



Best Practices for Maintaining the Good Relationship Between Principals and Academic Staff

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Citation: Suneel Kumar, Dr. Megha Mehta. et al. (2023), Best Practices for Maintaining the Good Relationship Between Principals and Academic Staff, *Educational Administration: Theory And Practice*, 29(4), 358-369, Doi:10.53555/kuey.v29i4.1821

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	<p>There have been periodic changes to the conventional responsibilities of principals in educational institute's leadership. An assessment of the literature is conducted to emphasize that the four main practice areas that need to be looked into to improve the bond between the principal and academic staff are "instructional, administrative, environmental, and emotional." Under the appropriate supervision of twelve educational specialists who hold doctorates, the literature study functioned as the basis for formulating the discussion points for the focus group. Participants in focus group discussions include department heads, principals, and senior lecturers. Multiple sampling techniques were used in this qualitative investigation, with a sample size of 80 (i.e., 8 Principals, 18 HOD, 12 Sr. Lecturers, and 44 Lecturers). A convenient selection of eight out of fifteen institutes was made, and faculty members from every discipline were picked randomly. Focus group discussions served as the method of data collection. NVivo 14 is the software used to analyze the qualitative data. The responses from each participant were noted and recorded into an M.S. Word document for further analysis work. The discussion files were imported into NVivo version 14, and thematic interpretations were performed. NVivo 14 created a word cloud, bar charts, and hierarchy charts to ascertain which practice is more prominent. The study concludes that improving relationships between academic staff and principals requires more environmental and emotional practices than administrative or instructional ones. The academic faculty has emphasized dynamic practices more, while the principal has focused more on organizational practices.</p> <p>Keywords: <i>Principal Leadership Behaviors, Polytechnics of Himachal Pradesh, Principal and Teachers Relationship, NVivo, Academic Leadership.</i></p>

1. Introduction

Building strong bonds between school administrators and staff is essential to fostering an atmosphere where students can flourish academically, socially, and emotionally (Liebowitz & Porter, 2019; Price, 2011; Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Both society and teachers must benefit from effective leadership. Because of all the challenges that the rapid advancement of technology has brought about, educational institutions in the twenty-first century require a strong academic leader (Sarwar et al., 2022). Positive and trustworthy staff connections have the potential to enhance student outcomes in several ways. It can make it possible for educators to improve the circumstances in which they practice and refine their teaching approaches (R. Hoerr, 2008). When school administrators prioritize developing a culture of positive adult interactions, it makes teachers feel like members of a bigger team, where everyone's job is to assist each other and all of the students (Futernick, 2007). This can facilitate teacher observation, practice discussion, information sharing, feedback exchange, and voicing issues among teachers in a comfortable environment (Barth, 2006). It can also give teachers the confidence to try novel teaching techniques and express alternative viewpoints (Brewster & Railsback, 2003). The connections between teachers and parents will likely be characterized by trust, generosity, helpfulness, and cooperation if these qualities also

characterize the relationships between students and teachers (Fournier et al., 2019). The principal's leadership position is essential to improving student learning and teacher effectiveness. As a result, high-performing teachers will enhance student learning outcomes. To foster an achieved teaching-learning environment and improve teacher effectiveness, a principal, as the leader, needs to adopt particular actions (Pardosi & Utari, 2022).

Today's leaders of educational institutions must possess abilities, knowledge, and mindsets very different from those of just a few years ago (Imig, Holden, & Placek, 2019; Seong, 2019; Pan, 2008; Rieg & Marcoline, 2008). Education leaders who recognize the importance of human relationships in our lives, in giving our experiences meaning, and in helping us acquire understanding are more likely to fully consider the "why, who, what, where, and when" of learning (Shields, 2006). Rather than maintaining the "status quo," the principal of an educational institution should be the caretaker of a collective commitment. The principal needs to foster relationships with various stakeholders, such as parents, lecturers, students, and the rest of the community (Sorensen & Machell, 1996). Principals lack the time and experience necessary to serve as conventional instructional leaders. Facilitating teachers' learning is another effective way to use instructional leadership. Teachers do not always seek guidance from an instructional leader. However, academic staff must feel assured that their superior is aware of their difficulties and frustrations and understands and values the work they accomplish. Teachers must view their principals as collaborators in the classroom, sharing knowledge and growing with them. Therefore, the principal-teacher relationship is crucial to the academic staff's performance (R. Hoerr, 2008). Effective staff management is essential in determining whether an educational institution succeeds or fails (Atolagbe et al., 2020). A strong emphasis on academic results, high regard for students, a conducive environment, and achievement-level supervision are all necessary to establish an influential educational institution (Pardosi & Utari, 2022).

Board members of educational institutes must communicate and confer with one another to preserve harmony, trust, comprehension of, and adherence to policy (Chombo, 2020). A positive working connection between principals and teachers can increase the educational institution's productivity (Omebe, 2014). Effective principals are viewed as being value-driven, focused on collaboration, empowering leadership as necessary, and creating strategies to increase the institution's capacity to enhance student learning and teaching excellence (Tulowitzki et al., 2020; Hallinger, 2011). Therefore, developing ongoing and significant professional learning opportunities for all of their teachers is a prerequisite for leadership in educational institutions (MacLeod, 2020; Tulowitzki et al., 2020; Printy, 2008). A few additional abilities principals exercise include team building exercises, task appraisal, awards and recognition, and proper team composition. In the Polytechnics of Himachal Pradesh, institutions want to concentrate on these strategies for fostering and sustaining productive teamwork (Suneel Kumar & Mehta, 2023). The principal plays several functions in educational leadership to give staff direction and exert pressure to meet objectives. The principal process in technical institutions such as polytechnics has become increasingly demanding because of the rapid technological advancements and the growing use of electronic teaching methods. In addition to their daily responsibilities, principals must stay current on changes and maintain staff motivation. To do this, they must know what their staff expects from them (Kumar & Mehta, 2022).

2008; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Qian & Walker, 2013; Li, Hallinger, & Ko, 2016; Li et al., 2016; Lijuan & Hallinger, 2016; Hallinger et al., 2017; Pan et al. 2017; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2017; Hallinger et al., 2019; Hosseingholizadeh, 2020; Mohammed et al. 2020 Pan & Chen, 2020). Numerous studies have examined the range of emotional demands and how they affect teachers' psychological health, stress levels, work satisfaction, burnout, overall well-being, and how well students learn (Ilies et al., 2015; Brackett et al., 2010). However, there is a shortage of studies regarding the excellent relationship between principals and academic staff, especially for polytechnic institutes of Himachal Pradesh, India. This study explores the best practices for maintaining the ideal relationship between principals and academic staff in the Himachal Pradesh, India, polytechnic institutes.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Principals and Relationships

A principle is commonly characterized as the one holding a prominent role in an educational institution and potentially the most significant constituent of the institution. They are the educational institution's instructional leader, and it is widely believed that a good administrator is a prerequisite for effective learning and teaching (Palaniuk, 1987; Marzano et al., 2005). The principal's leadership is nearly always cited as the key to success when an institution is dynamic, inventive, and child-centered, has an excellent educational reputation, and students achieve their full potential (Rieg & Marcoline, 2008). Successful principals prioritize students over programs, emphasize behaviors over beliefs, demand student

commitment, make the most of their high-achieving teachers, and develop goals before the academic year begins (Whitaker, 2003). The most effective administrators put much time and energy into cultivating and enhancing their relationships. The foundation of what sets apart an exceptional educational institution is positive relationships. The most effective leaders create cultures characterized by professionalism, care, compassion, teamwork, trust, respect, advice, and mentoring (Connors, 2000). A principal must be visible in the institute and community to cultivate relationships with staff members and positively influence academic culture (Rieg, 2007).

The principals are skilled speakers and listeners who offer constructive criticism as well. As strong leaders, principals demonstrated the morals, professionalism, and conduct they expected from others while also knowing when to ask for advice and when to show courage. Principals cared more about the institution, the teachers, and the students than themselves. They also showed humor, empathy, and compassion (Dinham, 2007). A principal's primary responsibility is to support the managing, coordinating, and organizing of different institute operations. The principal's primary duty is establishing and maintaining a teaching-learning atmosphere for the institute's educational programs. The principals are responsible for assisting the teachers in their educational initiatives. Principals have several duties, one of which is to lead with sincerity and effectiveness, which helps teachers portray themselves more professionally. The principal's job is to provide highly esteemed visions that concentrate on their daily operations and cultivate a positive institute climate that encourages outstanding teacher performance (Saleem et al., 2020).

2.2 Principals and Teachers

To maximize the productivity of their staff, principals need to build solid and enduring connections. Relationships need to be cultivated carefully, with expert guidance. Principals aim to establish cohesive teams inside the institution that question the "status quo" and prioritize ongoing enhancements (Hyland & Yost, 1994). It is important to note that team building is a skill that requires supervision and oversight from the principal. Staff members can work harder than they would individually when working as a team, which raises outputs across all developmental levels in the educational system (Ramsey, 1999). Professional learning, both for themselves and their teachers, is highly valued by successful principals. Additionally, they acknowledge that teachers could be leaders and promote their professional development both within and outside of the classroom (Dinham, 2007). If the principal seeks outside to help faculty members occasionally, interactions between the staff and the principal will flourish (Kellison, 2007). Teachers need their principals' moral and emotional support (Zeng & Zeng, 2005). Being open and honest with one other and the families they serve is essential in every relationship, hence why principals and teachers need to communicate with each other frequently (Rieg, 2007). Principals must become intimately familiar with every staff member to foster the relationships that form teamwork (Rieg & Marcoline, 2008).

Principals can use specialized strategies to build relationships with teachers, such as highlighting good job performance, identifying high performers, being available to staff, assisting with personal and professional concerns, praising and honoring teachers for their achievements, and listening to them with gratitude. The relationship between principals and staff members is improved when they are involved in staff and instructional improvement (Rieg & Marcoline, 2008). By allocating time for staff collaboration centered on coursework planning and institute improvement, providing teachers with asset-based feedback and learning systems, delegating leadership for numerous tasks across the school, and involving employees in the decision, principals can foster interactional trust between many staff members (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Job satisfaction was predicted by the interdependent decision-making techniques of institution principals, which pertain to making decisions alongside other academic staff members (Cansoy, 2018). The degree of contentment, coherence, and dedication among principals and teachers is influenced by the interactions that they have with each other. These positive work connections enhance principals' impressions of cohesion, commitment levels, and job satisfaction. Principals exchanging expectations with their instructors is a relationship mechanism that directly explains large diversity across teachers (Price, 2011). It is particularly stated that principal assistance helps teachers feel less stressed and more positive about themselves and their work (Berkovich & Eyal, 2018).

The principal's relationship with the academic staff is determined by several studies investigated through existing literature. This relationship extends beyond the instructional or administrative domain and is connected to the teachers' emotional stability and personal circumstances. All practices examined in this study utilizing qualitative research and recommendations on strengthening the bond between the principal and academic staff will be presented.

3. Research Questions and Objectives

This study aimed to determine the optimal methods for sustaining the positive working relationship between academic staff and principals in Himachal Pradesh's Government polytechnic institutes. The research questions of the study are as follows:

3.1 Research Questions

1. What are the parameters for sustaining a healthy relationship between academic staff and principals?
2. What are the critical protocols and concerns for preserving the positive working relationships between principals and academic staff based on the designation (i.e., Principal, Head of Department, and Senior Lecturer)?

3.2 Objectives

1. To determine which initiatives are best for keeping the positive working relationship between academic staff and principals.
2. To determine the most essential practices for establishing positive relationships between principals and academic staff based on the designation (Principal, head of department, senior lecturer, etc.).

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design and Instrument

The primary practices employed at different institutions are recognized with the aid of the literature review. These served as the foundation for creating the discussion points for the focus group. Based on the literature review, it has been concluded that four practice areas should be investigated to strengthen the relationship between the principal and academic staff. "Instructional, administrative, environmental, and emotional" are the categories of these practices. Twelve doctorate-holding educational specialists in higher education and vocational training are provided access to the discussion points in detail, and the final discussion points are framed based on their suggestions. A mixed group of principals, department heads, and senior lecturers/lecturers conducted the focus group discussion. Since the principal's and the staff's relationship is being investigated, obtaining input from all appropriate persons is crucial to enhancing the quality of the output. Focus group conversations were held in the polytechnic's conference room or common area, and the researcher briefly overviewed a topic to every participant. They were assured that, in compliance with research ethics, their responses and personal information would not be disclosed. Everybody was allowed to respond when the researcher began discussing the points. Each person's response was precisely recorded and then converted into a soft copy for future investigations. Subsequently, NVivo version 14 software was utilized to import all discussion files, and theme interpretations were made.

4.1 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

Eight polytechnics, the largest and offering more than four courses, were conveniently picked from 15 institutes for this qualitative study and intended for focus group discussions. At each of these polytechnics, the focus group discussions included the principal, the head of department, and the senior lecturer, with a total sample size of 80 through 8 selected institutes. Each lecturer at that institution was chosen randomly from each discipline. The focus group discussion was held in the conference room or common area of each chosen polytechnic. All participants were informed about the topic and assured that their identities and opinions would remain confidential. The researcher called the discussion, delivered the topic statement to each participant one at a time, and recorded each participant's response.

5. Data Analysis Observations and Results

The data collected from focus group discussions is transferred into an M.S. Word file, and participant responses categorized by institution were adequately documented for each topic of discussion.

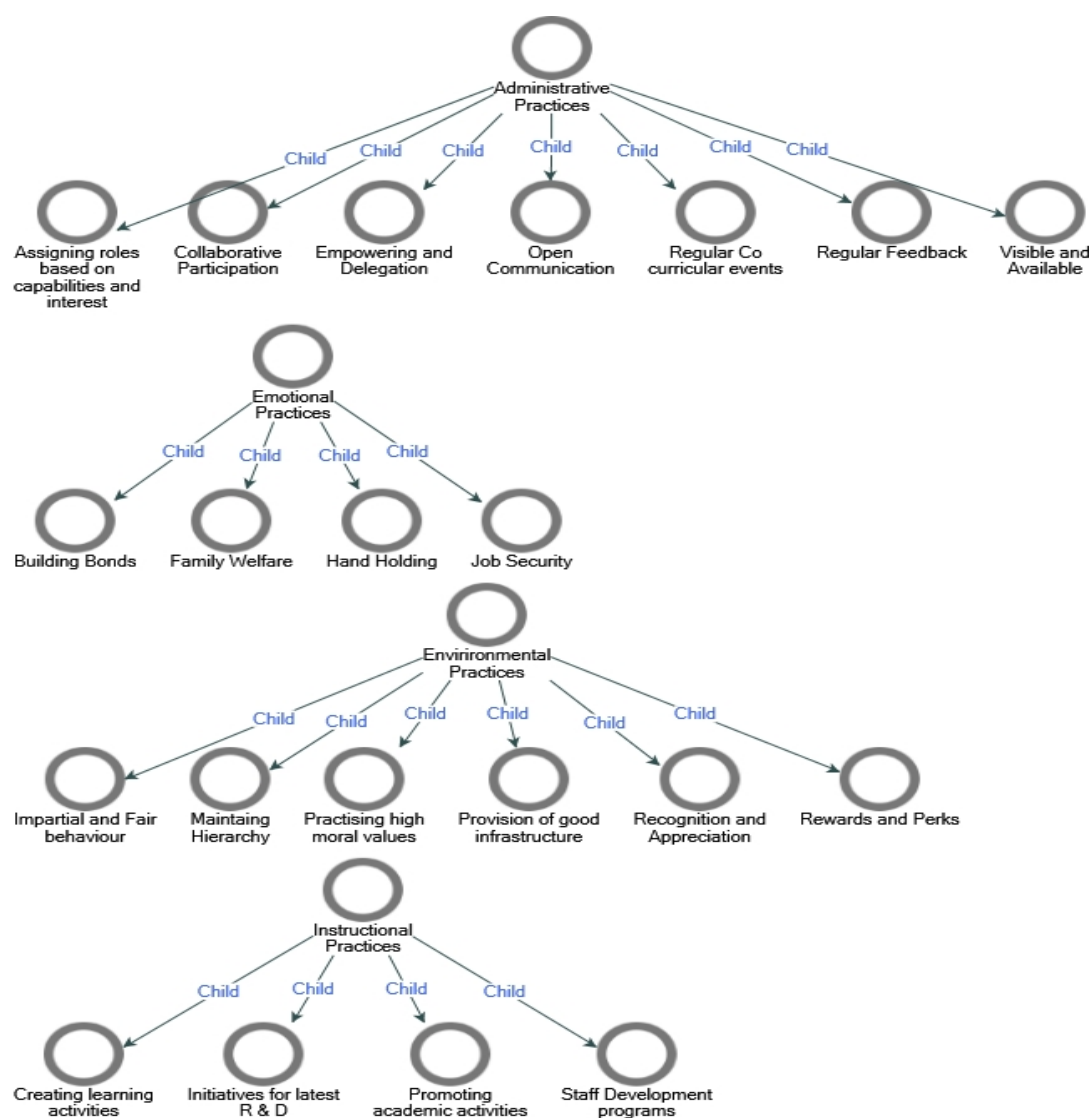


Fig. 1, Main Nodes and Child Nodes (Source: Compiled Through NVivo 14)

All files were imported into the NVivo 14 software for further analysis. The software prepares the main and child nodes based on the collected data represented in Figure 1 and Table 1.

Table 1, Main Nodes and Child Nodes (Source: Compiled Through NVivo 14)

Main Node	Child Node
Administrative Practices	• Assigning roles based on capability and interest.
	• Collaborative participation.
	• Empowering and delegation.
	• Open communication.
	• Regular co-curricular events.
	• Regular feedback.
	• Visible and available.
Emotional Practices	• Building bonds
	• Family welfare.
	• Hand holding.
	• Job security.
Environmental Practices	• Impartial and fair behavior.
	• Maintaining hierarchy.
	• Practicing high moral values.
	• Provision of good infrastructure.
	• Recognition and appreciation.
	• Rewards and perks.
Instructional Practices	• Creating learning activities.
	• Initiative for latest R&D.
	• Promoting academic activities.
	• Staff development programs.

A Hierarchy Chart was developed to determine which practice is more prevalent than the others. The significance of that factor is indicated by the area that each node occupies. Figure 2 illustrates the collected data in the form of a Hierarchy Chart.

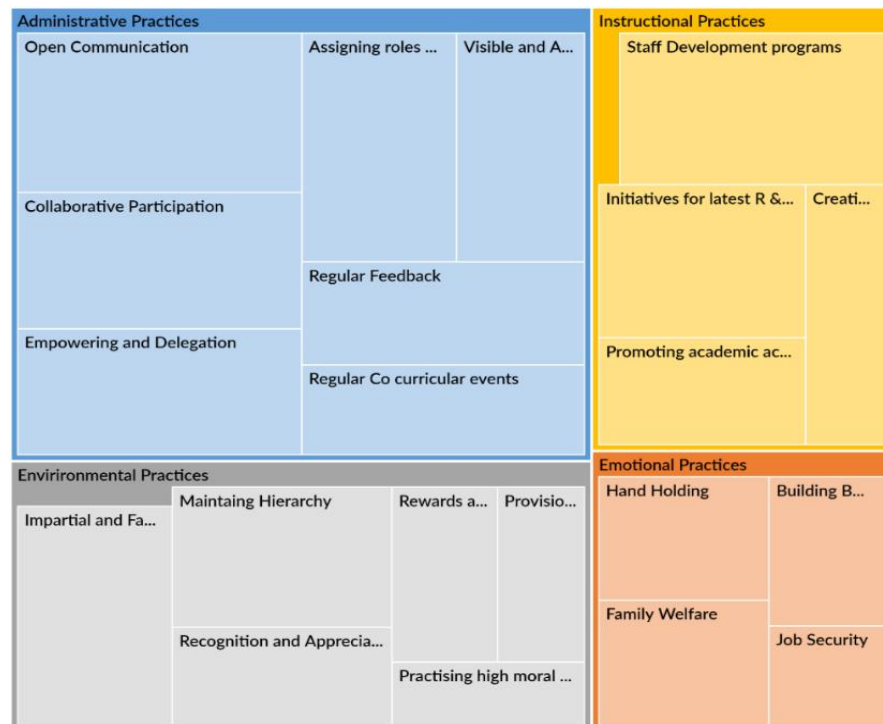


Fig. 2, Hierarchy Chart of Collected Responses (Source: Compiled Through NVivo 14)

The data from the Hierarchy Chart shows that “administrative practices” serve the central roles, followed by “environmental practices.” “Open communication” is the cornerstone of “administrative practice,” and “impartial and fair behavior” is a crucial component of “environmental practice.” In “instructional practices,” the “staff development program” is essential, while in “emotional practices,” “hand-holding and family welfare” is incredibly vital.

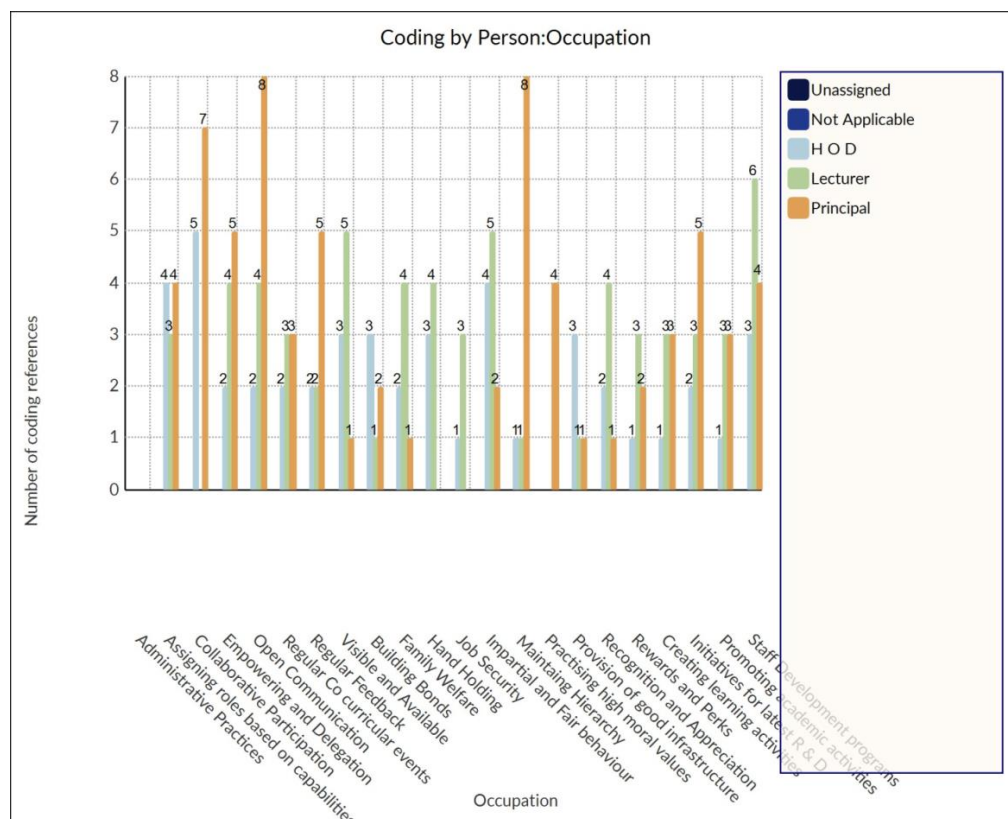


Fig. 3, Various Types of the Practices (Source: Compiled Through NVivo 14)

Lecturer/Senior Lecturer, HOD, and Principal participated in the focus group discussion. The accompanying bar graphs in Figures 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 illustrate each type of stakeholder's emphasis throughout the discussion of the basis of designation. Figure 3 shows the various types of practices concerning the occupation.

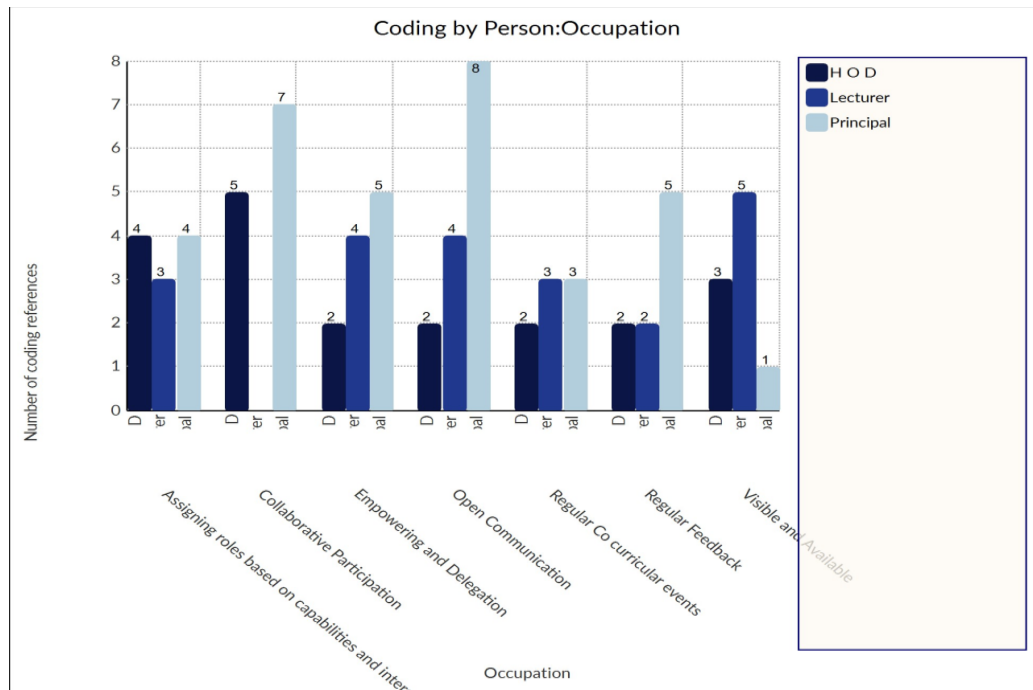


Fig. 4. Administrative Practices(Source: Compiled Through NVivo 14)

The HOD has exhibited the least attention to administrative procedures, whereas the principal has placed more emphasis on these. Senior Lecturers have adopted a moderate stance. However, the principal has exhibited the least concern to be present and visible. Figure 4 illustrates the administrative practices concerning the occupation. Figure 5 illustrates the various emotional practices concerning the occupation. The principal has exhibited a minor concern in emotional practices compared to the lecturers and senior lecturers. HOD has adopted the middle path.

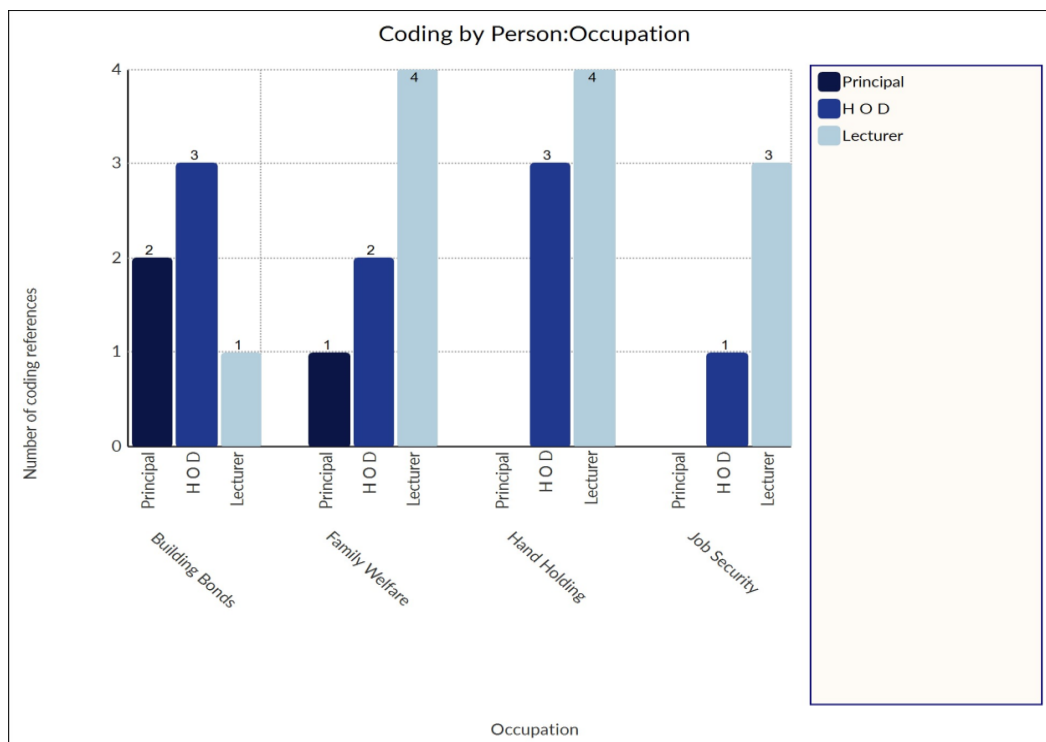


Fig. 5. Emotional Practices(Source: Compiled Through NVivo 14)

Figure 6 illustrates the various environmental practices concerning the occupation. Lecturers and senior lecturers have expressed more significant concern about environmental practices for rewards, recognition, and impartial behavior. The head of the department has placed more emphasis on maintaining hierarchy while maintaining good infrastructure, and the principal has placed more emphasis on upholding moral principles.

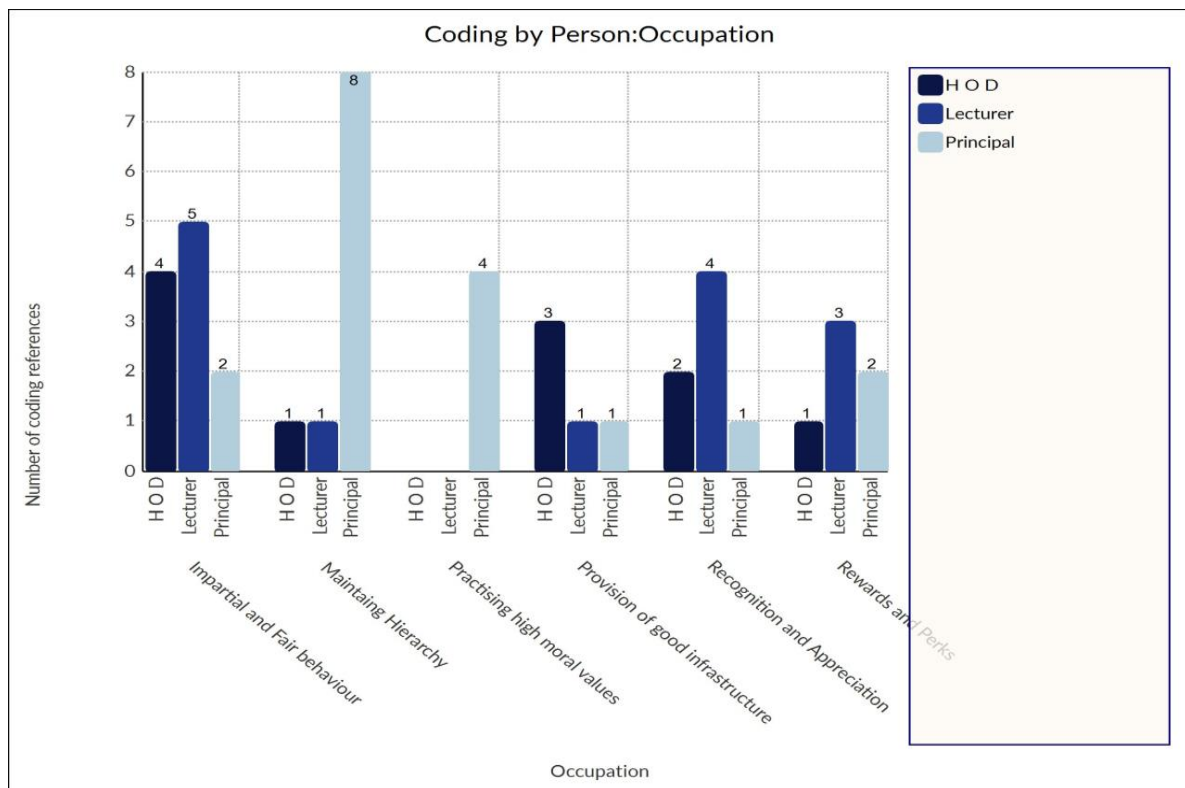


Fig. 6, Environmental Practices(Source: Compiled Through NVivo 14)

Figure 6 illustrates the various environmental practices concerning the occupation. According to the Bar Chart of Instructional Practices, the Principal, Lecturer, and Senior Lecturer have displayed improved concern, while Hod has chosen a more balanced path.

academic staff affects the performance of the staff, and both the principal and the staff should adopt these practices. The staff should focus more on instructional activities, maintain hierarchy, and uphold high moral standards. The principal should establish a fair, unbiased development environment where everyone may experience a healthy, honest, and impartial culture. In addition to putting up stronger staff development and infrastructure initiatives, the principal should organize these practices to ensure the welfare of the families.

6.1 Implications and Recommendations

The study's findings have provided Government Polytechnics' principals and academic staff with a vision for implementing administrative, educational, emotional, and environmental practices to improve their relationships. The study has strongly emphasized improving staff-principal communication, the principal's impartial and fair behavior, the practice of high moral values, offering a helping hand to those in need, family welfare, and development activities for a better learning environment. To preserve positive relationships between principals and academic staff, government polytechnics in the state can implement these recommendations. The insights from the study can be beneficial for institution administrators, policymakers, and future scholars to investigate the relationship between principals and academic staff and the implementation of specific practices in any institute. Through this research, teachers, the school community, and principals are made aware of the current state of the principal-teacher relationship. Based on the recommended findings, it assists decision-makers and other related personnel in taking remedial action. Teachers, administrators, and the school community may become more transparent and open. Knowing the elements influencing the principal-teacher relationship benefits teachers, principals, and students. It might be helpful as research material for other researchers.

6.2 Scope and Limitation of the Study

With a focus on the interaction between teachers and school leadership in a few chosen polytechnic colleges in Himachal Pradesh, India, the study's scope will be limited to factors influencing relationships. Additionally, this study had a few drawbacks that could have compromised its quality. The research may have been limited by time, discipline issues, fewer institutes evaluated, or a narrower study region. In the future, researchers can also investigate border study areas with more institutes.

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