

Identifying Causes of Parents' Dissatisfaction over Public Sector Schools

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to identify the factors of parent's dissatisfaction over public sector schools. The population comprised of the parents whose children were attending a school. The study was delimited to Sargodha and Khushab Districts. A structured interview was conducted of 66 parents of children of government schools selected through convenience sampling. The conceptual framework for the study was based on five factors: communication from school; teachers and their methodologies; learning environment of the school; availability and utilization of physical facilities; and the parents' expectations from schools. On the basis of the responses of the parents, it was found that they were less satisfied with the communication made by the school, and utilization of available physical facilities. They were more satisfied with the teachers and their teaching methodologies, and environment of the school but did not have high expectations from government schools.

Keywords: parents' dissatisfaction, public sector schools

Introduction

Since the time when education was conceived as an important determinant of economic and social development of the individuals (Heckman, 2000), parents have been trying their best to provide their children with the best schooling available (Rehman et al, 2010) for better development of their children (Gibbons & Silva, 2009). The constitution of Pakistan declares education as a basic human right along with food, housing, clothing, (Article, 38-d) and holds the governments responsible for the provision of free and compulsory education (Article, 25-a). In Pakistan, public school system is working under the government at federal, provincial and local levels along with a sizable share of private sector. The emergence of private sector has provided the parents with a number of options for quality education of their children. The real purpose of these private schools, which surfaced during late

nineties, was, however, profit making (Iqbal, 2011).

As parents are the real decision makers of selecting schools for their children, their satisfaction becomes a crucial factor especially when they have variety of choices. The main idea behind conducting this survey on their satisfaction is an attempt to identify school areas (feedback mechanism, students' output, learning environment, etc.) that need to be improved (Silverstein, 2005). A number of studies show that parents in Punjab are not satisfied with the performance of government schools (Andrabi et al, 2007; Gillani, 2009) and they are 'voting with their feet' (Kardar, 2011) by opting the private sector. As a result, a downward trend has been observed in the enrollment of students at government schools in Punjab (PSLM, 2004-05; 2010-11).

Parents' satisfaction scales have been consistently used throughout the

world to identify the strengths and the areas that need improvement from parents' perspectives (Silverstein, 2005). It has become an important issue in the context of competitive educational environment with parents having wide range of choices (Friedman, Bobrowski & Geraci, 2006). Parent satisfaction basically depends upon their satisfaction with specific areas of the school. Researchers have indicated that the factors determining parent satisfaction are numerous and their strength varies across studies and countries (Badri et al, 2010). Parent satisfaction depends upon both academic and non-academic factors (Friedman et al, 2007).

Friedman et al. (2006) presented a conceptual framework of parent satisfaction. This model included factors like teacher effectiveness, administrators, facilities, communication with parents, and classroom support of learning. Sudharshanam (2011) based on his study on variables like location of school, quality of teaching, fee structure, administration, and amenities provided by schools. Badri et al (2010) took teachers and teaching, parents' participation and involvement, assessment and reporting, communication, school environment, and facilities in the framework for their study.

Teachers and the quality of their teaching at school is one of the greatest determinants of parents' satisfaction with schools (Hoxby, 2002; OFSTED, 2006; Salsbury et al, 1997; Skallerud, 2011; Sudharshanam, 2011; Tuck, 1995). Parents regularly want from the school administration to inform them about the progress of their children. They feel more satisfied with the schools when they regularly communicate and provided timely feedback (Bond and King, 2003; Ham et al, 2003; Friedman et al, 2006; OFSTED, 2006). Parents expect from the school that their children will perform better academically at present and in future. Their expectations from schools

regarding the academic achievement of their children and long term performance are another essential element of their satisfaction with the schools (Bast & Walberg, 2004; Carnevale & Desrochers, 1999; Garcia, 2008; Olson, 1999).

Despite the fact that public schools in Pakistan are offering free education, parents are least satisfied with the learning environment of these schools.(Rehman et al, 2010) yet the government sector is still the largest provider of educational services (Gillani, 2009; PSLM, 2010-11). The government school teachers are more qualified and better paid than their counterparts in the private sector (Andrabi et al, 2007; Imran, 2008). The government schools have better infrastructure and physical facilities than most of the private schools (Iqbal, 2005) but more than half of the students in urban areas of Punjab are attending a private school (PETF, 2011). They are trying to attract parents even in rural areas (Andrabi et al, 2007). Even the recent developments like provision of missing facilities and establishing a computer lab at almost every government secondary school could not attract the parents. The government's policy of converting its schools to English medium schools was initiated in 2006 but it could not stop a continuous decreasing trend in enrollment in government schools. Free textbooks are provided to the students of government schools and in some districts of Punjab, stipends are also given to increase enrolment for girls. Despite all these government efforts, the parents still seem dissatisfied with the government schools. There is a dire need to investigate the satisfaction level of parents and adopt the policies accordingly if the government is serious to bring revolutionary changes in this sector. The parents are important stakeholders of schooling in this regard. This study targets the perception of selected parents of students who are currently enrolled in any government secondary school to investigate their

satisfaction with school and identify different factors of their dissatisfaction over government schools.

Research Questions

This study tries to answer the following questions:

1. Are parents satisfied with the school communication with them about the progress of their children's education?
2. Are parents satisfied with the teachers and their methodologies for educating their children in government schools?
3. How much parents are satisfied with the availability of physical facilities and their utilization in providing quality education?
4. Are parents satisfied with the learning environment of the government schools?
5. What parents expect from government schools about the development of their children?

Development of Research Instrument

An extensive literature was reviewed to find out the indicators of parents' satisfaction with their children's schools (Badri et al, 2010; Garcia, 2008; Silverstein, 2005; Sudharshanam, 2011). From these reported instruments, five (05) indicators were selected that seemed to be more relevant to Pakistani education system. They include communication from school, teachers and their methodologies, learning environment of the school, availability and utilization of physical facilities, and parents' expectations from school. On the basis of these indicators and discussions with three experts, a structured interview was developed. The research instrument was tried out on five parents by conducting structured interviews before collecting data. The statements were refined accordingly on the

basis of feedback received through pilot study. These statements were given in the form of restricted response items. These items were assigned numerical values to utilize the data for the purpose of calculating mean scores and hence making it more convenient for readers. The statements used a four level scale (labeled from 1 to 4) and combined mean for each factor was calculated to find factor wise perception of the parents.

Sampling

Snowball sampling technique was used but not more than 3 parents from any one school were included in the sample. Parents coming from different sections of the society were accessed as far as possible. A total of 66 parents from 39 boys and girls studying in government secondary schools located in rural and urban areas were interviewed. The study was delimited to the schooling of Sargodha and Khushab Districts headquarters only.

Results

The parents of children attending a government school were least satisfied with the utilization of available physical facilities though availability of facilities was not a matter of concern for them. They were of the opinion that only those students were allowed to visit the computer lab who had opted for computer as a subject. The science labs are also being used only to prepare them for practical part of examination and not for the understanding of the concepts in various subjects. As far as the use of library is concerned, parents perceive that the students are neither encouraged to use it nor are they given an easy access. Parents are not satisfied with the communication made by the school to inform them about their child's progress. They have never been called for a formal meeting with the teachers. They also showed concerns about the routine

feedback by the administration but have the confidence that if something extraordinary happens, the school will inform and if they visit by themselves, they are not welcomed. Parents' expectations regarding moral development of their children is being met by the schools but schools are not taking any serious steps for their confidence building, and not satisfied with the preparation for future life. The parents who were busy or lack the capability of tutoring their children send their children for coaching classes in the evening.

Parents showed satisfaction with the teachers and their methodologies especially parent were heard saying, "New (newly recruited) teachers (educators) have brought considerable change in teaching." Parents showed their satisfaction with the environment of the school as they feel that the schools provide their children a safe friendly environment, without any serious discrimination. The main findings of the study have been given in the following table:

Table 1: Descriptive indicators showing the opinions of parents

Factor	Indicator	Mean score	Mean of the factor (based on all items included in the factor)
Communication and their methodologies	Routine feedback	2.70	2.83
	Response from schools on parents' visits	3.15	
	Information on extraordinary events	3.39	
	Teacher-Parents meetings	2.09	2.98
	Teachers' efforts and commitment	3.18	
	Homework assigned	3.58	
Environment	Assessment and feedback of assigned homework	2.91	3.49
	Concept based understanding of the students	3.12	
	Student's recognition of teachers' efforts at home	2.79	
	Friendliness at school	3.42	3.49
	Discriminatory behavior at school	2.33	
	Safety at school	3.88	
Physical facilities	Equal importance to all students	3.58	2.61
	Priority of government school over private school giving free education	3.61	
	Sufficient number of clean toilets	2.48	
	Clean drinking water	3.42	2.61
	Use of library material	2.18	
	Access to computer lab	2.64	
Expectations	Access to science labs	2.36	2.87
	Condition of school building	3.67	
	Condition of classrooms	3.61	
	Expectations regarding moral development	3.18	
	Expectations regarding confidence building	2.88	
Expectations regarding educational achievement	3.06		
	Expectations regarding future successful life	2.85	

Conclusion and Discussion

The parents of children attending a government school were least satisfied with the utilization of available physical facilities including computer lab, science labs and library though they were quite satisfied with the availability of physical facilities. The research study of Badri et al (2010) has also reported similar results. The government has taken serious steps for provision of physical facilities on priority basis through Punjab Monitoring and Implementation Unit (PMIU). The parents were of the opinion that only those students are allowed to use the computer lab who have taken computer as a subject while science labs are only utilized for preparation of practical examination instead of making the students understand the concepts. The under utilization of these labs may be due to extra course work and teachers perceptions regarding availability of various software to accelerate learning in all subjects. Similarly funds for the maintenance and provision of science equipments are also low.

Parents have also shown concerns about the communication made to them by the school administration or teachers. Communication is one of the biggest determinants of parents' satisfaction with schools (Bond and King, 2003; Ham et al, 2003; Friedman et al, 2006). Parents want to know the educational progress of their children and to get timely feedback from the schools. There are research studies which support that frequent communication with the parents makes them more satisfied (Silverstein, 2005; Sudharshanam, 2011). Badri et al (2010) also found that parents are not satisfied with the communication made by the schools. There might be three ways in which parents get information from schools about their children's educational status:

progress reports or result intimation cards on regular intervals or after classroom tests / school examinations; formal parent-teachers meetings; and parents' visits to schools by their own. Majority of the respondents were overall dissatisfied except staff's behavior on their visits to schools. Government schools are not provided with any kind of funds for communication with the parents if they want to send test results to their homes by post. The total absence of regular parents-teachers meetings might be a result of parents' socio-economic status, level of their education and their interest in educating their children. School administration informs and calls the parents to visit the school if some extraordinary event happens regarding their child. The parents are satisfied in this respect so the schools might not be cautious about calling parents for formal meetings with teachers.

Parents did not show any high expectations from the government schools regarding moral development, academic achievement, and confidence building of their children. Meeting the expectations of parents is essential for creating satisfaction (Olson, 1999). Garcia (2008) also found that the parents were least satisfied with the high school in respect of preparing their child for further studies and future life. Rehman et al (2010) concluded that government schools in Peshawar (Pakistan) are not performing according to parents' expectations. It is perceived that majority of the students of government schools come from lower socio-economic status and their background does not support an overall personality growth. The obsession and fear of examination in the minds of the teachers might be another reason in this respect.

Teachers are more concerned with results than any other thing. Perhaps our

teachers with weaker educational background and lack of motivation do not know the real spirit of hidden curriculum neither they are specifically trained for this. Work burden of teachers and number of students might be some other reason along with long courses of subjects and lesser duration of periods. Sending their children for tuition might not a good indicator of parents' dissatisfaction with schools regarding the academic achievement of their children. Parents might want to increase the study hours of their children or the trend might have crept in on the basis of inputs of some low performing schools. Even our respondents who showed their satisfaction that the schools are playing an appreciable role in the academic achievement of their children also send their children to extra coaching after school timing.

A few number of parents showed their concerns but majority of parents were satisfied about the teachers and their teaching methodologies. The findings of Andarabi et al (2007) and Rehman et al (2010) contradict these findings by reporting that Pakistani parents are not satisfied with the government school teachers. Quality of teaching is the most single influencing factor of parents' satisfaction with schools (Hoxby, 2002; OFSTED, 2006; Sudharshanam, 2011). During discussions with parents, it was quite evident that they are more satisfied with the younger generation of teachers as compared to the older one. In the recent recruitment policies, considerable changes have been made by the department e.g. merit lists are published publically to ensure merit and minimum qualification for induction has been raised to graduation, etc. Directorate of Staff Development (DSD) has also worked for competency building of the teachers through its continuous professional development framework. DSD has also published guide books for teachers for different grades and subjects.

The respondents of the study were satisfied with the environment of government schools. The environment has proven a good indicator of parents' satisfaction. If the parents are satisfied with the school environment they feel no hesitation to send their children there. Parents are satisfied that government schools provide a friendly and safe environment where all students are treated equally without any kind of discrimination.

Recommendations

The available resources should be properly utilized for optimum learning of the students. The government has rightly focused on provision of missing facilities but it needs also to ensure that the available resources are meaningfully used. All the head teachers should be encouraged to communicate more and more with the parents and if possible special funds should be provided to them. Keeping the large enrollment separate trained staff should also be provided to improve school communication. Trainings for teachers can also be arranged with greater emphasis on their skills and techniques for overall personality development of the students. As far as the recommendations regarding further studies are concerned, public image of the government school should be explored. The parents who never sent their children to a government school should be investigated to unfold their perceptions about government school.

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