad, Pakistan

Madiha Shah a *, Marwan M.A. Abualrob b

aUniversity of Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
bArab American University, 970 Jenin, West Bank, Palestine

Abstract

Collegiality among educators is considered as an essential component of successful and effective organizations. Literature suggests that teacher collegiality is a vital determinant of teacher commitment and high professionalism. However, most of the studies on collegiality have been conducted in the developed world using non-quantitative approaches. There is a paucity of research on teacher collegial relationships in the developing countries such as Pakistan. The purpose of this quantitative, non-experimental survey study was to identify the impact of teacher collegiality on teacher professional commitment in public secondary schools in Islamabad, Pakistan. The survey, comprising the teacher collegiality scale (TCS) and the occupational commitment scale (OCS) was conducted in 17 secondary schools located in Islamabad. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to assess the impact of teachers’ collegiality on their professional commitment. The analysis confirmed that teacher collegiality positively influenced professional commitment among Pakistani school teachers. A strong positive impact of teacher collegiality on professional commitment among school teachers necessitates school leadership to focus on this aspect if teachers are desired to remain highly committed and devoted to the teaching profession.

Keywords: teacher collegiality; professional commitment; secondary schools; Pakistan.

1. Introduction

Educators have been expected to exhibit strong and healthy collegial relationships in educational settings to reduce isolation and enhance professionalism. Benefits of collegiality have consistently been highlighted in the literature. Educational researchers and scientists have been suggested that developing the ability among school personnel to function as professional collegial communities could bring effective outcomes and substantive school improvement [1] [2] [3].

Similarly, teacher professional commitment has also been identified as a crucial factor in determining and influencing organizational outcomes. Commitment is believed to be vital for organizational productivity, quality, and performance [4] [5]. Higher commitment among school staff influences the future success of education and schools [6]. Keeping teachers in their profession is indeed vital to maintaining standards and improving school performance specifically in terms of student academic achievement.

Many researchers have argued that collegiality in schools promotes such a cultural climate that allows teachers to share their expertise and engage in professional inquiry [7] [8]. As a result, teachers become a source of professional
growth for each other [9] and their commitment level increases consequently. Teachers’ commitment to teaching is strongly associated with collegiality [7] [10] and teachers’ enjoyment in their work is linked to their sense of school community [11].

2. Literature Review

Despite the recognized value of strong interpersonal relationships, it is still a rare practice among educators [12] [13]. Building collegial communities is considered as an essential requirement for successful and effective organization as its members interact regularly to share their ideas and expertise and develop common understanding of organizational goals and the means to their attainment [14]. Teachers need opportunities to collaborate with each other to best serve their students, to make their work more meaningful, and to transform schooling in a way that keeps it vibrant and relevant.

Professional commitment, which includes occupational competence and efficacy [15] [16] is a relatively new and less researched concept. It has only started its recognition in the late 1980s. Most of the earlier work on professional commitment was based on organizational commitment studies. An increased attention to professional commitment by scholars and researchers might be attributed to the significant changes in important characteristics of the workforce. An increase in mergers, acquisitions, and layoffs made people realize that depending on a single organization to sustain their entire career is unrealistic. Similarly, increasing education levels have also influenced individuals’ interest to their professions rather than their organizations. Employees are now thought to be less dependent upon their employing organizations and are more willing to keep their attachment to their occupation, career, and/or profession [17].

2.1 Teacher Collegiality and Teacher Professional Commitment

Focusing on the link between teacher collegiality and teacher professional commitment, many studies have indicated that in schools where teachers work together to plan school improvement, select instructional methods and activities, and plan teacher professional development and training, teachers tend to be more committed to their profession [7] [10] [18]. It is further supported that collegiality among teaching personnel helps them to better develop higher commitment levels [19].

It is claimed that collegiality can contribute to teachers’ desire to remain in teaching profession [20]. Teachers who work collegially are more likely to remain in the profession because they feel supported and valued in their role [21]. Studies of restructuring schools found that collegiality contributed to teacher professional commitment [22] [23]. However, the findings of these studies were more pronounced in the qualitative than in the quantitative data. This argument is further supported by stating that collaborating teachers perceived themselves as more committed to their goals and to their students [24]. Another study focusing on teacher commitment developed a framework for assessing how differential incentive policies affect teacher commitment [25]. This research identified collegiality as a key element that contributes to teacher commitment.

A study of teacher professionalism found that collegiality among teachers stimulates their professionalism and commitment to teaching [26]. Another study investigating the role of professional learning communities in 16 high schools in California and Michigan found that collegial support and interaction influence how teachers feel about their jobs and their students [27]. The authors found that collegiality also influenced the motivation and career commitment of teachers and the extent to which they are willing to modify classroom practice.

Examining the effects of professional support on teachers’ commitment to the teaching profession revealed that teachers’ professional commitment was directly influenced by principal leadership/support as well as peer support [10]. According to this study, the largest direct effect on teachers’ professional commitment was from peer support. The findings indicated the importance of teacher interpersonal relations in enhancing teachers’ professional commitment.

A study surveyed elementary school teachers in magnet and non-magnet schools regarding their level of commitment [7]. The researchers determined the indicators of professionalism related to commitment and concluded that forming a community of learners in a school significantly influenced teacher professional commitment. In all situations, teachers who felt a sense of collegiality and were given opportunities to learn together were the most
committed. It is claimed that professional commitment can be nurtured and developed in a collegial school culture [28].

In short, the literature review has suggested that professional commitment is an important variable that is most frequently influenced by the variations in the levels of collegiality among teaching personnel.

3. Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to identify the impact of teachers’ collegiality on their professional commitment in public secondary schools in Islamabad, Pakistan. This study tested and verified the following research hypothesis:

Hypothesis: Teacher collegiality has a positive impact on teacher professional commitment.

4. Methodology

The current study was a quantitative, non-experimental study conducted at 17 public secondary schools across Islamabad including eight male and nine female schools†. The survey was distributed to all the teaching staff numbering 445 in total. A total of 364 completed questionnaires (a response rate of 81.79%) were collected from the selected schools after a period of two weeks for scoring and analyses.

The survey instrument consisted of two measures: teacher collegiality scale (TCS) and occupational commitment scale (OCS). TCS was a self-developed scale consisting of 32-items. This scale addresses seven dimensions of collegiality among secondary school teachers: demonstrating mutual support and trust; observing one another teaching; joint planning and assessment; sharing ideas and expertise; teaching each other; developing curriculum together; and sharing resources.

OCS consisted of 18-items was adapted from Meyer, Allan, and Smith [29]. This scale measures three forms of commitment: affective commitment; continuance commitment; and normative commitment. A Likert scale ranging from 1 to 7 (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree) was used for both the measures. The coefficient alphas for TCS ranged from .71 to .85. The Cronbach alpha values for OCS ranged from .86 to .88.

Data were analyzed using descriptive as well as inferential statistics. Structural equation modeling (SEM) using AMOS 16.0 was used to analyze the impact of teacher collegiality on teacher professional commitment.

5. Results and findings

5.1 Demographic Information of the Respondents

Almost half of the participants were male (49.2%) and half were female (50.8%). More than half of the teachers (54.7%) were master’s degree holders and 34.9% were bachelor’s degree holders. Only 10.4% were either MPhil degree holders or PhD holders. Nearly 22% of the staff had less than five years of teaching experience and 31% of the teachers had 5-10 years of experience. Almost 47% of the staff had been teaching for more than 10 years.

5.2 Descriptive Statistics

The means and standard deviations for each subscale of TCS and OCS were calculated. Teachers’ perceptions about collegiality showed higher mean values for two subscales namely ‘demonstrating mutual support and trust’ ($M = 5.31$, $SD = .61$) and ‘sharing ideas and expertise’ ($M = 5.15$, $SD = .51$). ‘Observing one another teaching’ subscale showed the lowest mean values ($M = 4.18$, $SD = .58$). Regarding professional commitment, teachers showed higher mean values for affective commitment ($M = 5.45$, $SD = .60$).

† In Pakistan, public secondary schools are separated by gender.
5.3 Results for SEM Analysis

The measurement model was tested initially to assess if observed indicators were loaded on hypothesized latent variables using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Standardized regression weights revealed that all but four indicators were strongly related to their associated constructs and were one indication of construct validity [30]. The four items with factor loadings less than 0.4 were removed from their respective subscales. The covariance between teacher collegiality and professional commitment was statistically significant with critical ratio (C.R.) > ±1.96 using a significance level of .05.

The goodness-of-fit (GOF) statistics were examined to verify the structural model. The fit for structural model was 3563.67 with significant p-value (p < .001). The other fit indices showed that structural model fitted the current data well (CFI = .93, TLI = .91, RMSEA = .04, and RMR = .05).

The structural path (Professional_Commitment <--- Teacher_Collegiality) was statistically significant (p < .001) with parameter estimate equals to .82 indicating the strong positive impact of teacher collegiality on professional commitment.

Discussion and Conclusions

Teachers’ perceptions regarding their collegiality show that teachers in Islamabad support their colleagues. They trust each other and feel comfortable in sharing their skills and expertise. Teachers do not feel hesitant in asking for suggestions about classroom management and discipline issues. However, they need to be more open with their colleagues about discussing instructional matters. Similarly, planning teaching strategies together and exercising joint assessment were less obvious among secondary school teachers, which might be due to the restriction of common planning time in most of the schools. Finding time to prepare and design lesson plans with colleagues during a regular work day was challenging for many teachers. Most of the teachers, however, believe that they share knowledge as well as other resources with their peers. The lowest mean values for ‘ observing one another teaching’ subscale indicate a need of convincing teachers to open their classrooms to their colleagues and to share their teaching practices in order to improve their knowledge and skills. Teachers in Pakistan need to learn that observing each other’s practice can improve their teaching expertise. Currently, the presence of other professionals in a classroom is viewed as one of scrutiny and surveillance instead of part of professional growth.

Regarding teachers’ professional commitment, the highest mean values were observed for affective (desire-based) component as compared to continuance and normative commitment. The results of the descriptive analysis showed that public secondary school teachers in Pakistan feel proud to be in the teaching profession and never feel regret having entered the teaching profession. They believed that if they would change their profession at this stage of their lives could cost them a great deal of personal sacrifice. They were of the opinion that whoever gets trained in a profession should spend a reasonable period in that profession. They also feel a great sense of loyalty in teaching.

The consistent argument in the literature about the positive impact of teacher collegiality on their professional commitment is strongly supported by this study. Teacher collegiality positively influenced teacher professional commitment among public secondary school teachers in Islamabad. The theories that support the positive impact of teacher collegiality on teacher professional commitment [7] [10] [21] [28] are verified in this study. The results indicate that teachers who perceive higher level of collegiality in their schools are more likely to be professionally committed.

The findings of this study suggest that teachers’ commitment to their profession could be enhanced by increasing collegiality among them. Therefore, school leaders and principals must provide their staff with facilities and opportunities that assist in improving their interpersonal relationships. Similarly, teachers must also recognize the value of working together and feel comfortable in opening their classrooms to their colleagues. It is imperative for teachers in any school setting to be highly collegial in all facets of the school activities. High team spirit and group involvement make teachers remain committed to their respective schools and to the teaching profession.
References

[1] Barth, R. S. (2006). Improving relationships within the schoolhouse. Educational Leadership, 63 (6), 8–13.
[2] DuFour, R. (2004). What is a “professional learning community”? Educational Leadership, 61 (8), 6–11.
[3] Little, J. W., Gearhart, M., Curry, M., & Kafta, J. (2003). Looking at student work for teacher learning, teacher community and school reform. Phi Delta Kappan, 85 (3), 184–192.
[4] Lee, K., Carswell, J. J., & Allen, N. J. (2000). A meta-analytic review of occupational commitment: Relations with person- and work-related variables. Journal of Applied Psychology, 85 (5), 799–811.
[5] Meyer, J. P., & Allen, N. J. (1997). Commitment in the workplace: Theory, research, and application. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
[6] Huberman, M. (1993). The lives of teachers (J. Neufield, trans.). London, UK: Cassell.
[7] Hausman, C. S., & Goldring, E. B. (2001). Sustaining teacher commitment: The role of professional communities. Peabody Journal of Education, 76 (2), 30–51.
[8] Scribner, J. P., Cockrell, K. S., Cockrell, D. H., & Valentine, J. W. (1999). Creating professional communities in schools through organizational learning: An evaluation of a school improvement process. Educational Administration Quarterly, 35 (1), 130–160.
[9] Bransford, J. D., Brown, A. L., & Cocking, R. R. (Eds.). (1999). Teacher learning. In How people learn: Brain, mind, experience and school (pp. 190–205). Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
[10] Singh, K., & Billingsley, B. S. (1998). Professional support and its effects on teachers’ commitment. Journal of Educational Research, 91 (4), 229–239.
[11] Bryk, A. S., & Driscoll, M. E. (1988). The high school as community: Contextual influences and consequences for students and teachers. Chicago, IL: National Center on Effective Schools.
[12] Bruffee, K. A. (1999). Collaborative learning: Higher education, interdependence, and the authority of knowledge (2nd ed.). Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
[13] Heider, K. L. (2005). Teacher isolation: How mentoring programs can help. Current Issues in Education [On-line], 8(14). Available at http://cie.ed.asu.edu/volume8/number14/
[14] Leonhard, L., & Leonhard, P. (2003). The continuing trouble with collaboration: Teachers talk. Current Issues in Education [On-line], 6(15). Available at http://cie.ed.asu.edu/volume6/number15/
[15] Bogler, R., & Somach, A. (2004). Influence of teacher empowerment on teachers’ organizational commitment, professional commitment, and organization citizenship behaviour in schools. Teaching and Teacher Education, 20 (3), 277–289.
[16] Day, C., Elliot, B., & Kington, A. (2005). Reform, standards and teacher identity: Challenges of sustaining commitment. Teaching and Teacher Education, 21 (5), 563–577.
[17] Cohen, A. (2007). Dynamics between occupational and organizational commitment in the context of flexible labor markets: A review of the literature and suggestions for a future research agenda. Bremen: Institut Technik und Bildung, Universität Bremen.
[18] Futernick, K. (2007). A possible dream: Retaining California teachers so all students can learn. [Electronic Resource] Report. California State University. Available at www.calstate.edu/teacherquality/documents/possible_dream_exec.pdf
[19] Hargreaves, A. (1997). The four ages of professionalism and professional learning. UNICORN, 23 (2), 86–108.
[20] Rosenholtz, S. J., & Smylie, M. (1984). Teacher compensation and career ladders. Elementary School Journal, 85 (2), 149–166.
[21] Barth, R. S. (1990). Improving schools from within. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
[22] Louis, K. S., & Smith, B. (1991). Restructuring, teacher engagement and school culture: Perspectives on school reform and the improvement of teacher’s work. School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 2 (1), 34–52.
[23] Louis, K. S., & Smith, B. (1992). Cultivating teacher engagement: Breaking the iron law of social class. In F. Newmann (Ed.), Student commitment and achievement in American secondary schools (pp. 119-152). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
[24] Walsh, K., & Shay, M. (1993). In support of interdisciplinary learning: The climate factor. Middle School Journal, 24 (4), 56–60.
[25] Firestone, W. A., & Pennell, J. R. (1993). Teacher commitment, working conditions, and differential incentive policies. Review of Educational Research, 63 (4), 489–525.
[26] Talbert, J. E., & McLaughlin, M. W. (1994). Teacher professionalism in local school contexts. American Journal of Education, 102 (2), 123–153.
[27] McLaughlin, M. W., & Talbert, J. E. (2001). Professional communities and the work of high school teaching. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
[28] Troncoso-Skidmore, S. (2007). Professionally committed teachers. PRISE White Paper No. 2007–9.
[29] Meyer, J. P., Allen, N. J., & Smith, C. A. (1993). Commitment to organizations and occupations: Extension and test of a three-component conceptualization. Journal of Applied Psychology, 78 (4), 538–551.
[30] Hair, J. F. Jr., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J., Anderson, R. E., & Tatham, R. L. (2006). Multivariate data analysis, (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River: Pearson Prentice Hall.