

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL EXCELLENCE

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Abstract

The education system of Pakistan, in general, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in particular, suffers from deterioration. Most of the schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa direly need improvement. Turning schools into Centres of Excellence requires exploration of factors that could lead them to excellence.

According to Sergiovanni (1983) excellence is identified with effective schools which, like other human enterprises, grow over a period of time, through persistent efforts for changing conditions; painstaking approaches for maintaining the complex processes and relationship within and outside the schools. Research has documented that attempting to improve the quality of personal relationships among stakeholders was instrumental to better school climate, staff morale, and public confidence in schooling.

The current study was carried out in boys' secondary schools located in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The population of the study included all the parents whose children were studying in those schools. It was also because parents were considered more important stakeholders in schooling of their children. The sample comprised 60 parents purposively selected proportionately of 30 sampled boys' high schools (26 from private sector and 4 from public sector).

Interviews with parents were used as major instrument for collection of data. Those were held with purposively selected respondents whose children were in 10th class of each sampled school. The interview items were of multi-dimensional nature. The data were given both quantitative and qualitative treatment. The outcome of the study revealed a number of factors based on parents' responses and expectations that could help convert a school into a centre of excellence.

Keywords: Community, Effectiveness, Excellence, Factors, Parents, Perception, Relationship, School.

INTRODUCTION

Perception denotes what idea parents hold about the important factors that contributed to excellent schools. Parents were considered more important stakeholders in schooling of their children and, therefore, it was considered a rational and logical correct approach to obtain their views on the issue of excellent schools.

It was generally believed that those schools were successful where most students had better gains as compared to some other schools. For them there was an easy fit between the students' and the schools' goals for education. Schools, on the other hand, were unsuccessful places for those who were below average in academic skills, failing one or more subjects, or socially isolated, or without clear goals for future and further education.

Imran et al (2008) stated that the quality of education should be understood in an appropriate manner in light of the changeable organized setting in which the schools were operating. The development framework of the area, in question, provided the external environment. The operational setting in which the schools functioned provided the internal environment in the schools and was reflected through better infrastructural facilities; human resources; effective teaching learning processes and students' achievement scores.

The effectiveness of the school also depended on good governance that extended to the limits which the school had established structures and that allowed involvement of parents and community in decision making in school based matters. Marzano (2005) while quoting Tangri and Moles (1987, p.520) documented that the rationale for parent and community involvement in school governance was based on the concept of parent [and community] participation in educational decision making that was closely linked to democratic ideals of citizen participation in the affairs of government.

A study conducted by Teaching and Learning Research Program (TLRP) in 2006 reported that the most important purpose of learning was to make a person able to unfold his/her internal qualities. While, on the other hand, required teachers to keep in mind previous knowledge of the learner. The same study further reported that teachers should

perform different activities in the class in order to make the environment of the class healthy by discussing and solving the pupil's social and emotional problems by which a teacher could make the learning effective. Setting congenial school environment for teaching learning process was also an indicator of excellent schools.

Munir. S (2010) while quoting Laskys' research concerning 'relationship.' According to Munir, Lasky found that, except in a few cases, much of the interaction with parents of both elementary and secondary teachers was episodic. This in many cases occurred informally on the school premises such as when parents volunteered in classrooms, attended fund raising or sports events or when children had problems such as discipline or attendance issues or of low academic achievement. Lasky provides a useful distinction between the terms 'interaction' and 'relationship.' She argues that interaction happens in formal and mechanistic communication, which is sporadic, episodic and governed by rules. However, relationship is a kind of communication that is qualitatively different, which involves "more sustained contact, equality, fluidity, increased depth of shared meaning, values, goals and affinity" (Lasky 2000:849).

Parents' preferences were generally for those schools where most students had the advantage of high-test scores and comparatively better academic achievements in lower grades.

Bouchey and Harter (2005) considered that support to school children from both parents and teachers was important in their academic performance. Willms (2004) stated, "Successful schools differ in several small but perhaps important ways, such as greater teacher autonomy, formal student assessments, and a strong disciplinary climate".

The literature on school community relationship documented that school-home relationship was also one of the factors that contributed to bring the school to the level of acceptance by community. The principal/headmaster of a school should be knowledgeable about the different groups and segments of population in the catchments area of his/her school. Among those were the people, who had special interest in education and in the affairs of the school. The community, when organized, was labeled as Parent-Teacher Association or Parent-Teacher Council and its input for school improvement was always needed.

According to Teddlie and Reynolds (2000) teachers and parents were in frequent contact in effective schools. They expected good work from students, who worked to fulfill their expectations. The overall atmosphere in those schools was conducive to teaching learning. Every one from students to staff, and administrator to parents craved and worked for excellence. While in ineffective schools, teachers did not care for students' level and expected them to attain higher achievement. The principal's expectations were lower than teachers but they would waste so much of resources on non-academic endeavours and thought that other aspects (social/personal growth etc) were also important in schools.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were examined in the study:

1. What are the factors that can contribute to promote excellence in high schools?
2. What implementable suggestions the study can make to reach the high schools to the apex of excellence?

METHODOLOGY

It was a descriptive study that attempted to identify factors that could promote effectiveness in 30 boys' high schools both in public and private sectors. The following tools were used in the study.

- Interviews from parents in sampled 30 schools.
- Literature review.

The primary data were based on information obtained from parents' interviews. Secondary data were obtained from a study of documents as well as review of relevant literature. The interviews containing 10 items/statements were held with 60 parents whose children were in 10th class of the sampled schools.

Their responses obtained were quantified, analyzed and given in tabulated form for drawing inferences and results.

Table for Q1.

S.No.	Factors for Excellent Schools	Number of Responses
1	Qualified Teacher	25
2	Trained Teachers	19
3	Quality Education	24
4	Strong Management	18
5	Good Environment	20
6	Intelligent Students	3
7	Suitable Location, Play ground, Equipped classrooms	8
8	Facilities	8
9	Medication	2
10	Psychological Development	11
11	Discipline	26
12	Syllabus	11
13	Confidence	9
14	Non-profit based	7
15	Co-curricular activities	9

Table for Q2

S.No.	Factors for Excellent Schools	No. of Responses
1	Co-curricular activities	24
2	Manner and Attitudes	43
3	Quality Education	26
4	Environment	8
5	Discipline	2
6	Parent Support	4
7	Required Facilities	3

Table for Q3

S.No.	Factors for Excellent Schools	No. of Responses
1	Academic Performance	17
2	Moral Development	20
3	Quality Education	14
4	Personality	7
5	Discipline	15
6	Qualified Teacher	27
7	Interaction B/w Teachers & Students	9
8	Trained Teacher	22
9	Management	27
10	Environment	14
11	Co-curricular activities	16
12	Community participation	3
13	Teachers financial problems	1
14	Curriculum	6

Table for Q4

S.No.	Factors for Excellent Schools	No. of Responses
1	Guidance	20
2	Attention of Academic problems	19
3	Attention to Social problems	19
4	Character Building	27
5	Loyal to Profession	33
6	Future Challenges	17
7	Hard working	33
8	Extra knowledge	25
9	Regularity	15
10	Qualified teachers	17
11	Trained teachers	12

Table for Q5

S.No.	Factors for Excellent Schools	No. of responses
1	Administration	37
2	Parents meeting	51
3	Sending Reports	30
4	Children's Psychology	25
5	Children's Participation	22
6	Provide Suggestions	49
7	Interest of Children's	23

Table for Q6

S.No.	Factors for Excellent Schools	No. of responses
1	Maximum	20
2	Middle	20
3	Minimum	12
4	Not Available	8

Table for Q7

S.No.	Factors for Excellent Schools	No. of responses
1	Punctuality	25
2	Discipline	45
3	Management	51
4	Focused on academics	13
5	Co-operation with teachers	28
6	Environment of teaching	19
7	Environment of studying	19
8	Sincere to profession	31
9	Highly Educated	14
10	Leadership Skills	16

Table for Q8

S.No.	Factors for Excellent Schools	No. of responses
1	Academic Performance	34
2	Quality of Handling Situation	14
3	Experience	17
4	Management	43
5	Dutiful	31
6	Good environment	34
7	Encourage Teachers	23
8	New techniques	8

Table for Q9

S.No.	Factors for Excellent Schools	No. of responses
1	Parents' meetings	45
2	Call/ notices	39
3	Dairy showing	5
4	Function days	29
5	Invite suggestions	7
6	Relevant Curriculum	11

Table for Q10

S.No.	Factors for Excellent Schools	No. of responses
1	Qualified teachers	25
2	Trained teachers	20
3	Not profit oriented	5
4	Good environment	22
5	Curriculum	39
6	Religious	17
7	Scientific	27
8	Personality development	29
9	Academic excellence	42
10	Administration	7
11	Suitable building	5

OUTCOME OF PARENTS' INTERVIEWS

The outcome of the interviews with parents indicated that the following factors could lead the schools to excellence:

1. Well-trained and qualified professional teachers with up-dated knowledge.
2. Up to-date and relevant curriculum.
3. Good results, healthy curricular and co-curricular activities.
4. Devoted teachers and principals.
5. Parents' involvement in school-based affairs like children academics, behaviour, their problems, and their overall progress.
6. Arranging activities including dramas, speeches, debates, games and other healthy competition in disciplined manner, to a large extent, promoted the school environment.
7. Community involvement.
8. Committed and honest principal not only for better administration, but for the overall development of the school

RESULTS

Parents held good results important because they were the ultimate outcome of the school efforts. Other factors for promoting excellence in schools included (a) efficient and dutiful administration. (b) devoted and well-trained

teaching staff. (c) conducive environment for learning. (d) parents' intervention. (e) participation of community. (f) needed facilities for students.

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APPENDIX

Interview Items for Parents

- 1. What, in your opinion should be the qualities of an excellent school?
- 2. Keeping in view the role of education in holistic development of personality, do you consider that only good results are not the main factor of excellence?
- 3. What are the main factors which make a school excellent?
- 4. What should be the role teachers in raising schools to the apex of excellence?
- 5. What type of improvement can be brought about in schools through parents' intervention?
- 6. Dramas, speeches, debates, games and other healthy competitions are very important for students in a good school. To what extent these activities are being promoted in your son's school?
- 7. What should be the traits of principal for promoting excellence in school?
- 8. How does the principal's effort make difference in school improvement?
- 9. How does the school involve you in school affairs?
- 10. What type of school you consider to be fit organization for the education of your children?