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Organizational Decline: Facets and Path to Revival for Punjab's Public Colleges

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ABSTRACT

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The rise and fall of institutions have been a focus of interest for decades. Still, the majority of the existing literature has examined the reasons for the downfall of the privately held corporate sector. The current study explores the causes of organizational decline in the public sector, particularly in an educational organization. An exploratory sequential design was used. A semi-structured interview protocol collects qualitative data using purposive sampling from 39 respondents including nine principals and 30 teachers from public colleges. In the second phase, a questionnaire based on the qualitative results is designed to collect quantitative data to support the results. In this phase, data were collected from 408 participants through a multistage sampling technique. Researchers traced out three dimensions of decline. Relevant authorities remained blinded from noticing the early signs of decline, and even when the decline became observable, the system remained disengaged and took no appropriate action. Hence, public colleges are in severe crisis. Findings underscore the insight that political involvements, substandard promotion criteria, inappropriate training, poor accountability, disengaged leadership, stagnant attitude of teachers, lack of discipline, moral corruption, non-conducive environment and monotony in managerial and classroom practices were the major causes behind the deterioration and stigmatization of public colleges.

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Decline does not always mean the opposite of success; decline occurs even for successful organizations. Hence, the phenomenon is complex and manifold. Initially, organizational growth and development were the sphere to study, but later, the phenomenon of organizational decline emerged during the 1980s (Adler & Chaston, 2002). The literature uses numerous phrases for this understudied phenomenon, including bankruptcy, downsizing, retrenchment, decline, organizational death, organizational exit, and failure (Mellahi et al., 2004). Some authors believe that the phenomenon of organizational decline remains limited to study as

turnaround because it is often misinterpreted as bankruptcy. In other words, the financial concerns of an organization were the major motive of the researchers to study this phenomenon (Adler & Chaston, 2002; Bodolica & Spraggon, 2021; Ribeiro Serra et al., 2017; Trahms et al., 2013; Whetten, 1980). Insolvency or bankruptcy is the complete failure of an organization. In contrast, an organization in a situation of decline has a glitch or set of glitches that have eroded its resources, e.g., its clients, administration, or monetary resources. Such organizations start to feel themselves drowning in a whirlpool. If the stakeholders make quick and accurate decisions, they may turn around and change the situation towards growth. If not, they will eventually dig deeper and deeper into decline and ultimately appear insolvent (Ponemon & Schick, 1991). An organization that is not responsive to contemporary needs and resists the implementation of necessary changes is stagnant, and such an organization ultimately declines and collapses (Yitzhak, 2017).

Hochbein (2011) also examined school decline to seek out the operational definitions and dimensions of the phenomenon from previous literature and concluded that the decline phenomenon had multiple challenges for the researchers to study. Success and failure of an educational institute are quite ambiguous terms. Enhancement, perfection, upward mobility, and decline will remain hard to define for an educational institution. Even if we reach an agreement upon the single definition of success and failure for an educational institute, then the objective to be achieved will vary, and reliable measurements for the phenomenon of decline do not exist.

In our context, public sector colleges are facing severe crises. They have enrollment problems, especially in locations where they face genuine competition from the private sector, despite providing free education. As a result of growing parental and student trust, the private sector frequently charges exorbitant prices and expands campuses. Pakistan Education Statistics reported that the private sector has gradually grown, especially at the intermediate level (Statistics, 2018, 2019). A stigma has developed with the public sector educational institutions. The majority of parents who have better socioeconomic status choose the private sector. People from the lower and middle class usually enrol their children in public sector colleges because they cannot afford the high fees of private institutes (Akhter, 2017). This decline is deep-rooted because of many unattended and exacerbating issues that need attention from the responsible authorities. Due to manifold issues, colleges faced severe obstruction in the development process, which resulted in decline and failure. The efforts of the study focused on suggesting institutional reforms, leading them from decline toward revival.

Literature Review

A collapse of an organization never occurs suddenly, instead, it happens step by step as mentioned by Weitzel and Jonsson (1989), organizational decline has five stages. “Blinded” is the earliest stage, which is the ignition point of decline for an organization. At this stage, an organization is unable to diagnose the challenges that threaten its viability as the warning signs (e.g., disproportionate employees, cumbersome procedures, uncertain goals, and alteration in clients’ preferences) are not detected by the “blinded” administration of an organization. In the second stage, which is the “inaction” stage, the organization may capture the decline in terms of revenues and performance, yet it may fail to act upon the prevailing situation to avoid the trouble caused by change. In the third stage, which is the “faulty action” stage,

the administration makes inappropriate or unsuitable decisions due to misinterpretation and lack of timely response to the prevailing situation. The fourth is the “crisis” stage, which is the last chance for an organization to recover from the damage that has already occurred by pursuing a major reorientation. The fifth and final stage the “dissolution” stage means that an organization has an irreversible situation and lost its markets being left with the only options of liquidation or insolvency.

Ghazzawi (2018) Argued that since the emergence of organizational decline as an interesting phenomenon of study for researchers, we are still unable to conclude what constitutes organizational decline. Along with other organizations, identifying an educational institute in decline and then developing pragmatic approaches to study will continue to challenge scholars. Those researchers who are concerned with the aspects or dimensions associated with decline can continue to search for triggers or predictors of the process. No matter what will be the direction or focus of future scholars to investigate about decline of an educational institute, it will ultimately increase the understanding of the phenomenon and provide awareness for different stakeholders in helping them to prevent decline.

Burke (2018) highlighted the importance of context while studying organizational change and development. He stated that the field of organizational change has become less and less central in organizational studies and the future is largely in organizations other than business-industry and requires a concentrated effort at understanding the importance of context. Literature suggests that organizational decline can occur due to external or internal factors. Management ignites the major root cause behind various internal factors of organizational decline while external factors are usually beyond managerial control (Yeh & Fang, 2011). Public administration literature needs enrichment by providing a way forward for them to revive or turn around an educational organization.

Gaps in Existing Studies

As mentioned earlier in the literature review, context holds great significance while studying the phenomenon of organizational decline. Although many previous studies have identified the causes of decline yet, a gap still exists in the context of educational organizations. The question remains: despite this competitive edge of providing free education, what are the reasons behind the decline in the public sector? Bodolica and Spraggon (2021) proposed a multi-domain agenda for future researchers by identifying the three major them: leadership aspects, intervening processes, and methodological concerns. The current study focuses on both the leadership aspects and intervening processes by using the mixed method approach to fill this gap. Ghazzawi (2018) categorizes the various causes into two broader levels, namely, the intra-organizational and inter-organizational levels. The intra-organizational level includes internal interactions and characteristics of an organization while the inter-organizational level includes external interactions. Moreover, He recommended the three variables, e.g., leaders’ role, innovation, and resource allocation, to study for future researchers. To fill these gaps, the current study focuses on how divisional-level administration in public sector colleges works at intra-organizational and inter-organizational levels. Since most previous studies have primarily focused on the corporate private sector, a gap remains in understanding public sector administration, where hierarchical structures and decision-making processes function quite

differently. Unlike private institutions, where stakeholders prioritize profit-making, public-sector institutions operate with the core objective of ensuring the provision of free education.

Method

Aims of the Study

Under the umbrella of mix method, an exploratory sequential design is used. The following research questions are posed by the study:

1. What is the perception of college teachers and principals about the existence of organizational decline in public colleges?
2. How are different aspects pitched in to cause a decline in public colleges?

Sample

In the first phase, qualitative data are collected through purposive sampling to analyze the existing situation of the issue through heterogeneous perspectives till saturation. Researchers purposively choose samples based on qualification, experience, gender, and area. Thirty college teachers and nine principals participated in this phase. While in the quantitative phase, the researchers used a multistage sampling strategy for data collection. Out of two divisions, four districts were randomly selected by lottery, e.g., Sargodha and Khushab from the Sargodha division while Faisalabad and Chiniot from the Faisalabad Division. 408 academic professionals from public colleges responded to the questionnaire. Demographic details of the participants in the qualitative and quantitative phases are presented in Figure 1, Table 1, and Table 2.

Figure 1

Demographic Details of the Participants

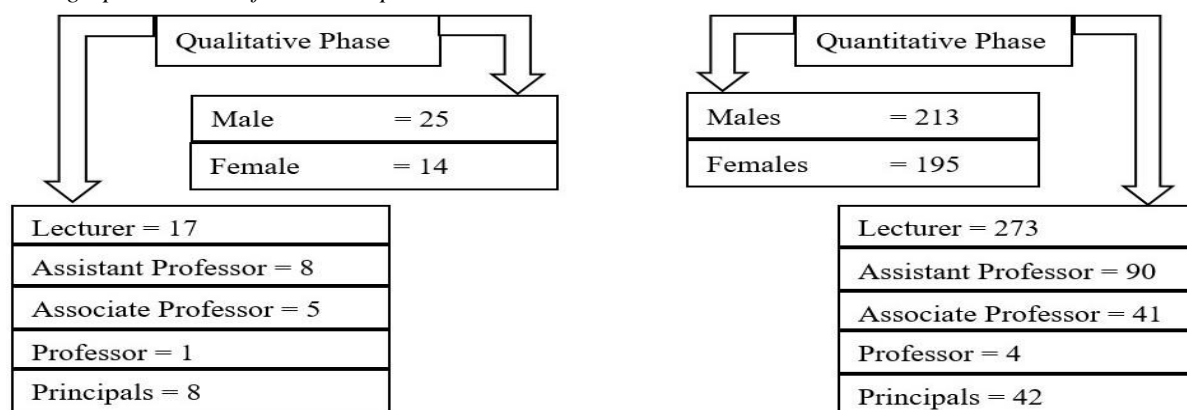


Table 1

Further Details about the Participants in the Qualitative Phase

Variables	Categories	Frequencies	Percentages
College Locality	Urban	24	61.53
	Rural	15	38.47
College Category	Associate	17	43.58
	Graduate	22	56.42
Subject	Natural Sciences	12	30.76
	Social Sciences	14	35.89
	Arts and Humanities	13	33.33

Table 2
Further Details about the Participants in the Quantitative Phase

Variables	Categories	Frequencies	Percentages	
Qualification	Graduate or Equivalent	145	35.5	
	M.Phil or Equivalent	204	50.0	
	PhD	59	14.5	
College Locality	Urban	245	60.0	
	Rural	163	40.0	
Subject Category	Natural Sciences	150	36.8	
	Social Sciences	135	33.1	
	Arts and Humanities	123	30.1	
Service years	1 – 5 years	199	48.8	
	6 – 10 years	67	16.4	
	11 – 15 years	64	15.7	
	16 – 20 years	21	5.1	
	21 – 25 years	20	4.9	
More than 25 years	37	9.1		
	College Category	Associate	194	47.5
	Graduate	214	52.5	
	College District	Sargodha	156	38.2
		Khushab	48	11.8
Chiniot		72	17.6	
Faisalabad		132	32.4	
Administrative Position held (if any)	Principal	30	7.4	
	Deputy Director Colleges	07	1.7	
	Director Colleges	05	1.2	
	Currently Working Principal	12	2.9	

Instruments

A semi-structured interview protocol with a demographic section is initially developed to collect qualitative data. To ensure validation, the tool is pilot-tested and improved through expert opinions by conducting three interviews. A lecturer and an assistant professor were male, and the third was a female lecturer. Researchers took advice from four experts and modified the instrument by improving its language and item quality. Three questions are deleted due to overlapping. The final tool includes seven open-ended questions. A questionnaire is subsequently created, based on the qualitative findings. It consisted of three sections: the demographic section, perception about the existence of decline, and causes of decline. The content validity of the tool was ensured by expert opinion. The tool's reliability is calculated using Cronbach's alpha resulted at .92. The Unidirectional eleven-point (0-10) rating scale is used to measure the intensity of the decline's causes. The scale is interpreted as: 0 indicates complete absence, 1 to 3 indicates minor presence, 4 to 6 indicates moderate presence and 7 to 10 indicates severe presence of a particular cause behind decline.

Data Collection

In the qualitative phase, researchers self-administered all interviews. In the quantitative phase, a questionnaire was disseminated through Google Forms. Unfortunately, the response rate was not up to the mark. Consequently, to increase the responses, the researchers visited several colleges to hand out printed questionnaires.

Data Analysis

Due to the heterogeneity of languages (e.g., English, Urdu, Punjab, etc.) in the interviews, the data were transcribed manually from audio-recorded files. Although it was a difficult and time-consuming task, it was very fruitful for the researchers to get familiar with the data. The outcomes of the study are summarized using thematic analysis. Streamlined codes-to-theory model given by Saldaña (2009) for qualitative data analysis is followed. In the quantitative phase, data are sorted from both online and print sources, and then data normality tests are applied before analysis. Descriptive and inferential statistical tests are applied for analysis.

Results

RQ1: What is the perception of college teachers and principals about the existence of organizational decline in public colleges?

Previously, Shahid et al. (2024) highlighted the plight of Punjab's public colleges and reasoned out about professional stagnation. Kanter (2012) mentioned nine symptoms of organizational decline. These are a decrease in communication, an increase of criticism and blame, a decrease in respect, an increase of isolation, a turning of focus inward, a widening of the rifts and growth of inequalities, a diminishing of aspiration, a decrease of initiatives, and the spread of negativity. Data reflected the presence of all symptoms in the public colleges in Punjab. There are negative thoughts and attitudes both at the leadership and employee levels. A lot of respondents believed that the public sector cannot progress and revive. A respondent argued, *"The future of college education, doesn't seem to hold any positive changes. There is no glimpse of enlightenment in it"*. The majority of divisional-level leaders argued that we are powerless and unable to uplift the institutes. A principal commented, *"I think that I have limited powers, and even if I use these powers, it may create difficulties for me"*. With a few exceptions, the majority blamed the government and each other for the decline, while data revealed that everyone was accountable for it.

All the participants agreed that public colleges have lost their fame. A participant mentioned, *"You consider it only decline but for me, it's a freefall from the sky to the earth"*. Another respondent commented, *"Most parents trust the private sector, particularly in urban areas"*. The quantitative phase of the study utilized five close-ended items to measure respondents' perceptions about the decline in public colleges.

Based on frequency values, there is a severe situation in public colleges regarding the trust of the public. Only against one item did the value fall between the moderate level, which is the scarcity of physical and human resources. Hence, the researcher concluded that the majority of the respondents believed that public colleges are moderately facing a scarcity of physical and human resources but severely facing a lack of trust from the public. As shown in Table 3, the overall mean value of 6.62, median value of 8, and mode value of 10 denoted the severe decline in public colleges.

Table 3
The Frequency Distribution of the Existence of Decline

Perception Regarding Existence of Decline in Public Colleges				
Statement	<i>M</i>	Mdn	Mode	<i>SD</i>
Private colleges are the priority for those people who can afford it.	7.30	8	10	2.61
Government colleges are suffering from neglect of local communities.	7.24	8	10	2.66
The reputation of government colleges has been affected badly	6.06	7	8	2.86
Most government colleges suffer from a scarcity of physical and human resources	5.45	5	5	3.06
The public has lost trust in government colleges.	7.07	8	10	2.85
Overall Values	6.62	8	10	1.99

As presented in Table 4, based on professional position, gender, college category, and college locality, the p values indicated that there was no significant difference in the perception of all groups.

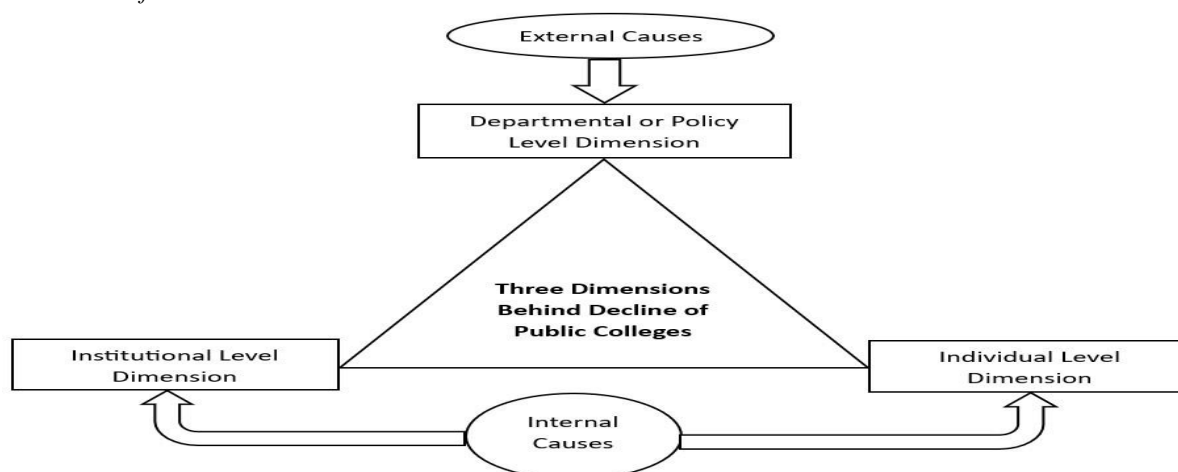
Table 4
Demographic-based Difference of Perception about the Existence of Decline in Public Colleges

Independent Sample t Test							
Demographics		<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Std. Error Mean	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>
Professional Position	Principal	42	6.51	1.21	.18	.59	-.53
	Teacher	366	6.63	2.07	.10		
Gender	Male	213	6.52	1.83	.12	.33	-.96
	Female	195	6.71	2.16	.15		
College Category	Associate	194	6.67	2.06	.14	.63	.48
	Graduate	214	6.57	1.93	.13		
College Locality	Rural	163	6.61	2.14	.16	.97	-.03
	Urban	245	6.62	1.90	.12		

RQ2: How are different aspects pitched in to cause a decline in public colleges?

The data showed several causes behind the decline of public colleges. Researchers have divided these causes into three broad dimensions, as displayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2
Dimensions of Decline



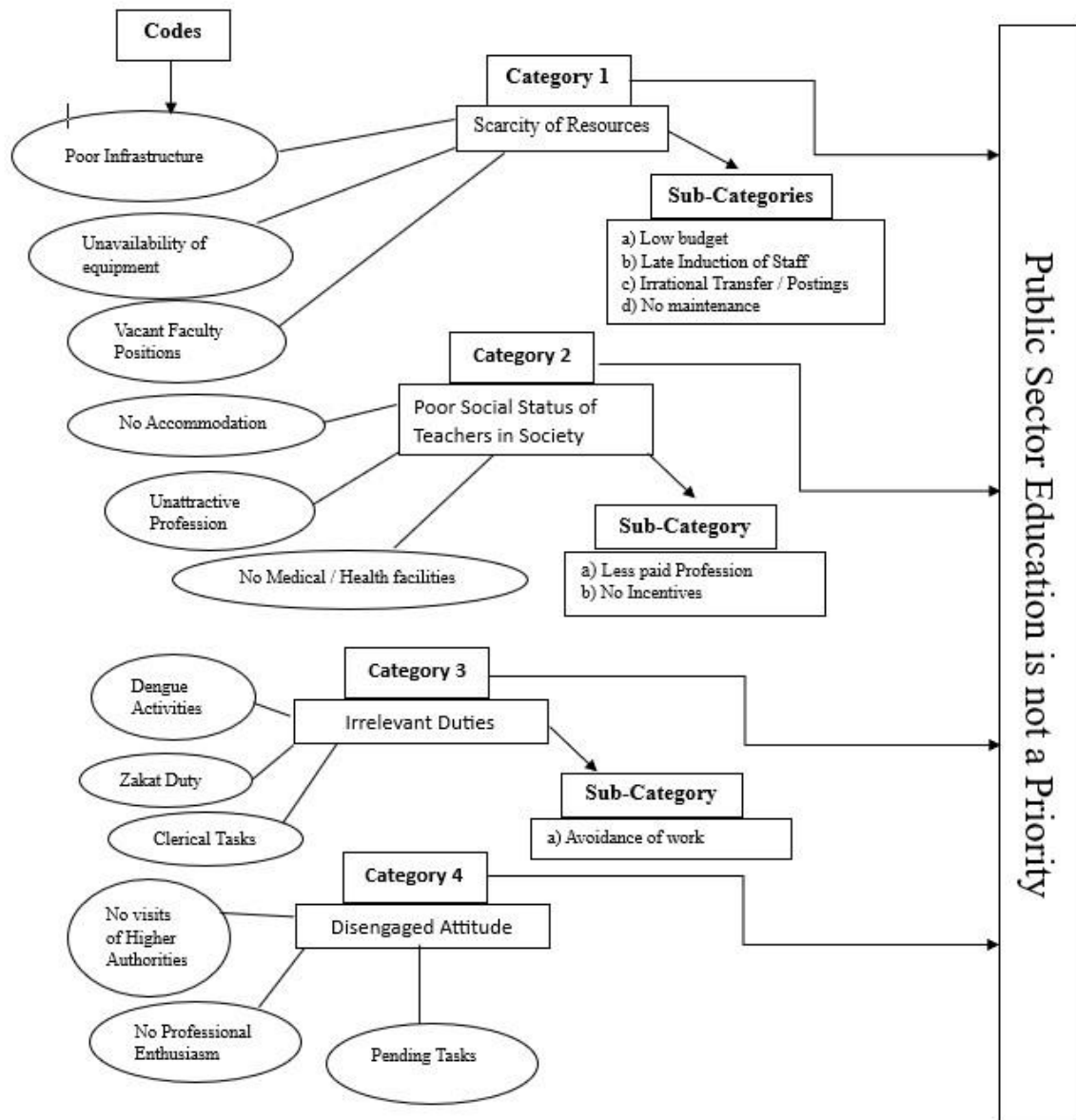
Dimension 1:

The first dimension of the causes is directly linked with the policymakers. The data on this dimension revealed six themes (See Table 5). The codes and categories of the first theme are presented in Figure 3.

Table 5
Themes under the Departmental or Policy-level dimension of Decline

Sr. No.	Major themes emerged	No. of Categories
1	Public sector education is not a priority	4
2	Complicated administrative processes	2
3	Political clout and administrative posts	2
4	Poor accountability	4
5	Inappropriate training	3
6	Stakes of the politician in the private sector	4

Figure 3
The Codes and Categories under Theme 1



Most respondents believed the government is not providing sufficient finance to public colleges. A principal mentioned, *“We have a sizable structure and building, but no grants provided by the government for its maintenance”*. Another respondent added, *“Because there is no funding for qualification allowance in the college budget, I have been waiting for my arrears allowance bill for a year”*.

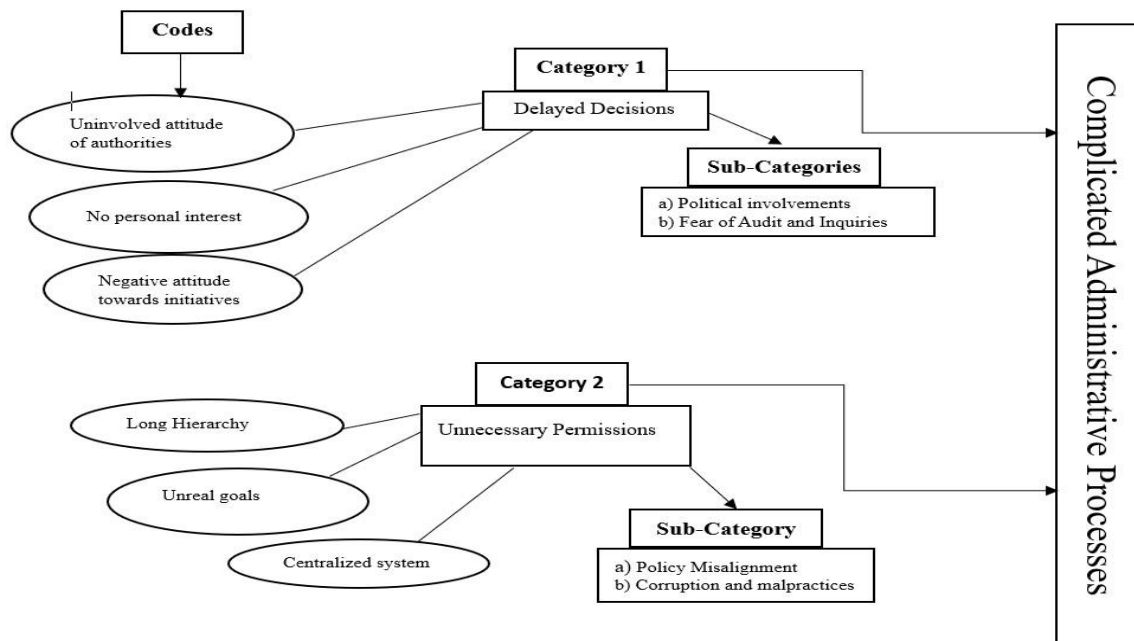
Respondents held the opinion that young individuals find teaching an unappealing profession. The majority have struggled in other areas, so pick this career as a final resort. A respondent argued, “When people join this profession as a last option, they do not have a teaching aptitude”.

Teaching is the main responsibility for which college teachers were hired, but the government is putting the teachers in pointless obligations at the expense of students' academic loss. “Whether it be a census, polio duty, administering elections, they have our department for it” uttered one respondent. Another mentioned, “Just look at the government's priorities. A few days ago, they assigned teachers to serve on the Zakat Committee”.

Respondents believed that government and top management have contributed to the decline of public colleges through disengaged behaviour. A respondent argued, “No one is willing to become a secretary of education. Moreover, this department does not have sufficient finance for corruption”. A female respondent commented, “The authorities at the secretariat are uninterested; our holidays have been on hold for months; even when we spend maternity leaves, the approval letter still hasn't arrived”. Numerous respondents pointed out that promotions of staff and appointment orders remain pending for years. and people become fed up due to the disengaged attitude of authorities. The aforementioned expressions make it abundantly evident that the government does not prioritise public sector education, instead involving academic professionals in pointless chores that lead to numerous academic issues and the demise of public colleges' reputations.

The second theme focused on the complex processes that obstruct progress, and they lose their significance relative to completion dates in public colleges. Due to the long chain of commands, initiating and completing tasks within a specified time becomes difficult. The private sector is fully authorized to use any corporate strategy and charm to attract students and improve quality, while the principals in the public sector are bound to get permission from several authorities. The codes and categories of the second theme are presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4
The Codes and Categories under Theme 2



A principal argued, *“Even though the government started my college, the schedule of new expenditure (SNE) was not approved. Despite my repeated appeals, it took years to open a college bank account”*. Similarly, a female principal pointed out, *“Whenever I requested budget, it took a long time or refusal and those who have authorities do not take interest to speed up the process. Instead, they frequently remarked that there was no need to endure the suffering”*. One respondent reported, *“Anyone who tries to reform the system would face significant obstacles. Even that struggle caused problems for his employment”*. Many decisions are delayed because of the centralized system. If anyone tries, his voice will be muffled”. Such unnecessary permissions make every process so lengthy and irritating that the majority step back or do not initiate.

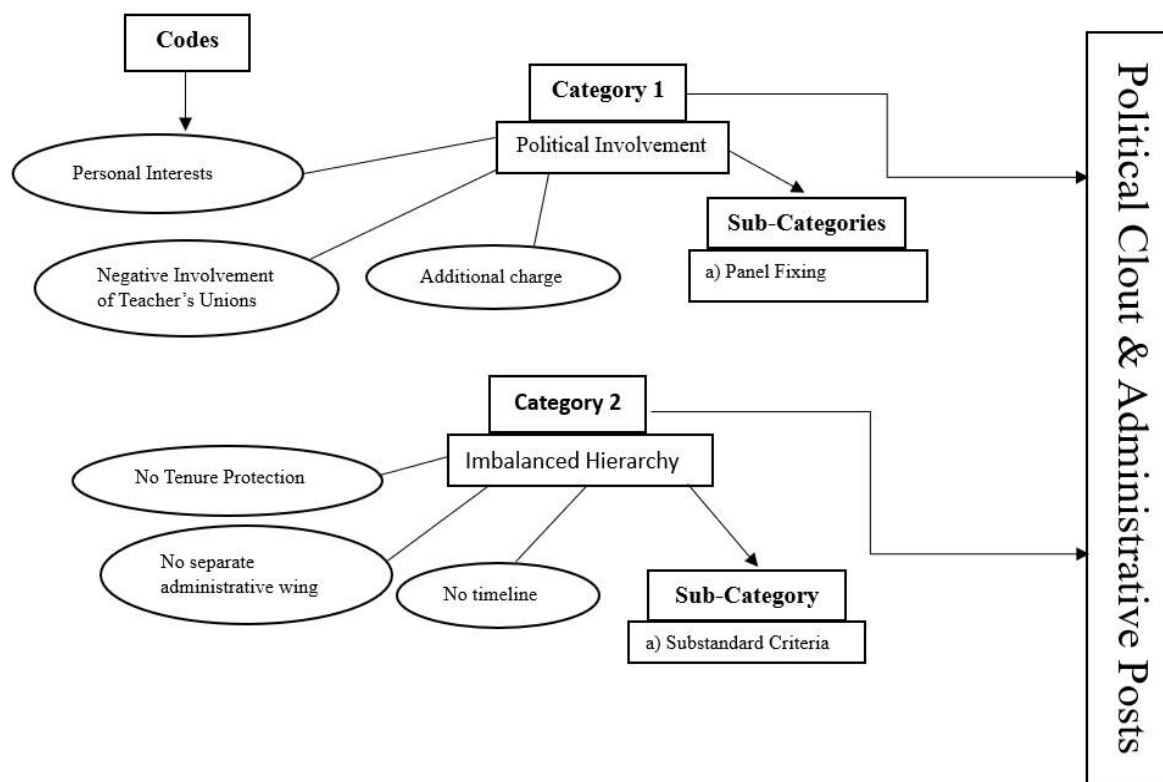
Instead of facilitating smoother and more transparent financial processes, the auditors obstruct using extortion to extract bribes in the public sector. Except for a few in-charge principals, the majority are nearing the end of their tenure and retirement. They have a fear of auditors and inquiries. They believe it will be difficult for them to respond at this stage of service if an inquiry is held against them. Therefore, they failed to spend money on crucial needs. A respondent reported, *“Our college has a budget amounting to Rs. 1.2 million but our principal is not ready to spend even a single penny due to fear of audit”*. Similarly, another respondent added, *“The majority of professors are unwilling to accept managerial positions in the department since they are investigated every time their tenure is up”*. This discussion determined that one of the main barriers to implementing the required changes in public colleges is the needlessly complicated and drawn-out procedures, which have resulted in a monotonic environment.

The selection for administrative positions in public colleges is subject to political influence and other malpractices, which is the focus of the third theme. The details about the different codes and categories under this theme are shown in [Figure 5](#). All respondents believed that political factors are used for managerial positions. A respondent commented, *“If you lack political clout, no matter how qualified you are, or how hard you try, no one will appoint you. During my thirty years of service, I have probably never seen anyone selected for managerial positions based on his ability or performance”*.

Between several influential stakeholders of public colleges, the selection procedure for administrative positions is a power struggle. The powerful groups try to fix the panel of their choice to choose the candidate. A respondent reported, *“Because the match has already been decided, every departmental policy has failed”*. Another respondent commented, *“Due to panel fixing, the institutions have been ruined”*.

Figure 5

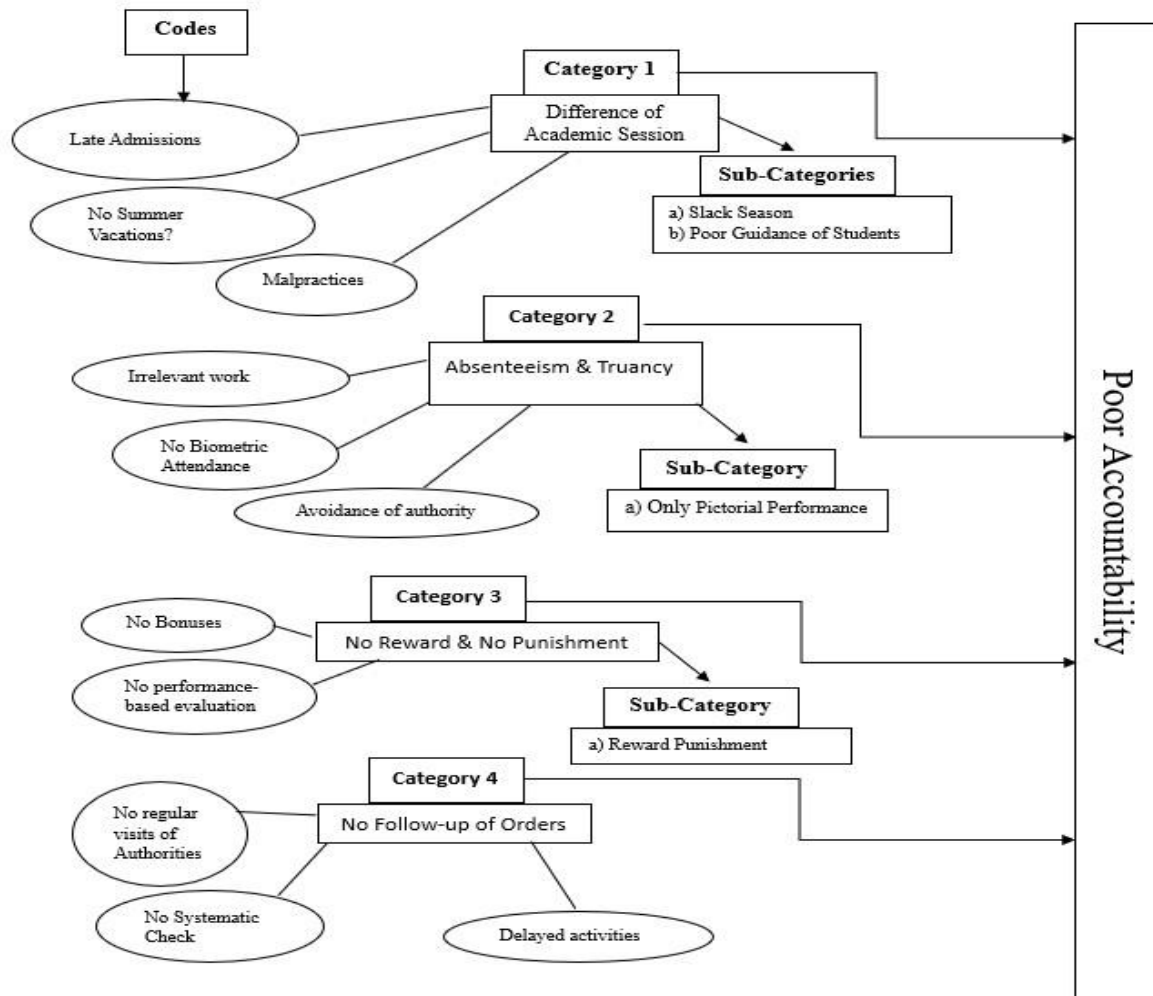
The Codes and Categories under Theme 3



A respondent mentioned, “There should be a distinct wing for administration and teaching because when I have to teach after serving as an administrator for a few months or years, I develop close relationships with my coworkers while teaching and develop a dread of them also because I will eventually be their subordinate”. Another respondent argued, “The hierarchy issue arises when teachers can choose whether to work as administrators or not. Everyone should be required to serve as administrators”. It is possible for someone occupying an administrative position to be transferred overnight from the position or to continue for several years. A respondent mentioned, “An administrator who lacks tenure protection will never make a significant choice and will instead, stay calm and stagnant”. The conclusion drawn from the aforementioned expressions is that the selection process of administrative positions in public colleges needs revision; from the selection criteria to the transparency of the process and tenure.

Poor accountability is the next theme under this dimension. Figure 6 illustrates the codes and categories. Respondents highlighted the difference in the academic session duration between the public and private sectors. They believed it to be one of the main factors contributing to students' poor academic performance. A respondent reported, “During summer vacations at public colleges, the private sector begins free summer camps, to increase admissions. Even though it is against official policy, the private sector defies it and offers summer campuses during hot weather. Why can't the government compel the private sector to stop this practice?”. Another respondent added, “Despite the extreme heat during summer, the government purposefully doesn't inquire with the private sector. Given that colleges are teaching, why would parents choose to keep their children at home? The session should be the same on both sides”.

Figure 6
The Codes and Categories under Theme 4



The institutional administration must take responsibility for leaving the students just before the exams during the final weeks of the session. In collegiate circles, these days are referred to as “the slack season”. A respondent reported, “*Slack season needs to be decreased at the college, and as a principal, I've tried to avoid releasing students early because they act as our college's ambassadors and by doing so developed our reputation*”. A female respondent added, “*There are some days in which we sit completely free and go back from college, waste two or three hours, sometimes eat sweets and gossip and go back called the slack season*”. Another respondent mentioned, “*In a nation where millions of children are already out of educational institutions, we cannot create entrance standards to limit the intake of students, but at least we can help them choose appropriate courses*”.

Different participants brought up the issue that absenteeism from duty at public institutions is common, especially among principals. While discussing this issue, a respondent laughed and commented, “*The colleges in the side area are working online while sitting from home, The faculty have a mutual understanding regarding absenteeism and both the principal and the staff have convenience*”.

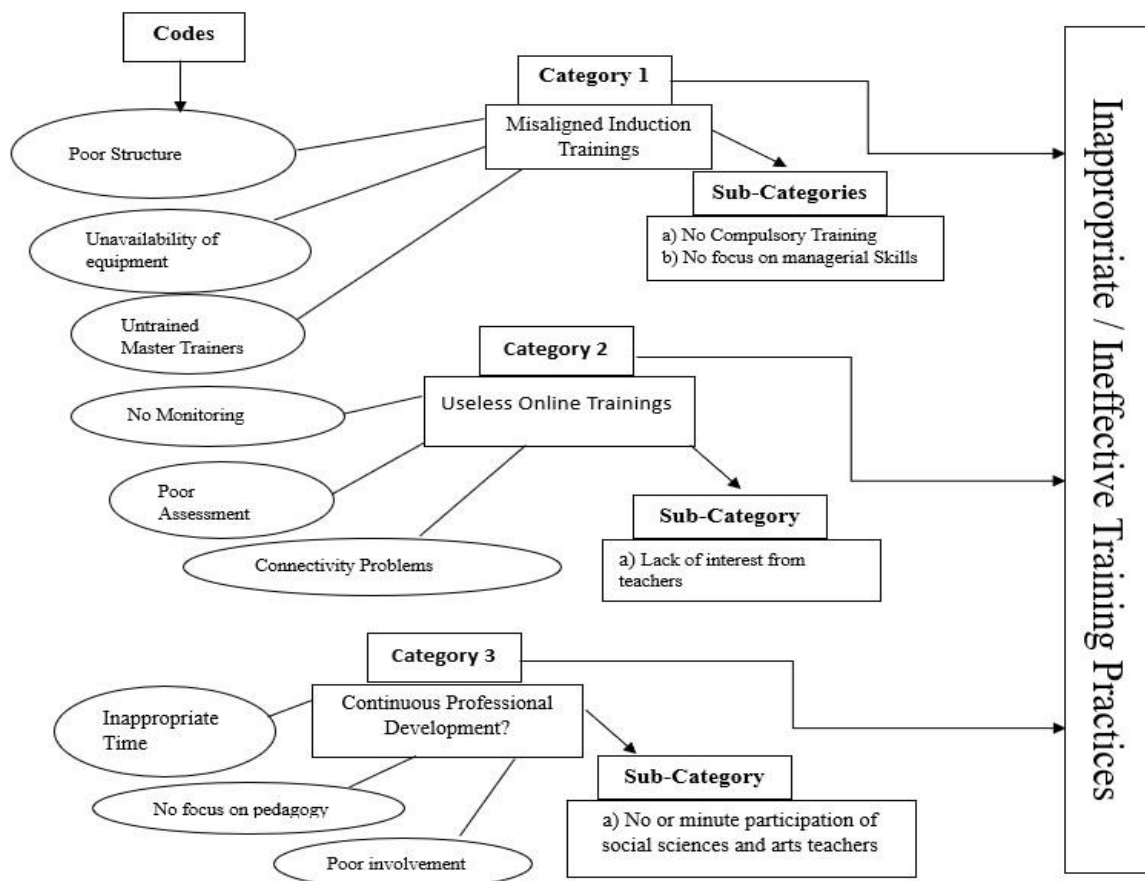
The public sector has no reward, and the punishment is occasionally carried through time-consuming and exhausting procedures. A respondent argued, “*Unfortunately, there is no*

incentive or punishment in this system. You will be promoted to the next grade even if you perform zero compared to any hard-working person”. A female respondent shared, “I have noticed that if someone remains active in any work, they will be given extra work as the reward so that people may start avoiding work”. The government has developed certain software with various performance indicators, but frequently, the staff sends only fake photographs instead of actual performance. A respondent reported, “When the deputy director visited the college, he didn’t talk to the staff about the actual situation, challenges, or outcomes; instead, he just took pictures and sent them”.

The discussion and expressions about this theme proved the poor accountability in the college cadre, neither reward nor punishment.

Inappropriate training is the 5th theme under this dimension. Figure 7 shows the details. Young lecturers mentioned that we have no induction training. Seniors who have experienced induction training believed that it was only a waste of time and resources. However, a few respondents disagreed with this stance and believed that induction training was fruitful. Moreover, respondents believed that induction training should be part of the recruitment process with an assessment at the end. A senior respondent with thirty years of experience commented, “I have attended none other than promotion link training in my whole career. Social science and arts teachers are not even invited for the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) training”.

Figure 7
The Codes and Categories under Theme 5



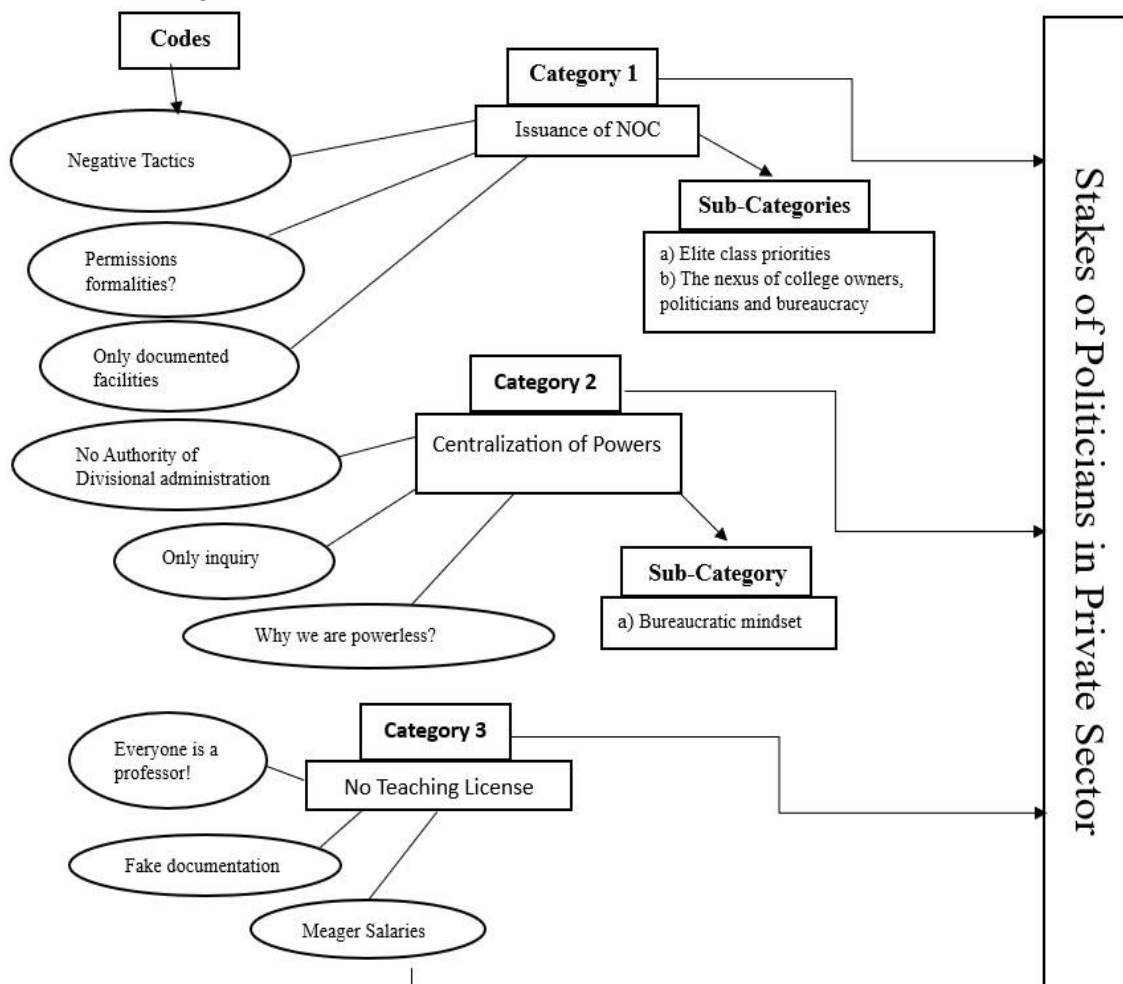
Several respondents highlighted the faulty online training. A respondent argued, “During Online training, participants do not listen to the speakers as there is no monitoring. They often put their mobile phone on the table and did other activities”. Another respondent added, “The department's training sessions are conducted only as a formality. Being skilled is different, even master trainers lack understanding of basic pedagogical practices”.

There is no engagement of managerial personnel in job-related training. They were only engaged in promotion link training, during which they gained some rudimentary awareness. A respondent mentioned, “Most principals believe that their only responsibilities are going to the office to verify staff members' attendance or sign forms, rather than going to the classes, which is what a manager of an academic institute does.”. A principal commented, “It is a reality that the department never cared about educating administrators about their job”.

The above discussion concludes that the existing training methods used at public colleges are flawed. It is necessary to thoroughly reform the training from its schedule to its materials, contents and methods. Separate training sessions for the administrative staff and teaching staff are required.

Figure 8

The Codes and Categories under Theme 6



“The stakes of politicians in the private sector” is the last theme under this dimension illustrated in Figure 8. Private colleges are required by law to obtain a No Objection Certificate

(NOC) from the relevant authorities before functioning. The college must meet specific conditions to receive NOC; however, respondents felt that the majority of private colleges, especially those in rural areas, did not meet the basic requirements but got NOC through political affiliations. Owners of private colleges have strong ties with politicians and bureaucracy. Hence, it has become easier to obtain NOC without fulfilling the requirements. A respondent mentioned the name of a well-known private college and its owner by saying *“You are aware that the owner is a politician. When a public institution begins to flourish in a specific location, these individuals arrive and instantly establish a private college. Why does the government give the green light to the private sector when the public sector is already performing well in a particular area?”*. *Politicians, the executive branch, and bureaucracy are all interdependent. As a result, they support one another in their personal affairs, especially when they need to make money for themselves”*.

Some respondents believed that the main goal of these institutions is to generate money in any way. They have run derogatory campaigns against the public sector. A respondent commented, *“In private institutions, several instances occur every day, but they are not discussed as much. However, here, if a student cleans the chair he is sitting on, they also claim that we treated that child unfairly”*. Another respondent asked, *“Did the media ever tell you about the indecency going on in private colleges in the name of musical shows? But they will put a big label with the name of our institution and say that this has happened in such and such a college in such and such a place. Who is behind this propaganda?”*.

Many respondents thought that because of the centralization of power in the public sector, principals and divisional-level management do not have the authority to take the rapid steps that the institution needs. Respondents perceived that the nexus of politicians and the owners of private institutions is behind this centralization of power. A respondent uttered, *“Politicians deliberately do not allow the local administration to be strengthened because of their benefits”*.

Few respondents made the argument that the government must issue teaching licenses to revive the public sector. A respondent commented, *“Why haven't these private academies been shut down? Why do teachers lack a standard system”*. Another respondent added, *“If any such system is introduced like issuing teaching licenses, then the private sector will not be able to get people working on meagre salaries and the public sector will improve”*.

Hence, providing teaching licenses can be a positive move. It will flourish the standardization in teaching.

Dimension 2:

This dimension of the decline is linked with the divisional-level administration. The institutions are overseen by the deputy director of colleges and the director of colleges, and they are directly administered by the principals. Data revealed three themes under this dimension, which are reported in [Table 6](#).

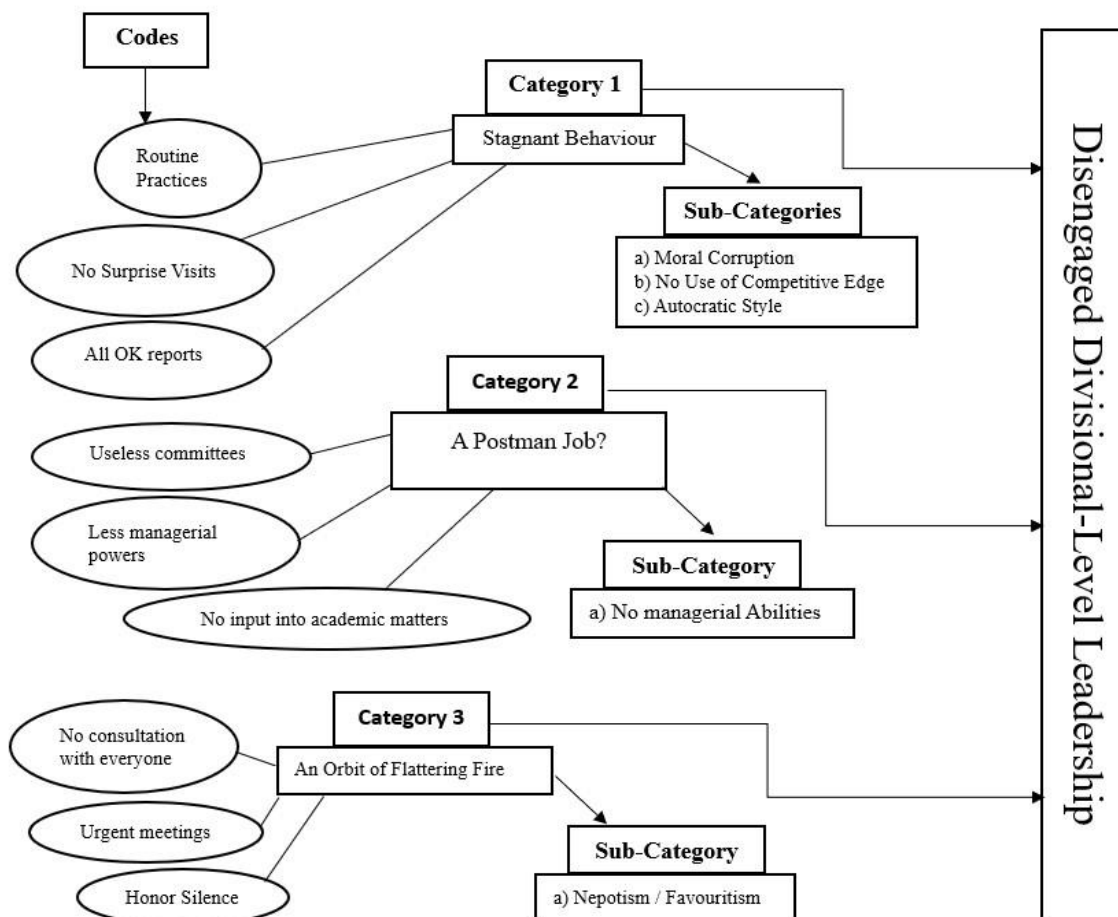
Table 6

Themes under the Institutional Level Dimension of Decline

Sr. No.	Major themes emerged	No. of Categories
1	Disengaged leadership	3
2	No or outdated publicity	3
3	Non-conducive environment	4

Figure 9

The Codes and Categories under the Theme “Disengaged Leadership”



As presented, related codes in Figure 9 show several respondents mentioned that whenever an authority visits a college, the principal and staff are already informed. So, they get alert and show the fraudulent performance. A respondent mentioned, “*The deputy director only has five colleges that he is required to inspect once a month, but he also does not carry it out correctly*”. Another respondent added, “*I am about to complete two years in this college but till now, the director has never visited*”. When higher authorities inquire about different performances, a letter is passed down from the top to the bottom, and the performance is only represented in documents. Even if problems are reported, they may be fixed, but staff members never mention it. A respondent reported, “*How can I report the problem to the director or any higher authority because if I do and the truth comes out, my principal will turn against me*”.

The majority of principals are confined to their offices only; it does not end here that they do not teach in the class; they do not even visit the classes. A respondent reported, “*I once suggested to my principal to visit the classes. The principal said that if I did that, the teachers would feel bad*”. In addition to this, a female respondent mentioned, “*If the principal has a good relationship with a teacher, then in such a situation she never visits the class, but if it is the other way around, then she will deliberately visit the class of that particular teacher to annoy her*”.

Unfortunately, the majority of principals were unaware of the usage of competitive edge and exhibited disengaged behaviour. One principal showed extremely frustrating behaviour by commenting *“I can't do anything individually to improve government colleges have become, everyone knows that there is free education here in the public sector and this is only competitive edge we have but people are not ready to trust us anymore, what should I do?”*. When the researcher argued that other than offering free education, you can offer such combinations of subjects in your area, which is not offered by the private sector, he made lame excuses and commented, *“Teachers in my college already think that they are already overburdened”*. A female respondent argued, *“The real problem is something else, actually the principal rewards her favourites so that they can come here and enjoy themselves, hence the principal will not see which subjects are in demand but she will see which teachers I have to annoy and which to enjoy”*.

Every college will have a notice of committees, e.g., sports committee, discipline committee, literary committee, etc., hanging on the board in the principal's office. But in reality, these committees are ineffective and the notices are only there to relieve the principal from the responsibility, allowing him to easily assign blame to the relevant committee whenever any authority takes notice of negligence. A respondent mentioned, *“Usually, the principal does not come to the college, nor is interested in work. If he is asked by any authority he will say, I have formed a committee for this work”*.

The principal, especially the deputy director and director, serves as a liaison between the upper management and the lower personnel. A respondent mentioned, *“I think that the administrative positions that we have at the division level are like a postman, they have no authority and cannot take any initiative. Even if a sports activity is to be carried out, that too is permitted from the provincial level”*. Similar to this, a principal commented, *“The leadership at the divisional level is powerless, it has become like a post office, the principal and the secretary have some powers but the DDC and the director have no powers”*.

Numerous respondents reported that leadership lacks abilities and professional spirit. Some respondents argued that being a good teacher or a manager is different. Hence, they suggested that there may be a separate administrative wing and teaching wing in the college cadre. As a respondent expressed, *“Since the senior most is given the post of principal, it is not a criterion. Our principal herself has no managerial ability. The real issue is that those who move into administrative positions from teaching positions fail to follow the correct path and direction of the administrative position, instead attempting to function as teachers even in administrative positions”*.

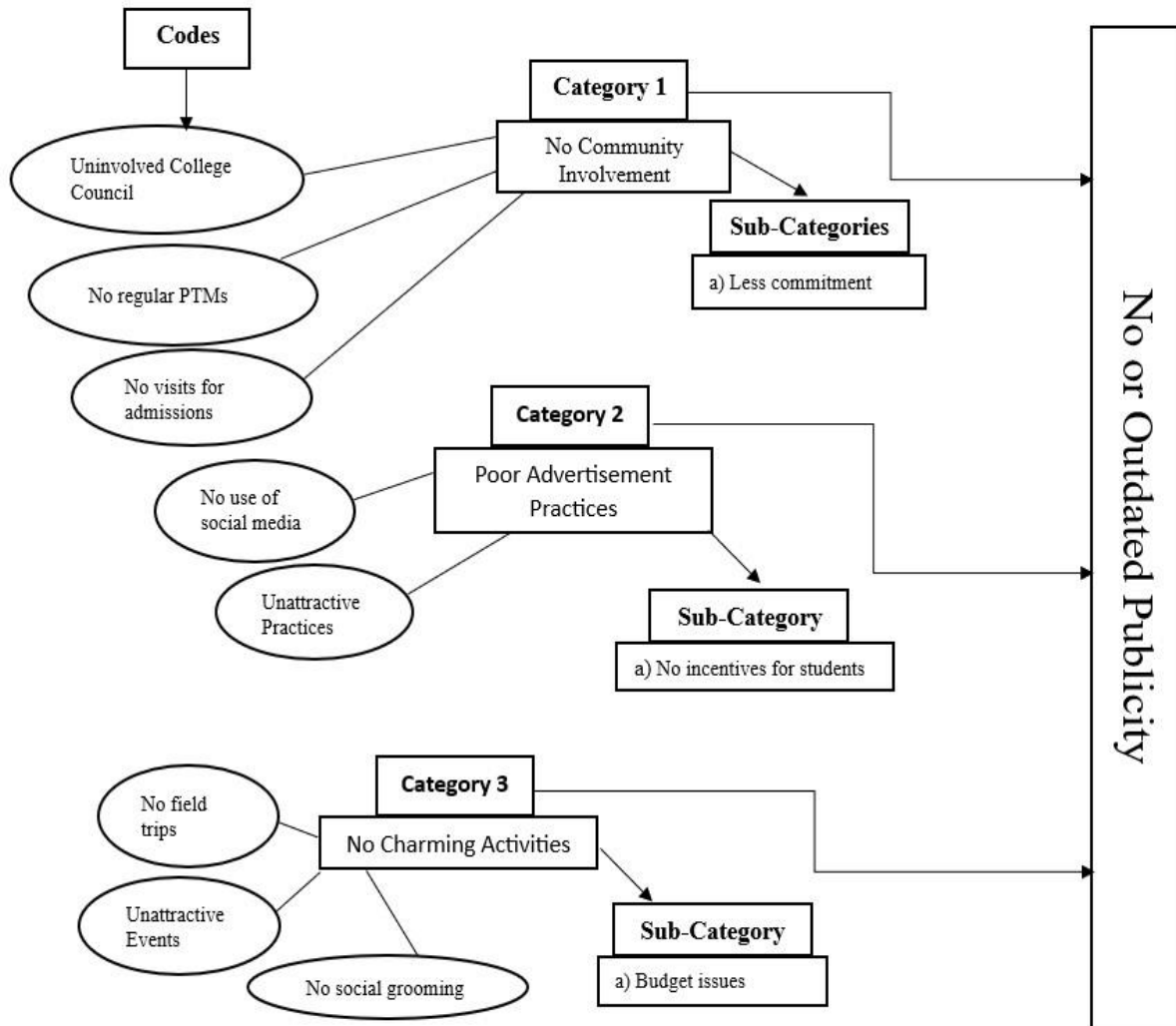
Another problem is the autocratic management. Principals believed that if we followed a democratic style, subordinates would not work properly. A principal argued, *“If we don't implement the decision by hook or crook, nobody listens to us”*. Similarly, a female principal expressed, *“People here in the public sector are already very relaxed”*. Teachers thought it would be better if principals consulted with the entire faculty before any decision. A respondent argued, *“A few flattered people tell the principal to enforce the order, no need to ask anyone else”*. Respondents also believed that some flattering people ignite the grouping culture in public colleges and keep the principal in an orbit of stagnation. The conflicting interests of these groups prevent the principals from altering the traditional approaches. Such flattering people are typically seniors in service and have an antiquated view of administration. A respondent

mentioned, “Here, decisions are always taken by a few people closer to the principal and those flatterers look out for their interests and are not concerned with the betterment of the college”. A principal commented, “Very few people can decide by themselves and involve everyone in the consultation”.

When someone expresses a viewpoint contrary to a principal, that individual is targeted and put through various mentally torturous activities. A respondent argued, “The person who disagrees with the principal’s opinion during the meeting, will be given some duty that will keep him humiliated”. Another respondent mentioned, “Most principals do not call a meeting at the beginning of the session. Instead, when a problem arises or teachers need to be informed of a pre-decided verdict, an emergency meeting is called to spoil work during the session”.

No publicity is another theme under the institutional dimension of decline, as shown in Figure 10. Some respondents believed that we still have positive attributes to showcase our institutions. The private sector offers various kinds of scholarships for brilliant students and they distribute attractive gifts and rewards, e.g., laptops, motorcycles, cars, etc., to the high achievers. Such marketing strategies are attracting students.

Figure 10
The Codes and Categories under the Theme “No or Outdated Publicity”



Respondents pointed out that public colleges are neglecting community involvement in marketing. A senior respondent commented, “There was a time when we had a community connection with the college, local dignitaries played their part in the improvement of the college, but as the private sector grew and their children started studying there, this trend ended”. Another respondent mentioned, “The principal’s job is to involve the people of the area and ask them to admit their children and then take responsibility. But unfortunately, the principal does not enrol his children here, how will he get the attention from the community?”.

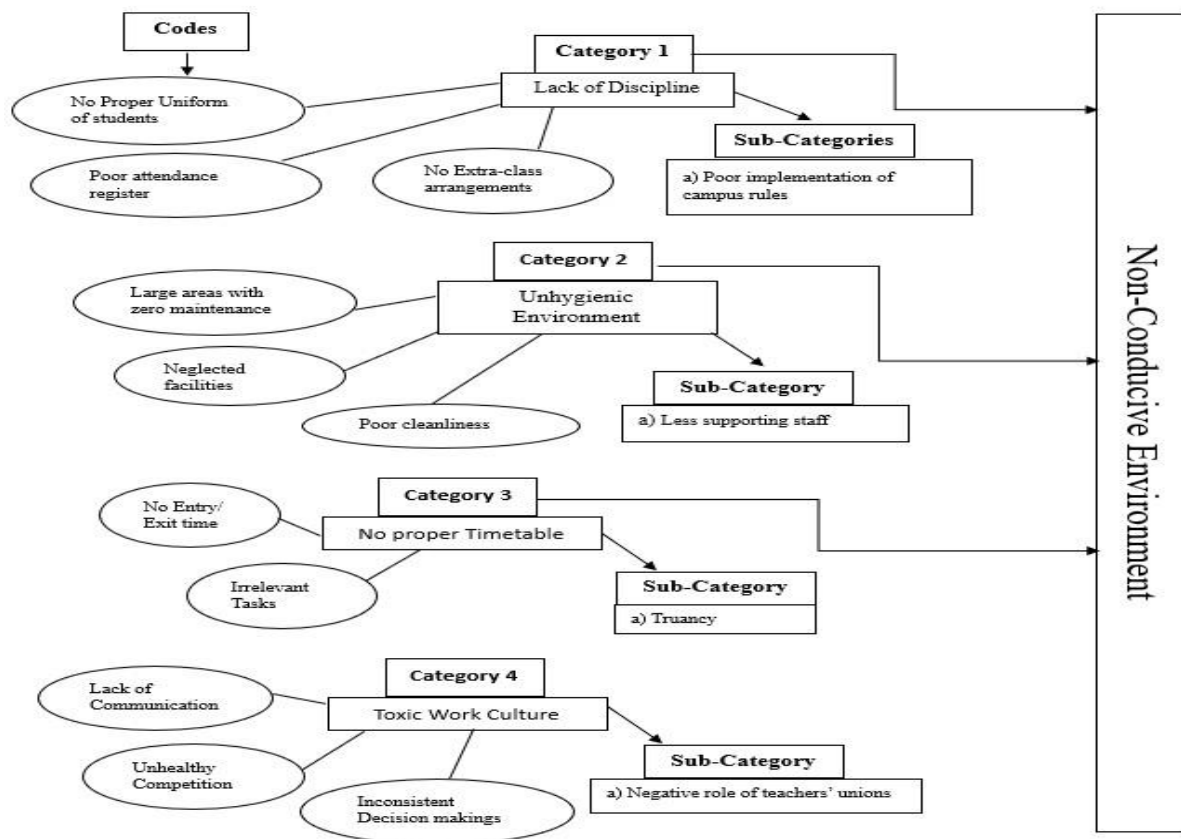
Another respondent mentioned, “I have experienced the private sector and at the time of admission everyone was given a target to increase admissions and we used to get incentives for it. But here no one cares whether a student gets admission or not”.

Respondents reported that whereas public colleges never advertise themselves, the private sector does so through a variety of media. Many respondents claimed that the private colleges organized the field trips, which became one of their marketing strategies. The majority of students who attend public colleges come from lower socioeconomic classes and these institutions are unable to cover the cost of field trips. A respondent argued, “In the private sector there are functions, there are cafeterias and there are trips so students are attracted towards it. We should get such facilities from the government”. Another respondent added, “The private sector does more exhibitions, there are music shows, and field trips, whereas our students cannot pay for such activities”.

The last theme under this dimension is the non-conductive environment presented in Figure 11.

Figure 11

The Codes and Categories under the Theme “The Non-Conductive Environment”



Public colleges are not properly implementing the rules and regulations, necessary for an educational institute to maintain discipline. This problem is more severe in boys' colleges. A respondent commented, *"Since students cannot afford, they frequently wear coloured uppers and coats and occasionally go without black shoes during the winter". We can't be too strict on the students because they can't buy it"*.

Respondents highlighted that whenever teachers are on leave, their classes remain unattended. Such practice also creates discipline problems on the college campus. Even at that time, when the researcher was doing an interview, there was a noise and the respondent commented, *"You won't see empty classes in a private college but here it is normal. If a teacher is on leave, his class should be managed so that there is no noise, due to this the rest of the classes are also being disturbed"*.

Respondents also reported about the filthy infrastructure. A respondent argued, *"Our classrooms and the entire campus are littered with cobwebs hanging. The grounds outside are overgrown with grass and weeds, but no one cares". The huge building was constructed by the government but there is insufficient staff to clean it, so there is dirt everywhere which affects our reputation badly"*.

Numerous respondents reported poor implementation of the timetable. A respondent mentioned, *"The teacher doesn't care if the class is over, he will be 10 minutes late; then he will continue to use the mobile inside class, leaving the class a little early is routine"*. Most teachers arrive at the college just before their classes and leave right after or perhaps even during the class. Another respondent commented, *"The teachers remain hurry to leave colleges. They have no interest in college affairs"*.

It should be the case that all the subjects of those teachers who are available in the college be offered in the prospectus, but the principals show favouritism. This practice has a detrimental impact on teachers. A respondent reported, *"The principal does not give work to his favourite people and thus, others do not work, that why the principal is doing favouritism?"*.

In the early years of service, people show enthusiasm towards their duties, but as they progress in the service, they become lazy and stagnant due to the non-conducive environment. There is no reward or motivation associated with professional improvement. Everybody is promoted to the next scale after a certain period. Moreover, there is a tradition of assigning more duties to those who show enthusiasm and mostly, those who lack the spirit for work keep enjoying the service. Such practices adversely affect the motivation and enthusiasm of young staff members and ultimately, they also become idle. A respondent reported, *"Such an atmosphere has been created here that whoever comes here loses interest in the work and steadily becomes stagnant". When I joined the public college as a lecturer, I was very eager to do something for the betterment of the institution, gradually I realized that doing something good here is like bringing trouble"*.

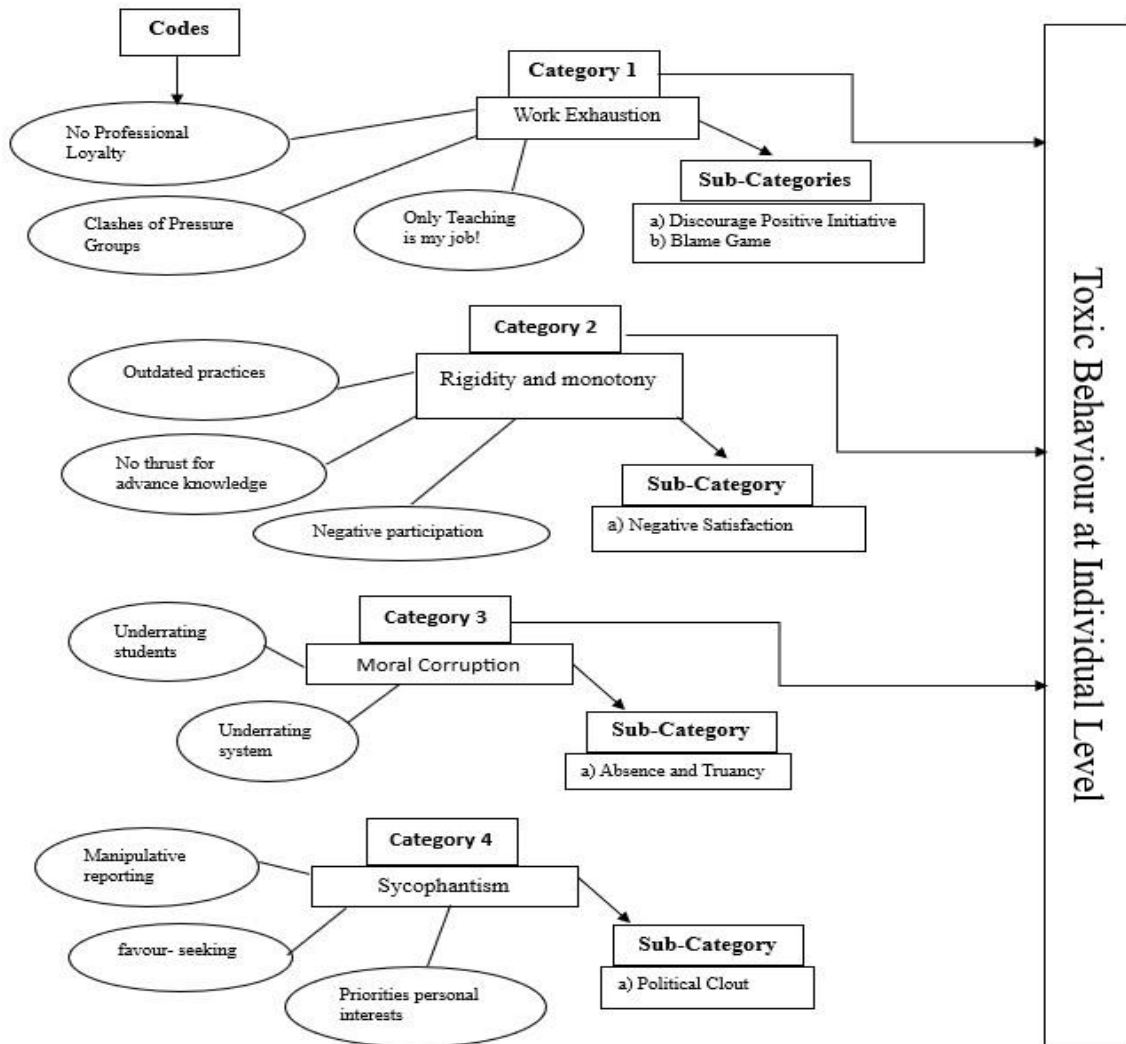
Teachers' unions often play a negative role at public colleges, particularly where they have more strength. A respondent commented, *"Union members often do such things for the negative interests of their people, which spoils the professionalism, and promotes grouping"*.

It is concluded that a non-conducive environment in public colleges needs reforms and improvements. A democratic environment can boost the professional spirit.

Dimension 3:

The individual level dimension is the third and last dimension of the causes of decline for public colleges. Professionals at the Individual level are directly related to the numerous factors that researchers have identified. Figure 12 illustrates the details.

Figure 12
Codes, Categories under “Toxic Behaviour at Individual Level”



People have created several groups, some of which have grown by teachers' union involvement, while others are based on shared interests or proximity to one another. These groups are responsible for internal crises. As a principal commented, *“These people impose their will firmly, yet if something is rejected, they reply, if you don't agree, then don't agree; we'll do what we want”*. Another respondent reported, *“Sometimes politically powerful people exert pressure through their groups, and so do some unionists”*.

Under-rating students and engaging in such practices that further undermine their academic achievement is immoral on the part of teachers. A respondent argued, *“Those students who excel in studies go to private colleges and we are left with those who only aim to pass with 33% marks”*. Similarly, another respondent argued, *“Most of the students enrol in public colleges*

are extremely duffers, some don't have common sense". No one was taking responsibility for negligence at his/her end. A respondent argued, "Teachers are careless, if I talk about my college, there are 80% of people who don't care. If we try our best and organize a function in the college, such people don't even like to come to the hall".

The expressions mentioned above concluded that there is a severe moral crisis in public colleges at the end of the administration and teachers. Everyone is playing the blame game and unwilling to accept responsibility. It is necessary to update and enhance the public college accountability system. The deficiencies in government colleges exist from the individual level to the policy level, for which a comprehensive strategy is needed to improve and all the stakeholders will have to contribute in their respective places for the improvement of the institution while continuously monitoring.

The quantitative phase of the study utilized 18 items in the questionnaire to measure the perception of respondents about the different causes of decline. Table 7 shows the frequency distribution of these causes.

Table 7

Frequency Distribution of Various Causes of Decline at Public Colleges

Perception Regarding Various Causes of Decline of Public Colleges				
Statement	<i>M</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>Mode</i>	<i>SD</i>
Scarcity of Budget	7.56	8.00	10	2.46
Scarcity of Physical resources	7.56	8.00	10	2.38
Scarcity of human resources	7.37	8.00	10	2.38
Lack of accountability	6.93	7.00	10	2.48
Irrational transfer/ posting of teachers	7.06	8.00	10	2.73
Irrelevant duties of college staff	7.05	8.00	10	2.67
Disengaged behaviour of management	6.80	7.00	8	2.54
Disengaged behaviour of teachers	6.17	6.00	5	2.56
Delayed and Complicated processes	7.40	8.00	10	2.26
Unnecessary audits and inquiries	6.20	6.00	5	2.72
Traditional criteria for administrative post selections	7.11	8.00	8	2.38
Hierarchy problems	6.67	7.00	7	2.28
Short academic session due to late admissions	7.07	7.00	10	2.47
Non-conducive environment	7.19	8.00	10	2.50
Inappropriate Training of staff	6.63	7.00	8	2.56
Centralization of powers	6.86	7.00	8	2.45
No or less publicity	7.23	8.00	10	2.41
No or less charming activities in public colleges	7.03	7.00	10	2.52

Values of 16 out of 18 items fell at a severe level, while "disengaged behavior of teacher" and "unnecessary audit and inquiries" fell at a moderate level of existence. Hence, it was concluded that public colleges are facing severe crises and quantitative data supports the results of qualitative data.

Discussion

Literature suggests that organizational decline can occur due to external or internal factors. (Yeh & Fang, 2011). External factors may include gradual changes in competitive dynamics, sudden environmental changes, technological shifts, etc. Internal factors include a bureaucratic style of administration, ineffective managerial practices, scarcity of resources, lack of committed employees, etc. (Morrow et al., 2007; Palmer & Hult, n.d.; Park & Mezas, 2005; Short et al., 2007; Trahms et al., 2013). The current study pointed out the three-dimensional causes behind the decline of public colleges. The first dimension is linked with the policy level

changes that are required to address particularly the external causes. The second “institutional level dimension” of decline is directly linked with the divisional level leaders. Hence, divisional-level leaders need immediate attention in this regard. Ghazzawi (2018) rightly highlighted the roles of leaders as the top variable for future researchers to study. In our context, the divisional level leadership has failed to encounter the prevailing situation and either taken no action or only faulty actions that have further contributed to the failure. Lastly, the third “individual level dimension” is linked with both the divisional level leaders and the academics in public colleges. The twofold conceptual framework proposed by Kulichyova et al. (2020) also emphasized that human resource development fosters individual creativity while simultaneously influencing mechanisms and processes that are pertinent to creativity at the organizational and individual levels.

Conclusion and Recommendations

All the signs of decline pointed out by the literature are present in the Punjab’s public colleges. The horizontal and vertical communication gap is widening day by day among academics. They have closed their doors to each other and failed to encounter this issue. The data reflected that academics in public colleges spend very little time inside the campuses. They do not have time to discuss college and student issues, they do not meet each other often, and they are in a hurry to go back. This situation has developed an isolation and horizontal communication gap among the academics. Moreover, they have created various pressure groups, and mostly, the decisions are made based on negative tactics (e.g., union affiliation, flattering, favoritism, etc.) instead of positive communication and discussion. Moreover, instead of taking responsibility, the majority blamed each other for the prevailing crises. Failure or poor performance is common in public sector colleges, and no one regrets it. For years, routine practices have been followed by leaders and academics, and no one has been willing to take any initiative. The majority of them avoid risks by cornering themselves from any administrative duty or college matters. Spread of negativity in the forms of disengaged attitude, moral corruption, absentees, truancy, and avoidance of academic matters by divisional-level leadership is also present which is further worsening the situation.

Immediate attention from relevant authorities is needed for the revival of public colleges. The selection process for college teachers under the Punjab Public Service Commission is quite effective. However, there are some shortcomings. The selection process may include a test to assess teaching aptitude. Additionally, it is essential to provide induction training in updated teaching practices and academic management. The training may be an integral part of the selection process. For inclusion, administrative positions may be assigned on a rotational basis. Such a system would help mitigate political influence and the negative effects of unions. Additionally, those who avoid administrative responsibilities and distance themselves from college affairs would be encouraged to participate actively. To motivate individuals further, those serving in administrative positions should receive additional points toward promotion to the next scale. For a balanced competitive environment, there is a need to decentralize authority, provide incentives to talented students, address hierarchical issues, improve the accountability process, and align performance with modern standards in the public sector.

Limitations and Suggestions

The current study has limited data to two divisions of Punjab, and future researchers can expand it further. Additionally, considering the viewpoints of higher-ranking and policy-level managers could be a valuable addition to the literature. A cross-sectional study with more constructs in the quantitative tool could add more components. Furthermore, additional information especially pertinent to college-level management practices may be included in a comparative analysis with the private sector.

Declarations

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