

## **Parents’ Perceptions of Excellent Schools**

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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 the apex of excellence.

The study was carried out in Boys’ Secondary Schools both in Public and Private Sectors located in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan. The population of the study included all the parents whose children were studying in those schools. Their inclusion in the study was based on the consideration that they are important stakeholders in schooling of their children. The sample comprised 120 parents purposively selected proportionately from 30 sampled Boys’ High Schools (26 in private sector and 04 in public sector).

The data were collected through interviews with purposively selected parents, whose children were in 10<sup>th</sup> 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.

Parents suggested various factors that could lead the schools to the apex of excellence. According to them teachers should be well trained with up-dated knowledge. There should be curricular and co-curricular activities, community involvement, committed teachers and competent principals', up to-date and relevant curricula. Based on parents' suggestions, the study recommended that merit should be strictly followed in teachers' appointments, teachers' training should be up-dated, healthy competitions and co-curricular activities should be given due importance; home school relation should be strengthened and principals and teachers should treat students like their children.

**Keywords:** Community, Effectiveness, Excellent, Factors, Parents, Perceptions, Schools.

## **Introduction**

Perception denotes what idea parents hold about the important factors that make schools excellent. 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 students who were below average in academic skills, failing one or more subjects, or socially isolated, or without clear goals for education.

Munir (2010) quoted Lasky (2000) and stated 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 demonstrated low academic achievement. Lasky provided a useful distinction between the terms 'interaction' and 'relationship.' She argued that interaction happens in formal and mechanistic communication, which was sporadic, episodic and governed by rules. However, relationship was a kind of communication that is

qualitatively different, which involved more sustained contact, equality, fluidity, increased depth of shared meaning, values, goals and affinity.

Imran et al (2008) stated that the quality of education should be understood in an appropriate manner in the context 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 schools and was reflected through better infrastructural facilities; human resources; effective teaching learning processes and students' achievement scores.

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, it 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 thereby making their teaching effective. Setting congenial school environment for teaching learning process was also an indicator of excellent schools.

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), documented that the rationale for parents and community involvement in school governance was based on the concept of parent participation in educational decision making that was closely linked to democratic ideals of citizen participation in the affairs of government.

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. Khan (2014) quoted Bouchey and Harter (2005) and stated 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 students' 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 meet 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 much care for students' level and expected them to attain higher achievement. The principal's expectations in these schools were lower than teachers but they would waste so much of resources on non-academic endeavours and thought that other aspects (social/personal and growth etc) were also important in schools.

## **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 research questions were examined in the study:

1. What are the factors that can contribute to make schools excellent?
2. What implementable suggestions the study can make to raise less effective high schools to the apex of excellence?

The study used the popular tool of interview and drew indicators from literature review. The primary data were based on information obtained from parents' interviews. The 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 120 parents whose children were in 10<sup>th</sup> class of

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

Q.No: 1. What, in your opinion should be the qualities of an excellent school?

Table for Q1.

S.No.	Factors for Excellent Schools	Number of Responses
1	Discipline	52
2	Qualified Teacher	50
3	Quality Education	48
4	Good Environment	40
5	Trained Teachers	38
6	Strong Management	36
7	Syllabus	22
8	Psychological Development	22
9	Co-curricular activities	18
10	Confidence	18
11	Suitable Location, Play ground, Equipped classrooms	16
12	Facilities	16
13	Non-profit based	14
14	Intelligent Students	6
15	Medication	4

Q.No: 2. Keeping in view the role of education in holistic development of students' personality, do you consider that only good results are not the only factor of excellence. What in your opinion, are the other factors listed below?

Table for Q2

S.No.	Factors for Excellent Schools	No. of Responses
1	Manner and Attitudes	86
2	Quality Education	52
3	Co-curricular activities	48
4	Environment	16
5	Parent Support	8
6	Required Facilities	6
7	Discipline	4

Q.No: 3. What are the main factors which make a school excellent?

Table for Q3

S.No.	Factors for Excellent Schools	No. of Responses
1	Qualified Teacher	54
2	Management	54
3	Trained Teacher	44
4	Moral Development	40
5	Academic Performance	34
6	Co-curricular activities	32
7	Discipline	30
8	Quality Education	28
9	Environment	28
10	Interaction B/w Teachers & Students	18
11	Personality	14

12	Curriculum	12
13	Community participation	6
14	Teachers financial problems	2

Q.No:4. What should be the role of teachers in raising schools to the apex of excellence?

Table for Q4

S.No.	Factors for Excellent Schools	No. of Responses
1	Hard working	66
2	Loyal to Profession	66
3	Character Building	54
4	Extra knowledge	50
5	Guidance	40
6	Attention of Academic problems	38
7	Attention to Social problems	38
8	Qualified teachers	34
9	Future Challenges	34
10	Regularity	30
11	Trained teachers	24

Q.No:5. What type of improvement can be brought about in schools through parents' intervention?

Table for Q5

S.No.	Factors for Excellent Schools	No. of responses
1	Parents meeting	102
2	Provide Suggestions	98
3	Administration	74
4	Sending Reports	60
5	Children's Psychology	50
6	Interest of Children's	46
7	Children's Participation	44

Q.No: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?

Table for Q6

S.No.	Factors for Excellent Schools	No. of responses
1	Maximum	40
2	Middle	40
3	Minimum	24
4	Not Available	16

Q.No:7. What should be the traits of principal for promoting excellence in school?

Table for Q7

S.No.	Factors for Excellent Schools	No. of responses
1	Management	102
2	Discipline	90
3	Sincere to profession	62
4	Co-operation with teachers	56
5	Punctuality	50
6	Environment of teaching	38
7	Environment of studying	38
8	Leadership Skills	32

9	Highly Educated	28
10	Focused on academics	26

Q.No:8. How does the principal's effort make difference in school improvement?

Table for Q8

S.No.	Factors for Excellent Schools	No. of responses
1	Management	86
2	Good environment	68
3	Academic Performance	68
4	Dutiful	62
5	Encourage Teachers	46
6	Experience	34
7	Quality of Handling Situation	28
8	New techniques	16

Q.No:9. How does the school involve you in school affairs?

Table for Q9

S.No.	Factors for Excellent Schools	No. of responses
1	Parents' meetings	90
2	Call/ notices	78
3	Function days	58
4	Relevant Curriculum	22
5	Invite suggestions	14
6	Dairy showing	10

Q.No:10. What type of school you consider to be fit organization for the education of your children?

Table for Q10

S.No.	Factors for Excellent Schools	No. of responses
1	Academic excellence	84
2	Curriculum	78
3	Personality development	58
4	Scientific	54
5	Qualified teachers	50
6	Good environment	44
7	Trained teachers	40
8	Religious	34
9	Administration	14
10	Suitable building	10
11	Not profit oriented	10

## Analysis of Parents' Responses

The analysis of parents' responses to interviews based on their perceptions indicated the following factors that could lead the less effective schools to excellent schools:

- Well-trained and qualified professional teachers with up-dated knowledge.
- Up to-date and relevant curriculum.

- Good results, healthy curricular and co-curricular activities.
- Devoted teachers and principals.
- Parents' involvement in school-based affairs like children academics, behaviour, their problems, and their overall progress.
- Arranging activities including dramas, speeches, debates, games and other healthy competition in disciplined manner, to a large extent, promoted the school environment.
- Community involvement.
- Committed and honest principal not only for better administration, but for the overall development of the school

## **Outcome**

Parents perceived that good results were most important for excellent schools because they were the ultimate outcome of the school efforts. Other factors for promoting less effective schools to excellent 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.

## **Suggested Measures for Improvement**

Based on parents' suggestions, the study made the following suggestions for improvement:

- Merit should be strictly followed in teachers' appointment.
- Teachers' training should be up-dated and make it to the standard of academically advanced countries.
- For the healthy competitions and co-curricular activities, in every school there should be specially trained teachers.
- Old curriculum should be up-dated.
- Parents should be invited to school at least twice a year, for the betterment of students and for the involvement of community.
- Principal and teachers should treat students like their children and try their best to solve their problems.

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