

Going the Extra Mile: A Multisite Case Study of Two Private Schools in Pakistan

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Abstract

This study explored the perceptions of administrators, teachers and students of secondary schools in Karachi-Pakistan regarding the strategies adopted by the schools to exhibit care for the learning of students. This qualitative multisite case study was conducted with schools under the administration and management of Christians and Ismailies. A semi-structured interview guide was used as a tool for data collection purposes. The data were transcribed and coded for the construction of themes. Themes such as teacher preparation and performance, communication with parents, a learning-conducive environment, curricula supporting activities and continuous professional development were constructed from the data analysis. The study findings reveal that schools have adopted various strategies to facilitate and support students' learning. However, the primary focus seems to be on cognitive development, often at the expense of paying adequate attention to physical, social, and emotional development. Hence the study suggests that assumed and expressed needs of students in areas other than the cognitive domain should be considered pivotal by the school for a safe and peaceful society. The study also suggests that the application of care in a practical sense is the need of the times and should be made a systemic reality for all schools in Pakistan.

Keywords: care, cognitive, social, emotional, policy.

Introduction

Students meet academic learning targets when they observe teachers taking the initiative in responding to their academic needs and taking pride in their achievements. Consequently, they find themselves motivated and academically

driven, thus fulfilling the ultimate purpose of education. ‘Care’ is a necessary precondition ‘for’ education as well as an essential ingredient ‘in’ quality education to meet the assumed and expressed needs of students (Mortari 2016; Nguyen, 2016; Owens & Ennis, 2005). In a virtuous sense, teachers ‘care’ for the learning of students in a way that they conscientiously set goals for their students, and work hard at encouraging and motivating students to achieve those goals. Caring teachers encourage their students to acquire the knowledge and attitudes needed to achieve their goals, instead of the ones of a pre-established curriculum (Noddings, 2005). Teachers might adopt “virtue care” because the cognitive survival of students depends on virtues such as attentiveness, intellectual tenacity, fair-mindedness and so on. Teachers as virtue careers may or may not be constrained by the expressed needs or wants of the cared-for; hence they decide what is best for the cared-for. They have the best interest of the cared-for at heart, but they are likely to act on needs they infer for the cared-for and not those needs expressed by the cared-for (Noddings, 2003).

Teachers not caring about their students’ learning needs implies that they do not recognize their pre-stated or developing needs and thereby ignore them. While a teacher provides lessons and worksheets and ensures that students perform well in their assessments, the teacher could be ignoring the students’ concrete educational demands, such as: whether the subject matter and learning occurring in the classroom resonates with the students; whether they are engaging with the material in a meaningful way; or whether other non-curriculum related educational demands require attention, such as students’ frustration and building of resilience. If teachers ignore students’ needs, the indication is that the teaching of content is preferred over the instruction and learning of students (Sanderse, 2013).

Schools in general respond to the assumed needs of students and chalk out contextual strategies to respond to these needs by establishing conditions to support the learning of students. These needs are greatly associated with the cognitive development of students as an outcome of the learning of specified content proposed by Government directives. Modern schools sometimes lean excessively towards paternalism, emphasizing control over care, attention, and love. Failure to support the learning of students occurs at the level of policy as no policy highlights strategies to support the expressed learning needs of students. Policy documents largely emphasize providing equal education opportunities and facilities for all

students. The policy-making is too narrowly concentrated on standardized teaching and testing, hence ignoring their focus on the supportive strategies that may respond to the expressed needs of students who desire concept clarification and skill development in content-specific disciplines of their choice to accelerate their learning (Engster & Hamington, 2015). The purpose of this study was to understand administrators', teachers' and students' experience of caring strategies adopted by the schools for the provision of enhanced learning of students.

Research Question

This study was based on the following two research questions:

1. What strategies are adopted by the schools to demonstrate care for the learning of students?
2. How does the school support teachers to care for the learning of students?

Literature Review

Students' behavior regarding academic progress is dependent on the behavior of teachers associated with the learning of students and thereby helps them to improve in academics (Louis et al., 2016). Teachers have the power to influence their students' lives by giving them extra time, in addition to the regular teaching time to support their learning (Goldstein & Lake, 2000).

Teaching and learning are to be valued and should be visible in all interactions and relations at school. Learning nurtured among students in a class does not remain confined to the four walls of the classroom. Its impact can be seen in the school institution at large and often even in the wider community. A student-centered learning environment assumed that expressed needs have to be reflected in different levels within a school system namely, by the principal, head teachers, academic coordinators, teachers and students. Schools need to provide a secure environment that is conducive to the assumed and expressed learning needs of students. A culture to care for the learning of students promoted by the school management supports the cognitive and social development of students throughout the school and in the classroom (Louis et al., 2016).

To enhance and improve the conditions for the learning of teachers, the schools need to develop and process the practice of learning organizations. The

learning organizations should focus on nurturing the learning environment across all grade levels. The schools are to create and support continuous learning opportunities for all staff, promote team learning and collaboration among staff, establish a culture of inquiry, innovation and exploration, embed systems to collect and exchange knowledge and learning, learn with and from the external environment, and model a culture of growing learning leadership (Admiraal et al., 2021)

The development of the culture of learning in schools in general and the classrooms, in particular, is not solely the responsibility of the teachers but the leadership has to play a major part in it. It is the school's organizational structure, culture and the behavior of the school administration and management towards the staff and students that guides the teachers regarding emotional conduct and expressions of care for the students to make the maximum of their learning. The school leader or the principal needs to demonstrate care for the staff and students to enable them to realize that their perspectives and views are respected, and secondly to benefit the school system from their insights to build a climate of trust and understanding. For this, the school principal needs to involve the school community in making and realizing the school's vision as well as ensuring the creation of an organizational culture by developing supportive mechanisms that promote healthy relationships to inspire the learning of students. With the help of the staff, the principal can strive to make the school a place of learning, care and joy through the use of different strategies for changing power relationships by treating staff members, parents and students like colleagues, co-learners and friends (Louis et al., 2016; O'Connor, 2008; Thompson, 2018).

The culture to care for the learning of students at school provides many benefits for the students even outside school hours. The students who are cared for in their learning by the teachers will most likely also show a caring attitude towards others as a caring climate at school promotes the social and emotional well-being of the students, which eventually helps them to become responsible members of society. At the school level, where there is a culture to care for the learning of students, there are fewer issues of students' misconduct including the use of drugs (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2008).

Empirical studies have found that in the modern schooling system, a great emphasis is on building trustful relations between students and teachers, students

with their class fellows, teachers and management and so on. A caring culture at school develops a sense of belongingness among students for their schools and such a context also helps students become independent learners as they experience that the school teachers and management are concerned about their safety and well-being (Johnson, 2009).

Noddings (2005) proposed six steps to develop a program based on care that could bring a radical change in school systems. The first step constitutes setting a clear and firm goal of education for fostering care and love among students. The second step recommends schools have an environment where a group of students are together with the same teacher for several years. In the third step, Noddings (2005) suggests teachers empower students by allowing them to take charge of their self-learning and classroom activities to a certain extent. This does not mean creating a chaotic environment because caring relationships require a well-managed learning environment in the classrooms. Teachers should act like facilitators and help students explore new knowledge. Step five involves removing hierarchical structures and inflexibility within the curriculum. The curriculum should be rich, flexible and based on students' needs and interests so that all students have the opportunity to study a subject of their interest, regardless of their academic background or any other such factor. The fifth step involves introducing activities on themes of care on a daily basis and comprises at least some part of the school day. These activities would include discussion and reflection on existential questions with consideration of care from all aspects. Lastly, the sixth step consists of teaching students that caring involves competence including taking responsibility to contribute continuously based on one's competencies (Noddings, 2005).

In return, teachers are responsible for their students' learning, which includes providing feedback, adjusting teaching methods, and respecting individual differences in the classroom. The benefit of explaining the content in different ways goes to students as it has a huge impact on the learning process of students and the learning needs of different types of students are satisfied. Hence exposing students to diversified educational settings, adaptive pedagogies and culturally responsive curricula while accepting cultural differences is part of teachers' ethic of care (Owusu-Ansah & Kyei-Blankson, 2016).

Students who are cared for tend to have higher levels of achievement

and school well-being (Danielsen et al., 2010). It is the caring relationships with teachers that help students to gain academic support during teaching sessions which becomes a means of achieving excellence and maintaining high standards of learning for students. Teachers invest in students' learning by creating a learning-conducive environment in the classroom as students respond to teacher care for their learning by getting actively engaged in the learning process, hence developing positive relationships. Relationships between teachers and students can encourage and motivate students to be active recipients and participants in the learning process (Engster & Hamington, 2015; Owens & Ennis, 2005). Face-to-face communication between parents and teachers plays a vital role in the learning process of students because effective collaboration between parents and teachers is one of the keys to ensuring the academic success of students. Parental involvement is essential for students' learning in schools because it's an opportunity to share academic progress and growth based on classroom observations, testing data, assessments, portfolios, and assignments and to discuss enrichment or intervention strategies to support students' learning (Opdenakker et al., 2012).

According to Stronge (2018), teachers can demonstrate care for their students by getting to know them individually, understanding their learning styles, needs, personalities, and personal situations. These aspects can significantly influence students' behavior and performance in school. The experience of care is different for each student based on their needs, interests and context (Noddings, 2005). This means that care must be exhibited with its purpose based on the learning needs of individual students by developing prolonged, reciprocal relationships with the students (Pang, 2001). For the education of the whole person of students, schools must establish conditions under which care-for can take place while establishing and maintaining the care and trust relationship (Engster & Hamington, 2015).

While the outcomes of teacher care are increased student self-image, sense of self-worth and enhanced learning (Collier, 2005) care demonstrated through verbal immediacy strengthens the relationship between teacher and student and has a great impact on students' educational experiences, retention of course content and overall achievement (Owusu-Ansah1 & Kyei-Blankson, 2016). Caring teachers motivate students in accepting learning challenges to attain their goals (Owusu-Ansah1 & Kyei-Blankson, 2016) and their needs which ultimately leads to academic success (Barrow, 2015).

Research Methodology

This study was conducted with two schools as cases, each consisting of a private non-profit school located in Karachi. English was the medium of instruction in both schools. The students in both schools came from medium to low socio-economic backgrounds.

Sample

Creswell (as cited in Turner, 2010) highlights the significance of the selection of appropriate individuals as the sample by developing criteria for sample selection to obtain relevant information appropriate to the research purpose. The researcher developed selection criteria for research participants. Individuals who met these criteria were then selected for the study. The sample included thirty-two participants, consisting of administrators, teachers, and students from the ninth and tenth grades in the pre-medical groups for the academic year 2020-2021.

Instrument

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews to explore participants' perspectives on the research topic (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007).

Data Analysis

Interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed, and coded. The coded data required several reads to identify areas of similarity and overlap between codes as well as to identify any broad topics or issues around which codes clustered to generate the themes and sub-themes. Data for this study were analyzed in two phases. In the first phase, data within cases one and two were analyzed discretely, treating each case as comprehensive in itself to explore the depth and accuracy of each setting and data. After the completion of the analysis of cases one and two independently cross-case analysis was made for external validity, to offer generalizations, and to highlight contextual variation across cases (Cohen et al., 2018; Gay et al., 2015; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2013).

Findings

The study's findings are summarized through themes constructed based on shared aspects in both cases.

Teacher Preparation and Performance

A lesson plan is important to facilitate students in achieving the learning outcome, having a complete and clear picture of the learning process, and ensuring that students should grasp and retain what is being taught to them. Negligence in making lesson plans might minimize the visualization of the teaching-learning process, resulting in not meeting the expected level of learning outcomes. Thus teachers need to plan their daily lessons by adopting the most suitable teaching technique to influence the learning of students (Ayua, 2017). The respondents said: “The learning needs of students in our school are met by seeing that the teachers plan their lessons.” (Case 1, Admin Nadir, 21st August 2020).

Our school supports teachers to care for the learning of students through regular observation of teachers by the section head and subject coordinators. After classroom observation, we sit with teachers and give them feedback on their teaching highlighting the areas for improvement (Case 2, Admin Ashar, 21st Oct. 2020).

“Teachers are asked to properly plan their lessons to understand different tasks mentioned in the lesson to be followed by the teachers. Lesson plans are submitted to the coordinators and are returned with the feedback for improvement.” (Case 2, Tr. Sana, 21st Oct. 2021). “Teachers are advised to plan and get their lessons approved before teaching.” (Case 1, Tr. Nadia, 21st Oct. 2021)

Communication with Parents

Parent and teacher meetings (PTMs) are an opportunity for teachers and parents to identify areas to be worked on for the betterment of students after evaluating the academic and non-academic performance of the student. The study participants expressed:

We have parent-teacher meetings twice a year, once at the beginning and once after midterm so that parents have an idea about the students as to where they stand, PTMs are very important where we can tell parents about the performance of students (Case 1, Tr. Ghazala, 20th August 2020).

“Teachers in our school are supported to care for the learning of students by receiving feedback on areas of concern mentioned to section heads and subject coordinators at parent-teacher meetings.” (Case 2, Admin Taskeen, 21st Oct. 2020). Communication between teachers and parents is a way for teachers to share the academic progress of students with parents and receive feedback about their strengths and weaknesses as a basis for future teaching-learning sessions (Bergmark & Alerby, 2006).

Learning-Conducive Environment

Dangara (2016) stated that the school administration is responsible for the availability of teaching-learning resources because teacher efficiency is dependent on the accessibility and usability of supportive materials provided by the school for a meaningful teaching-learning process. The study participants stated:

“Our school facilitates teachers to care for the learning of students through the provision of various resources such as libraries, laboratories, playground, sick room, computer lab, and audio-visual aids.” (Case 2, Tr. Nancy, 28th Oct. 2020). “The school supported teachers to care for the learning of students during the pandemic. This was done by providing a resource pack to all those students who had no gadgets to attend online classes so they do not miss on their studies.” (Case 2, St. Zarish, 27th Oct. 2020)

“Our school supports teachers to care for the learning of students through establishing a learning-supportive environment for teachers and students.” (Case 1, Tr. Noel, 21st Oct. 2020). “The school ensures the availability of resources such as multimedia, whiteboards, soft boards, laboratory and library in helping teachers to concentrate on the learning of students.” (Case 1, St. Zekiel, 5th Nov. 2020)

Nganga et al. (2019) state that caring teachers cultivate a nurturing classroom environment. Noddings (as cited in Nganga et al., 2019) further believes that teachers concerned about the learning environments are genuinely interested in their students’ well-being. Teachers are expected to create and maintain a learning conducive environment in the school where students are not insulted for making mistakes, but instead, encouraged to think critically and actively participate in the teaching-learning process (Hatti, 2003).

Curricula Supporting Activities

Co-curricular activities are an important part of school life. They help in enhancing the learning process as they are supportive of the development of social skills, intellectual skills, moral values, and personality progress of students (Khan & Iqbal, 2014). The stakeholders of the study expressed:

We do not believe in being limited to curricular activities but co-curricular activities are also held in school. I remember that last year we made seven societies and the purpose of this was to uplift the students depending on their capacities (Case 1, Admin Nadir, 24th August 2020).

“Teachers receive support to foster student learning through the school’s programs, including initiatives like Drop Everything and Read (DEAR), WRITE, and Learning Support Class (LSC) programs” (Case 2, Admin Ashar, 21st Oct. 2020). “School has introduced programs such as DEAR. Every Monday teachers and students are expected to read a book in their free time. Every Friday we have a WRITE program. Teachers and students are expected to write on the mentioned topics.” (Case 2, St. Layba, 27th Oct. 2020)

Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

Teachers should be involved in the process of meeting institutional and individual professional development priorities through participating in CPD short and long-term programs (Powell et al., 2003). The schools support and promote care for the learning of students by encouraging teachers to participate in CPD programs. The respondents said:

“A number of workshops are conducted which are very helpful for teachers to plan and implement child-centered teaching meeting the needs of 21st-century learning requirements” (Case 1, Tr. Arti 19th August 2020). “Different sessions are normally conducted in our school to equip teachers with the latest teaching strategies to support students in the learning process.” (Case 2, Tr. Sangeeta, 28th Oct. 2021)

During COVID-19 the school trained teachers on how to use Google

Classroom, Google Meet and Zoom to conduct online teaching sessions for the students. This was done to ensure that students do not miss anything on their studies because the school does not compromise with our studies. (Case 2, St. Zeeshan, 5th Nov. 2020)

CPD programs are of immense importance for in-service teachers to increase their motivation, confidence, and commitment to teaching. Teachers need to continue upgrading their teaching skills over time and learn to apply them in the classroom resulting in a stimulating and effective teaching environment. The teachers have explicitly mentioned that their school cares about investing in the learning of students through the frequent organization of CPD sessions for teachers and having follow-up sessions to ensure the implementation of the taught (Kıncal et al., 2015).

Discussion

The research participants of both cases shared similar insights into the practice of care support mechanisms in their respective schools through monitoring and tracking the performance of teachers in their care for the learning of students. In both cases, teachers' performance is monitored through the approval of their lesson plans by the section heads. This process ensures that the teachers address the specific learning needs of students while aligning with subject-specific learning goals. This practice is based on the belief that lesson planning benefits teachers as it demonstrates their teaching-learning process is structured; they have confidence in teaching the selected content based on students' needs; the teaching strategy used meets the learning styles of various students; and the classroom time is used effectively (Rabin & Smith, 2016).

Classroom observations of teachers by subject coordinators and section heads is another strategy adopted by schools in both cases to monitor the performance of teachers. Classroom observation is considered of significant importance to evaluate teachers on their practices such as teaching strategies, classroom management strategies, assessment strategies, questioning and development of subject-relevant skills in students. Observation is valuable at various stages of a teacher's career, supporting their personal and professional growth.

In both cases, the adoption of parent feedback to monitor teacher performance is evident.. During parent-teacher conferences teachers are expected to seek feedback from parents concerning students' satisfaction with the teaching approaches and skills used by the teachers so that they can improve on the areas identified by the parents as most effective for the learning of students (Bergmark & Alerby, 2006).

McNeil (as cited in Nganga, 2019) expressed the need to have caring teachers in every classroom as they can create an environment that nurtures learning. The research participants of both cases identified the provision of a learning-conducive environment as a positive demonstration of care for the students' well-being. A school's learning environment is strengthened through well-designed curriculum-supportive programs and activities. The activities are considered an integral part of schooling to support students and enhance their learning under the guided supervision of teachers. On the other hand, the students are expected and motivated to participate in these activities to assist their growth in the knowledge of relevant subjects and develop social and intellectual skills. Some of the examples contained in the data of this research included reading and writing programs; sports, library and cultural activities; as well as art and craft exhibitions, debates, declamations and science fairs. The research participants related how their schools ensure the provision of learning-conducive environments as these give encouragement and support to teachers which translates to the students as care for their learning since quality education is imparted in an environment that supports teaching and learning. A learning-conducive environment includes facilities like libraries, laboratories, well-lit classrooms with proper ventilation, spacious playgrounds, consistent temperature, and a noise-free atmosphere. These elements collectively support students in achieving educational goals. It is important for a school as an organization to bring together various resources and allocate them effectively to accomplish the subject-specific goals of education (Dangara, 2016).

The data from both cases reported that schools invested in CPD opportunities for their teachers by facilitating their participation in onsite and offsite seminars, conferences and workshops based on the needs of individual teachers not only to be competent in matters related to the teaching and assessment of students in the relevant subject but to excel in them. The research of Powel et al. (2003) showed that teachers' participation in continuous professional development activities helps

them to renew and further develop their abilities and skills for the benefit of students' learning experiences and academic and personal achievements.

The provision of on-campus and off-campus CPD opportunities for teachers is to update them with recent national and international practices in the field of education to bring creativity and innovation to their classroom teaching, learning and assessment. It is important to note that students of cases one and two did not mention teachers' involvement in CPD programs. This could be because students had not experienced an improvement in the regular teaching, learning and assessment patterns of their teachers. It further signifies the importance for schools to have a follow-up plan in place to monitor the implementation of learnings from CPD programs.

The respondents of case one thought that their school's care for the learning of students is evident through the employment of competent and experienced teachers. High content competency and experienced teachers can clarify content-related misconceptions for students because of their strong background in subject matter knowledge, the skills to monitor learning and provide feedback, and the ability to recognize the potential of students and guide them based on their area of interest. Research participants of case one also narrated that students' learning is the focal point for the teachers as they give them extra time out of their routine teaching schedules such as teaching extra classes after school hours, on Saturdays, during a free period or during break time. Showing a different perspective, the research participants of case two reported that their school demonstrated care for the learning of students by encouraging relationships between teachers and students. These relationships are encouraged for student growth and development. Nodding's (1984) work supports this approach in stating that human beings can show care for each other and have a moral obligation to use this ability to identify the needs of the other and to satisfy those needs through engrossment and motivational displacement. Care is a reciprocal act, and through this relationship between the cared-for and the one caring, people learn to give and receive, an essential quality for all citizens (Bergmark & Alerby, 2006).

Research participants of case one school mainly emphasized that care for the learning of students is generally exhibited by taking some concrete actions with a focus to help students satisfy their learning needs. Thus teachers plan

lessons, participate in CPD sessions, and participate in regular PTMs. The narrated responses of research participants generally indicated that care was embedded in the school policies with a focus on classroom teaching and assessment techniques, the appointment of expert and experienced teachers, teacher participation in CPD sessions and respecting the self-esteem of students by avoiding physical and verbal abuse of students; however, student behavior towards the teaching-learning process minimized the impact of care.

Research participants of case two describe that teachers of their school maintained a relationship with students to have an impact on their learning for enhanced academic performance. This is evident in the examples of engrossment and motivational displacement shared by the research participants that teachers of their school are empathetic towards the learning needs of students, kind to students, ensure the physiological well-being of students and are committed to helping them in academics by planning their teaching, permitting classroom observation for constructive feedback, being physically and virtually available to support them to overcome academic issues through various curricular support activities such as DEAR, WRITE and Learning Support programs. The responses of the research participants largely interpret that the case two school is supportive of teachers caring for the learning of students by inculcating caring aspects in the school environment and policies, and making teachers accountable to follow them by getting involved in various activities to facilitate the learning of students.

The findings of the study narrate that both the schools under study are persistent in their efforts to impact the learning of students through the induction of various curricular and co-curricular programs. However, the administration and management of both boards are suggested policy construction and enactment to appraise and evaluate the performance of schools for measures taken to satisfy the learning needs of different types of students enrolled in the schools.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The interview responses are the evidence shared by various participants on how the school adopts multiple ways of exhibiting care for the learning of students. Thus the interview responses support the perspective that student learning is a priority and that the schools keep working for improvement by introducing and implementing innovative strategies to enhance the learning of students. However, it

has been extracted from the interview responses that the care supportive mechanism in both cases is greatly limited and restricted to the cognitive development of students. Various stakeholders consider schooling as a means of accelerating various levels of the cognitive domain though the focus remains limited to the initial three levels: knowledge, comprehension and application. The parents and teachers have minimal understanding of the importance of physical and social development yet the school system in Pakistan gives it the second priority. However emotional development of students is an area that needs immense attention from the stakeholders to help students to be balanced individuals understanding themselves and the people around them.

Schools today are beginning to recognize that social and emotional education is as important as academic education (Cohen et al., 2018; Noddings, 2005, 2006). Schools have always been considered incubators for acceptable citizens, and citizenship has not always been defined in terms of academic achievement scores (Noddings, 1988). Therefore, policies to concentrate on the physical, emotional and social well-being of students should be framed and practiced (Bergmark & Alerby, 2006). Hence schools must continuously equip teachers with multiple strategies to go the extra mile with care, confidence, and a charismatic and cheerful spirit to cherish the learning of their students.

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