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RESEARCH PAPER

Understanding Leadership Level of Principals, a Phenomenological Study in Punjab

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ABSTRACT

The current study attempts to understand the leadership level of college principals in Punjab, Pakistan. Academia is facing various challenges. The need for vibrant, active, and proactive leadership is one of them. Leadership literature has a new dimension in the form of five levels of leadership by John Maxwell. There is a population and an empirical gap in the literature on the topic. It was a mixed-method research. A sequential explanatory design was used. The first was a survey, and in the second phase, the phenomenological approach was used to complete the study. Results revealed that demographics like experience and personal job status cause significant differences when assessing the principal's leadership level. College faculty believed their principals were at Pinnacle. It is recommended that this phenomenon be investigated at various levels of education and in different cultural contexts.

Keywords: Assessment, College, Faculty, Leadership, People Development, Position, Permission, Principals, Production

Introduction

The ever-changing scenario of educational organizations demands energetic and daring leadership to cope up with the challenges of the modern world. Academia needs experienced and skillful leaders. various research from the past highlights the need for active leaders in the higher education sector. Current research is a maiden study measuring faculty perspectives on the effect of stages of the principal's leadership. Principals and faculty in higher education institutes are vital to the development of any country. It is essential to equip educational leaders with the skills to cope with the challenges of the modern world. Leadership literature has many theories, styles, and methods that provide many avenues for effective leadership. John Maxwell introduced many strategies to make leaders solid and active. He believes leadership can be more effective if followers assess the stage of leadership of the current in charge. Views and perspectives of followers help elevate the stages of leadership. The current study is a novice approach to exploring the opinions and beliefs of faculty in depth and knowing the reasons for their subjective reality. The study also seeks to see the interceding effect of demographics on respondents' opinions.

Literature Review

Leadership in higher education institutes is critical to success (Hassan et al., 2018). Effective leadership is the mantra of success. A leader elevates the performance of the organization and its employees. Leadership is a crucial indicator of the adequate performance of any organization.

The case is the same in the corporate sector. It is inevitable for leaders to adopt effective leadership styles and management competencies if they want to keep pace with the modern world (Alshahrani, 2020). A dynamic leader keeps followers active, energetic, and focused (Amelia et al., 2022). Besides all the capabilities, leading any organization has

become challenging due to the complexity of demographics and ever-changing situations. The cultural beliefs of faculty also affect leaders in organizations. It has become difficult for organizational leaders to cope with organizational challenges. In educational leadership, the role of the leader is clearly defined. They have to perform multiple tasks in the right direction. He has to synergize the working abilities of people around him to get maximum results (Sajjad et al., 2023). This is the charisma of the personality of leaders, which connects people to them. Many concepts are being added to the knowledge pool and need to be investigated in all contexts of organizations. Maxwell (2011) introduced a new dimension of leadership study. He introduced five levels of leadership. These stages are *Position, Permission, Production, People Development, and Pinnacle.* These five levels help to determine the performance standard of any organizational leader.

The first stage of Maxwell's model of leadership is Position. It indicates that a person in the first step of the model is a boss. Because he practices powers designated to him only, this is the starting point of the leadership journey. It provides a base for the upcoming leadership journey. In the first stage of the leadership model, the leader learns to lead and spreads his influence in the organization. The positive side of people standing at this stage is that they have the potential to lead; therefore, they are designated power. Now, they are ready to take off on a leadership journey. Maxwell believes that a leader's potential and capabilities are recognized at the Position leadership level. However, position level has its drawbacks, too. The position is the starting point of influencing people. At this stage, followers obey the leader as they have to. There are no cordial relations or collaborations. The leader has to synchronize his values with the organization. He has to set ethical, relational, and success values in the workplace. All the stages on the leadership level have pros and cons., depending too much on power dynamics to mislead people. This may result in the form of a politicized working environment. A leader should use his powers to cooperate with employees. It is the start of the growth of a leader. The second stage of the leadership model is Permission. One exciting thing about the leadership model is that all the subsequent stages involve qualities of previous stages.

The workplace environment becomes effective, productive, and pleasant at the permission level. Collaborative efforts start, and a “have to” mindset ends. Leaders and followers come near each other and discuss personal and family matters. A leader knows how to get things done. The leader gives privileges to employees and helps them in every possible way to attain goals. A trust -based relationship flourishes. Leaders consider it an opportunity to serve. Leaders and followers start walking side by side. A sense of teamwork develops, and they start working towards a shared vision.

Maxwell (2011) believes that it is easy to care for followers without leading them, but it is not easy to lead without care. A wave of change arises in this organization. Leaders need help to handle this because followers exploit relations with the leader. It becomes challenging for leaders to make the right decision with the right attitude. On the other hand, consistency in building relations with employees and maintaining them is necessary. A leader should value each person at this stage. Undivided attention and focus on attaining goals should be the motto.

The third stage of the leadership model is Production. It gives a new start to any organization. The productivity of a leader is enhanced at this stage. Making things possible is the agenda at this level. A momentum of productivity is established through the vision of the leader. He synergizes the potential of employees. Productive organizations become unbeatable. A leader gains self-confidence, which gives a sense of accomplishment. Each person in the organization should know the organization’s vision. Great leaders work in teams. Teamwork is the most essential part of this stage. Teams should be provided with proper feedback to make the right decisions. Employees should be encouraged by the leader to give maximum output. Leaders should reward teams and individuals. Causes of failures should be identified. People are the most precious asset of any organization. The growth of

people is the growth of the organization. A leader's task is to enable followers to grow and explore their innate potential. In productive workplaces, leaders allow followers to explore their potential and grow professionally. The leader sets examples for the employees. Every human has their own pace of making progress.

Leaders should not expect the same pace of work from all. It is obligatory to announce deadlines, but leaders should also be flexible wherever it is needed. Prioritizing the tasks is a sign of good leadership. Being a change agent leader, one should know how, when, and where to start any task. The fourth level of leadership is People's development. Leaders should value people and enable them to grow. When employees stop taking instructions, it means that they are ready now to lead. It indicates that the leader of the organization is making future leaders.

A leader should be pragmatic at this stage. He should let employees experience new things; however, he keeps an eye on all matters.

The fifth level of leadership is the Pinnacle. A few leaders attain this level. All the qualities of previous stages are included in it. The leader becomes the leader of leaders. He prepares enough number of future leaders. He can present many people who can lead the organization whenever needed. However, the biggest problem at this stage is that a leader becomes self-centered and focuses on bigger goals. Ignoring small obstacles may create hurdles for him. A sense of insecurity threatens him. One who masters the art of controlling without anger and ego stays for a long time at this stage.

In Pakistan, educational leadership is discussed in schools and universities. The college level remained under-researched. This maiden research attempts to elicit the perception of faculty on the leadership level of college principals.

Literature indicates that there is a population and knowledge gap in this area. College faculty members are under-researched. The effect of demographics on levels of leadership needs to be explored. Ellis (2009) explains in her research that it is essential to study participants' demographics. If a researcher wants to move to the universalism of results, he should study participants' demographics (Hammer, 2011). The detailed description of participant demographics enables readers to generalize any study's findings. This study assessed the leadership level of college principals at the tertiary level. Considering educational leadership important, this study was conducted in an academic setup to see the level of leadership assessed by faculty and the effects of different demographics on it. So that suitable leadership can be prepared to cope with the recent academic challenges.

Material and Methods

The current study used a mixed-method design. Mills & Gay (2016) believe that mixed method studies help explore the strength and interaction of qualitative and quantitative investigation.

Mixed method studies enable the researchers to confirm and cross-validate the extent of the relationship between variables (Fraenkel et al., 1993). There are many designs in mixed-method studies. One of them is sequential explanatory design. This design was found to be most appropriate to conduct this study. In sequential explanatory design, the first stage of the study is quantitative, and the later stage is qualitative, which follows the footprints identified in the first phase of the research. A Quan-qual model is followed in current research. The sole purpose of using this model is to gain an in-depth understanding of phenomena. The paradigm of study is pragmatism.

Paradigm is explained by Kaushik and Walsh (2019). They described paradigms as conjectural and real-world "tools." They help solve specific research problems that are used to solve specific research problems. Paradigms work heuristics in social research.

This is an ex post facto research. In an ex post facto study, the researcher intends to retrospectively study an independent variable for its possible association with the dependent variable in a natural setting and to see its effect. Then, a cause-and-effect relationship is established between variables. (Cohen et al., 2017). In the second stage of the study, qualitative research helped the researcher explore the density of the phenomenon and discover the subjective reality of the phenomenon. A phenomenological approach was used to complete this phase. In phenomenology, the researcher brackets the particular aspect of the phenomenon and tries to understand the respondent's attitude. The phenomenon is studied in a natural setting by approaching people and exploring their views helps the researcher to approach reality (Bogdan &Biklin, 1997).

Table 1
Reliability of Assessment of Level of Leadership scale

Factors of scale	Items in each factor	Reliability α
Position	3	.756
Permission	5	.694
Production	5	.812
People's development	5	.813
Pinnacle	2	.798
Total items	20	.934

Reliability refers to the consistent scoring of a measurement obtained through repeated administration of the same instrument. Cornbach's alpha coefficient is utilized to gauge internal consistency and inter-item correlation, with a coefficient of .7 or higher typically considered acceptable (DeVellis, 2016). The reliability calculation of the Assessment of Level of Leadership scale yielded scores within the acceptable range across all factors and the overall scale.

In the subsequent phase of the study, a structured interview protocol was employed to engage faculty members. In qualitative research, reliability pertains to the consistency and stability of responses among different coders (Creswell & Poth, 2013). Detailed responses from study participants were meticulously recorded, and two independent researchers analyzed the digital data files. The consistency of interpretations derived from the data demonstrates its reliability and authenticity.

Sample

The study sample comprised 635 faculty members from the college wing operating under the Higher Education Department of the Government of Punjab, Pakistan. The selection of participants was conducted using a proportionate random sampling technique. This method ensured that each respondent had an equal opportunity to be chosen for inclusion in the study, thus enhancing the sample's representativeness.

Table 2
Demographic information of the study samples

Demographic Variables	n (%)
Gender	
Male	391(62)
Female	244(38)
Qualification	
Masters	250(40)
MPhil	275(44)

PhD	115(16)
Designation	
Lecturer	245(39)
Assistant Professor	193(31)
Associate Professor	172(30)
Professor	25(4)
Age (years)	
25-35	235(33)
36-45	192(37)
46-55	188(30)
Marital Status	
Married	437(69)
Unmarried	171(27)
Widow/Divorced	27(4)
Personal Job Status	
Permanent Teacher	422(66)
On Contract Teacher	213(34)
Spouse Job Status	
Business	422(66)
Job In the Same Profession	238(35)

Table 2 presents a concise overview of the demographic characteristics of the study sample. Among the participants, there is a slightly higher representation of males (62%) than females (38%). Educational qualifications vary, with a significant portion holding either a Master's (40%) or an MPhil degree (44%), while a smaller proportion possess a PhD (16%). Within the educational institution, the majority of participants hold positions as Lecturers (39%) or Assistant Professors (31%), followed by Associate Professors (30%) and Professors (4%). The age distribution shows a fairly even spread across three main categories: 25-35 years (33%), 36-45 years (37%), and 46-55 years (30%). In terms of marital status, a substantial portion of participants are married (69%), while a smaller proportion are unmarried (27%), and a tiny percentage are either widowed or divorced (4%). Regarding personal job status within the educational institution, most participants hold permanent teaching positions (66%) compared to those on contract (34%). Lastly, participants' spouses primarily engage in business (66%), while a smaller percentage hold jobs in the same profession (35%). This demographic profile offers valuable insights into the composition and diversity of the study sample, encompassing various demographic factors that may influence perceptions and responses within the research context.

In the second phase of the study, criterion sampling is used. In criterion sampling, such cases are selected that can give more information about phenomena (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024)

Procedure

The assessment of college faculty members' leadership levels commenced with distributing a questionnaire developed by Maxwell (2011) for this purpose. Subsequently, the collected data underwent analysis via SPSS software. An interview protocol was then crafted to conduct interviews with faculty members within colleges. The questions within this protocol were formulated to investigate deeper into areas where additional insights from study participants were deemed necessary.

The interview process's primary objective was to elucidate the underlying factors contributing to the observed leadership levels of college principals and ascertain the critical criteria employed by faculty members in assigning specific leadership levels to these principals. Throughout the interviews, numerous probing questions were posed to elicit comprehensive responses from the participants.

In the subsequent study phase, qualitative data analysis techniques were applied, facilitated by software such as Nvivo. This involved the exploration of themes emerging from the data. Project maps, hierarchy charts, and word frequency lists were also generated to elucidate the qualitative data analysis process and its outcomes.

Results and Discussion

Data was analyzed in two phases. In the first one, descriptive statistics was applied to segregate the data according to demographics. The effect of demographics like Gender, Job status, Experience, qualification, and spouse job status was studied.

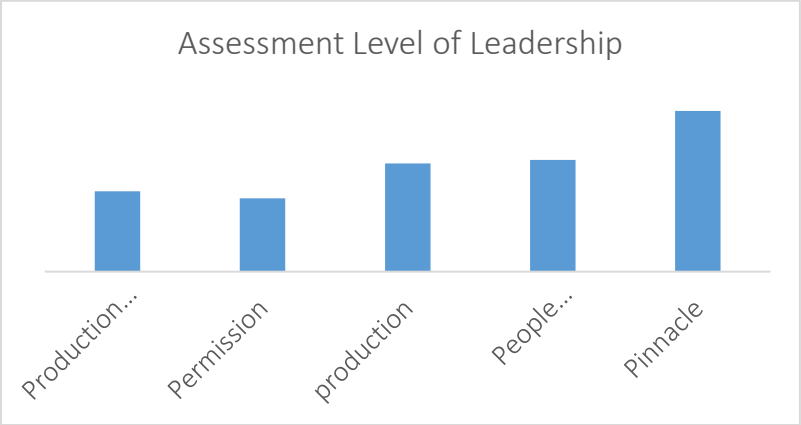

Figure 1: Level-wise mean score of principals assessed by faculty

The above graph shows the mean score on college principals' Assessment Level of Leadership. Overall, the mean on the ALL scale was 3.61.

Table 3.
Factor Wise and Overall Assessment of Level of Leadership of College Principals by College Faculty (n=635)

Factors	Mean	SD
Position	3.43	0.78
Permission	3.46	0.65
Production	3.54	0.76
People Development	3.57	0.76
Pinnacle	**3.60**	**0.77**
Overall Mean Score of Study	3.61	0.60

Table 3 presents the factor-wise and overall assessment of the leadership level of college principals as perceived by college faculty members (n=635). The table includes each factor's mean scores, standard deviations (SD), and overall mean scores.

Position: The mean score for the Position factor is 3.43, with a standard deviation of 0.78. This suggests that, on average, college faculty members perceive the leadership of college principals in their positions to be moderately high.

Permission: The mean score for the Permission factor is 3.46 with a standard deviation of 0.65. This indicates that college faculty members perceive the extent to which college principals grant permission or autonomy in decision-making as slightly lower than the Position factor but still generally positive.

Production: The mean score for the Production factor is 3.54, with a standard deviation of 0.76. This suggests that faculty members perceive the effectiveness of college

principals in fostering productivity and output to be lower than other factors but still relatively optimistic.

People Development: The mean score for the People Development factor is 3.57, with a standard deviation of 0.76. It proves that members of the college faculty appreciate their principals. They give them credit for producing many future leaders for the organization.

Pinnacle: The mean score for the Pinnacle factor is 3.60, with a standard deviation of 0.77. This suggests that faculty members perceive the college principals' ability to reach the highest levels of leadership and achievement to be moderately positive.

The overall mean score of the Study: The overall mean score is 3.61, with a standard deviation of 0.60. This indicates that, on average, college faculty members perceive the overall level of leadership demonstrated by college principals to be generally positive.

In summary, the overall assessment suggests that college faculty members perceive college principals to exhibit high leadership across various factors, with slight variations in perceptions across specific areas such as permission and production.

Table 4
Comparison between perceptions of college faculty on the Assessment of Level of Leadership Scale on personal job Status

Assessment of Level of Leadership	Permanent M(SD	Contract M(SD)	t (635)	p	Cohen d
Position	3.68(0.80)	3.38(0.75)	2.73	0.006	0.334
Permission	3.56(0.68)	3.78(0.62)	-3.82	<0.001	0.338
Production	3.48(0.78)	3.27(0.73)	3.27	.001	0.288
People development	3.46(0.78)	3.22(0.73)	3.65	<.001	0.318
Pinnacle	3.56(0.76)	3.25(0.77)	4.83	<.001	0.403
Overall	3.64(0.62)	3.48(0.58)	3.14	0.002	0.267

The analysis reveals a significant difference between faculty members' perceptions due to job status. Members of the faculty gave different opinions on position levels. The mean score of those professors was high as compared to those who were working on a contract. Specifically, in dimensions such as Position (Permanent: M = 3.68, SD = 0.80; Contract: M = 3.38, SD = 0.75), Production (Permanent: M = 3.48, SD = 0.78; Contract: M = 3.27, SD = 0.73), People development (Permanent: M = 3.46, SD = 0.78; Contract: M = 3.22, SD = 0.73), Pinnacle (Permanent: M = 3.56, SD = 0.76; Contract: M = 3.25, SD = 0.77), and Overall assessment (Permanent: M = 3.64, SD = 0.62; Contract: M = 3.48, SD = 0.58), permanent faculty exhibited higher mean ratings. On the other hand, the mean score of College faculty members on contract (Permanent: M = 3.56, SD = 0.68; Contract: M = 3.78, SD = 0.62) on Permission level was relatively high compared to those with permanent job status. These results highlight the influence of job status on college faculty members' insights into leadership in an educational context, suggesting a prospective effect on organizational forces at work and faculty satisfaction. More studies are required to explore the phenomena.

Table 5
Comparison between perceptions of College faculty on the Assessment of Level of Leadership Scale on Personal Experience

Assessment of Level	1-10	10-20	20-30	> 30	One-way ANOVA

of Leadership	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	F	*P*
Position	3.68(0.8)[a]	3.72(0.81)[ac]	3.91(0.87)[ac]	3.23(0.71)[b]	8.11	<.001
Permission	3.68(0.65)[a]	3.68(0.74)[a]	3.69(0.74)[a]	3.32(0.63)[b]	4.41	0.004
Production	3.54(0.76)[a]	3.67(0.79)[a]	3.63(0.69)[a]	3.2(0.76)[b]	3.46	0.016
People development	3.54(0.75)[a]	3.63(0.79)[a]	3.6(0.69)[a]	3.27(0.76)[b]	3.46	0.016
Pinnacle	3.57(0.78)[a]	3.63(0.84)a	3.61(0.82)a	3.25(0.75)b	3.70	0.011
Overall	3.63(0.58)[a]	3.69(0.67)[a]	3.72(0.58)[a]	3.35(0.51)[b]	5.13	0.002

Note. Different letters in mean scores indicate statistically significant differences between groups. Letters are assigned based on post hoc Tukey's HSD multiple comparisons among college faculty based on Experience.

Table 5 compares college faculty perceptions regarding the Assessment of Level of Leadership Scale based on their personal experience, categorized into four groups: 1-10 years, 10-20 years, 20-30 years, and more than 30 years. The table presents the means (M) and standard deviations (SD) for each dimension of the leadership scale within each experience group and the results of the one-way ANOVA test, denoted by F-values and associated p-values.

Position: There are statistically significant differences in mean scores across the experience groups ($F = 8.11$, $p < .001$). Post-hoc Tukey's HSD multiple comparisons reveal that groups labeled with different letters (a, b, c) have significantly different mean scores. Specifically, faculty members with 20-30 years of experience ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 0.87$) tend to perceive their position-related leadership levels differently than those with other experience levels.

Permission: Statistically significant differences in mean scores are observed among the experience groups ($F = 4.41$, $p = 0.004$). Post-hoc comparisons indicate that faculty members with 1-10 years of experience ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.65$) have significantly different perceptions than those with over 30 years of experience ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 0.63$).

Production: Significant differences exist in mean scores across the experience groups ($F = 3.46$, $p = 0.016$). Post-hoc comparisons reveal differences between various experience groups, with those in the 1-10 years group ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 0.76$) differing significantly from those with over 30 years of experience ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 0.76$).

People Development: Similar to Production, significant differences are found in mean scores among the experience groups ($F = 3.46$, $p = 0.016$). Post-hoc comparisons indicate that faculty members with 1-10 years of experience have significantly different perceptions than those with over 30 years of experience.

Pinnacle: Significant differences are observed in mean scores across the experience groups ($F = 3.70$, $p = 0.011$). Post-hoc comparisons reveal differences between various experience groups, particularly between those with 20-30 years of experience and those with over 30 years of experience.

Overall: Significant differences are noted in mean scores among the experience groups ($F = 5.13$, $p = 0.002$). Post-hoc comparisons indicate differences between various experience groups, with those in the 1-10 years group differing significantly from those with over 30 years of experience.

In summary, different letters in mean scores indicate statistically significant differences between the experience groups, as determined by post hoc Tukey's HSD multiple comparisons.

Qualitative data was analyzed using Nvivo software. Audio of in-depth interviews with participants of the study were recorded. Later, interviews were transcribed and saved in Nvivo's digital files. At the initial stage of data analysis, small codes were extracted. The codes generated significant themes of study. All of them were presented as a hierarchy chart and project map. Qualitative research demands hard work. It is a rigorous procedure to scrutinize the data and elicit the participant's point of view. The sole purpose of phenomenology in qualitative research is to know the subjective reality of phenomena. Themes were verified using various techniques like word frequency lists and word clouds, which is laborious. Themes and participants' beliefs and perspectives are explained in the findings section.

Findings of study in the quantitative phase

The college faculty members believe that their principals are standing at the highest level of leadership, which is Pinnacle.

Demographics like personal job status and experience significantly affect the participant's views about principals.

Findings of study in the quantitative phase

The following project map presents nodes and themes of study.

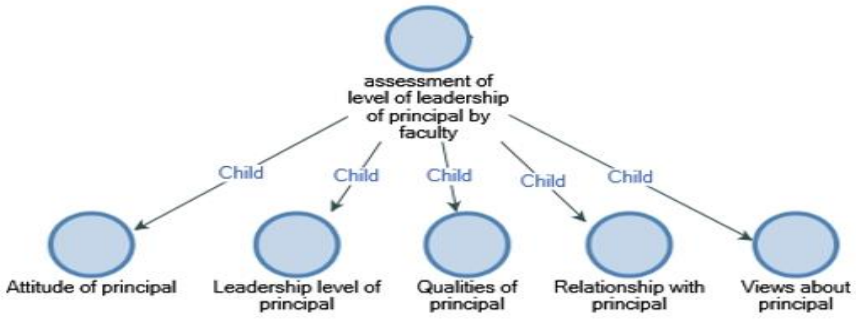

Figure 1: Project Map of themes of study

The study participants shared their perspectives on the leadership level of their current principal. Five themes emerged from the data.

Views about principals

Faculty consider their current principal to be a good manager and leader. According to their perception, their current principal is the right person for the job**.** One participant reported that.

'*My principal always makes the right decision, and it is his quality to appreciate the performance and results of faculty*''**.** (Respondent 5)

Relationship with principal

Faculty members believed that their relations with the principal were pleasant and warm. Their principals share their problems and solve them. They celebrate the achievement of organisational goals. Faculty gave full credit for amiable relations to the principal.

Leadership level of principal

College faculty members gave the opinion that their principal is caring. He values the beliefs of the faculty. They provide full attention to the faculty. They care for them. These perceptions depict that the principal is at the highest leadership level.

Attitude of principal

Faculty reported that their principals are reliable and have sensible behaviour.

A respondent reported,

''My principal is very encouraging. She always appreciates faculty. She possesses well-balanced behaviour.'' (Respondent 8)

Qualities of Principal

The college faculty reported that their principal possesses good qualities. A participant reported,

'*My principal is punctual, regular, and very hard working. He possesses good command of work.''* **(Respondent 3)**

These views provide empirical evidence that the opinions reported in the study's first phase are authentic, and later talks authenticate the perception.

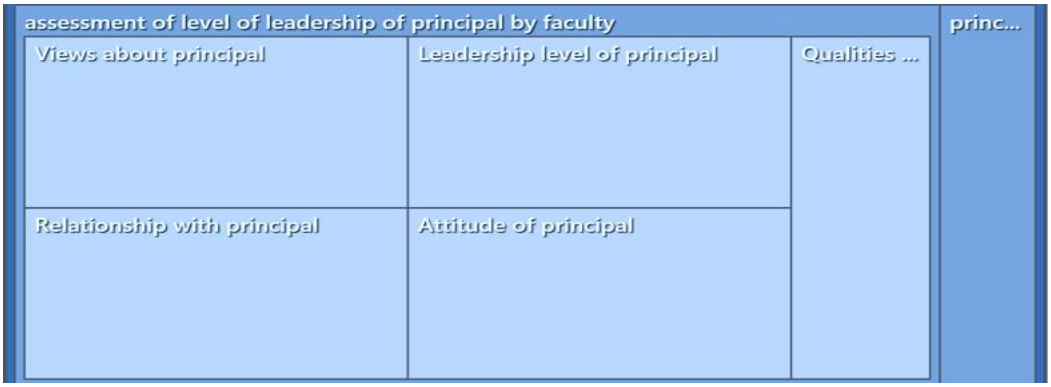

Figure 2: Hierarchy chart of themes of study

In the hierarchy chart, the weightage of data is depicted in each block. The size of each block represents the weightage of data it carries.

Figure 3 Word tag before funneling

Figure 4: Word tag after funnelling

The word tag technique was used to authenticate the main words, later producing the study themes. Unnecessary words were deleted, and a word tag figure was finally generated. It helped in the scrutiny of textual data. Figure 3 shows the raw data. Figure 4 shows data after funneling.

Figure5: Word cloud

Word cloud presents and verifies funneled data as well. Some words were found prominent in this technique, too.

Discussion

The study provided empirical evidence for the assumed research questions. It confirmed the previous study by Ellic (2009) and Hammer (2011) that the demographics of participants influence their perceptions and responses to a great extent. It is proved in this research that personal job status and experience significantly affect the perception of study participants. However, some demographics, i.e., age, qualification, and gender, didn't significantly affect the perception of faculty. Its reasons may be explored in further research to see why they do not affect respondents' perception; when the phenomena were studied in depth, many reasons were found that make the principal a level five leader. Faculty also

indicated the reasons for ranking the principal as a pinnacle leader. Good behaviour, professionalism, and performance efficiency inspire faculty. That is why faculty consider them as potential leaders. More studies in different cultural contexts should be done on the effects of culture on the phenomenon.

Conclusion

The study results proved that faculty members believed that their principals were standing on the highest stage of leadership. Demographic factors like experience and job status significantly affect the perception of faculty. The reasons for designating the highest leadership level in the study's second phase proved that professional behaviour, active performance, and a well-balanced personality are the reasons for attaining such a high rank on the leadership scale.

As a maiden study, it was a small effort to see why demographics influence faculty perceptions. More studies should explore why some demographics do not affect this phenomenon.

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