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PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL QUALITY: CONTESTING THE NOTION OF QUALITY

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National Education Policy (2009) has regarded quality of education as major casualty of the system's inefficiency. Quality of education has emerged as a serious concern throughout education policy with a reference to differentials in quality and consequent opportunities of children. As such improving access with a focus on quality was regarded as the most central strategic education policy priority. Tracing the history of education in Pakistan over the last sixty years, one can see similar emphasis on increasing access and improving quality of education have been a recurring theme in educational policy statements and development plans for the past six decades. Yet, the policies all have failed in impacting schools. This failure has serious ramifications for the government school system and has also led to a mushroom growth of private sector schools. This trend has been aptly documented in earlier studies:

> The failure of the public system of education has enormous consequences vis-à-vis educational justice for all. For one, this failure makes possible the expansion of a private school system. The driving force for such expansion is mainly the perceived bad quality of public schools [----]. The scanty data that we have shown that by 1968, nearly 22% of total enrolment at the primary level and 42% at the secondary level was in the private sector, as were over half the students in higher education. By now, about 33% of total enrolment in Pakistan is estimated to be in the private schools. We cannot argue against a growth in private schools per se. What we worry about is that this growth indicates a serious failure of the state to provide quality public education to its children. Private sector can never cater for all children of Pakistan. Without an effective public education, we can never hope to develop a hopeful, enlightened, and tolerant citizenry. (CQE, 2007)

In the light of above, understanding what works, or rather what has failed to work in the government schools is a matter of urgent importance. In the Sindh province of Pakistan, there has been an influx of externally driven reform projects, many of which have "school development" as their ultimate focus. A statement by one of the key government officials has outlined the agenda of future inquiry, "*as we begin to think about school development, we need to understand two related issues that impact school quality. The first is in understanding the reasons for the deterioration of standards in schools historically known for their high level performance and output. The second is the need to understand local perceptions of quality and underlying factors which have led to the erosion of trust in government run schools.*"

The study proposal expected that the two related issues would be explored in two different components of the proposed study. Three well-resourced schools of good repute (in

past) were to be selected to develop their comprehensive profile to explore the concern of declining status of these schools. The study also aimed to investigate the second concern about local perception of quality through conducting a survey on parental perceptions of quality. Ethnographic study, through focus group discussions, was to further explore the issues, emerging from the school profiles and parental perception survey.

Revisiting School Quality

The current literature concerning school quality in South Asia ultimately results in a school choice debate between private and government schooling. In this debate, the literature aims to extrapolate factors that relate to parents' decisions in regards to school choice and the bulk of the literature tends to draw its conclusions based on large scale census or household data analysis. While relevant, this type of analysis cannot fully answer the question as to *why* parents choose a particular type of school over another. Instead, the available literature posits that one school type, government or private, is better than another and uses analysis of cost-effectiveness of school resources, socio-economic background of families, distance to school from the home, and achievement of students to validate these claims (Alderman et al., 2001; Andrabi, 2008; Kingdon, 1996; Orazem, 2000; Tooley & Dixon, 2007). Such data analysis can make inferences based on the available data but is not able to fully explain parents' reasons for school choice. Also, before one can quantify a "better" or "worse" scenario, a clear definition must be provided to adequately discern just what is "better" or "worse." To identify what indicators use to qualify their choice in schools one must first have a clearly defined understanding of parents' own perceptions of quality, what indicates a quality education and what detracts from a quality education.

In the current literature, the largest claims come from those interested in privatizing and those who believe that education is a responsibility of the government and rather than privatizing more should be done to strengthen government policy and government schools. However, the privatization claims, namely, that the creation of new private schools in neighborhoods where government schools already exist creates competition which, in turn, compels government schools to increase standards of quality in order to insure enrollment in their schools and that new systems of private education are affordable to all even the poorest quintiles of society, does little to explain what factors are being claimed when parents deem a school to be of "high quality" (Alderman et al., 2001; Andrabi, 2008; Kingdon, 1996; Orazem, 2000; Tooley & Dixon, 2007). Additionally, the proponents for government schooling claim that the very term "choice" in the school choice debates is fallacy as the opening of new private schools inevitably does nothing but cause a "cream-skimming" of students, which in turn allows private schools to take the best achieving students and those whose households have the most expendable resources out of government schools, thereby leaving an inequitable system of disenfranchisement of the ultra-poor in its wake (Hsieh & Urquiola, 2003, p. 13; Ladd, 2002; Mehrotra & Panchamukhi, 2007). However, these claims are based on the assumption that all or most parents whose children

attend government schools do so for a *lack* of other choices. This, while interesting, is an inference not based in facts supported by claims that parents have themselves made.

This is not to say that none of the research surveys parents. From the research available, some researchers *do* survey parents as key stakeholders in the question of school choice. Amongst these, Tooley and Dixon (2007) claim in their study, titled *Private Education for Low-Income Families: Results from a Global Research Project*, that one of the reasons that parents in developing countries are choosing private education is because of "the deterioration of government schools" (p. 16). Tooley and Dixon (2007) site research was conducted in the northern states of India to define this deterioration as attributed to "a lack of teacher accountability, strong unions (which contribute to teacher complacency and lack of motivation to teach), poor facilities, high pupil teacher ratios, and poor management" (p. 16). Tooley and Dixon also claim that, "these same problems…were not found in the private schools serving the poor and low-income families. In the great majority of these schools, there 'was feverish classroom activity' " (p. 16). However, the latter claims are based on observations, not based on private school students' parents' satisfaction of the teaching quality of private schools. Also, Tooley and Dixon (2007) do not provide a holistic picture of what parents' perceptions of quality are, choosing instead to focus on the benefits of private schooling to meet the needs of education for all amongst society, even those amongst the poorest households.

Mehrotra and. Panchamukhi's study, titled *Universalising Elementary Education in India: Is the Private Sector the Answer* (2007), is another of the few studies that significantly validates parental perceptions of quality as a factor in ascertaining school choice. Mehotra and Panchamukhi's study provides an interesting assessment of the indicators that Indian parents in the Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal states deem important when choosing a school. However, Mehrotra and Panchmukhi (2007) used these perceptions and indicators of quality to analyze the benefits and detriments to privatization and nationalization of schools in India. Moving the focus from what parents want and what are necessary implementations to quality in schools according to parents' own perceptions of quality and shifting it to a policy debate about privatization and nationalization.

While commenting on self-sustaining primary schools in rural Pakistan in her study, titled "Road to success", Farah (1996) identified school success as major outcome of school quality which can be measured through some indictors which include above average enrollment of boys and girls, high retention/low dropout rate, high attendance rate, low repetition rate, and high students' achievement (p.39). Similarly, school and classroom climate, teacher ownership of schools, community ownership, teachers' competence, and curriculum implementation have also emerged as key dimensions of school quality. Importantly, Farah (1996) also explored views of local clientele about school quality. A list of school quality indicators has emerged as a result which are in sync with the findings of the studies quoted earlier. According to the community of research context, children's ability to practice and learn life and social skills, appropriate infrastructure (building and other facilities), positive interaction between students and teachers,

development of students' literacy skills, punctuality and regularity of teachers, presence of a head, personal character of a teacher or a head and values they adhere to and teachers' kind behavior towards their students are the manifestations of the quality or success of a school.

Marzano (2003) has identified three levels of factors which contribute to the school quality or school effectiveness. The first level of factors is based on the school itself with a focus on quality of curriculum (p.22-34), challenging goals and effective feedback on the same (p.35-46), parental and communal involvement (p.47-52), safety and order of environment (p.53-59), and lastly, the sense of collegiality and professionalism (p.60-69). The second level of factors with a focus on teachers emphasize on instructional strategies (p.78-87), classroom management (p.88-105), and classroom curriculum design by the teachers (p.106-122). The third level of factors focus students with a reference to their home environment (p.126-132), their learning roots, capabilities, styles and behavior (p.133-143), and their levels of motivation (p.144-156). The critical role of leadership and school administration in enhancing and maintaining school effectiveness and quality of the school is yet another important ingredient of school quality recipe. According to Marzano (2003), this last factor actualizes the above three factors that are playing key roles. It reinforces and combines the functionality of the former factors.

Methodology

The broad focus of the study was exploring school quality in Sindh Pakistan. Within this scope three components were identified:

Developing School profiles: This component of the study aimed at examining the cases of well-resourced government schools and comparable private schools situated within the vicinity. The conceptual premise of this component promised a comparative analysis of these two scales with reference to a set of quality indicators.

Survey "Parental perceptions of school quality": This component of the study aimed at exploring perceptions of the parents of school quality through a survey.

Ethnographic component of the study: This component aimed to probe on issues emerging from the quantitative survey and school quality profile. The key strategies used for the data collection were the focus group discussions with parents (and where possible head teachers, teachers and management staff were engaged in discussion) and shadowing of students in all focus schools.

Developing School Profiles

Comparability was to be applied as a major principle while selecting two sets of schools for this component. According to the initial plan, the study was to focus on schools in Karachi only. However, during the Research Advisory Committee meeting held in 2009, the time was advised to extend the geographical scope of study by including rural or semi-urban context. After careful consideration, district Matiari was selected as a semi-urban context for the study. Travel

distances from AKU-IED (from manageability perspective) or security concerns were also considered while selecting rural or semi-urban school.

Parental Perceptions Survey

One major component of the study was parental choice survey to be conducted in the focused schools in two different geographical contexts of research.

A five point scale (1=unimportant to 5=very important) questionnaire was developed in which the respondents were asked to rate the importance of each item under six subscales according to their perceptions about school quality. These subscales included physical conditions, teachers, curriculum, teaching and learning, governance, security and gender. Considering the linguistic diversity among potential respondents, the questionnaire was translated in Urdu and Sindhi.

Sub-Scales	Sample Item	Items
Physical Conditions/ Facilities	Availability of clean drinking water in school	11
Teachers	Ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers	9
Curriculum, Teaching and Learning	Provision of co-curricular activities for students	16
Student Learning Outcomes	Regularity of students	8
Governance and Leadership	Voice of Parents in decision making in school	17
Security & Safety	Proper and secure boundary wall	11
Equity	Simple, transparent and clear School's policies and regulations	7
Co-education	Differentiated co-curricular activities for boys and girls	5

Ethnographic Component of the Study

The study had an ethnographic component to probe on issues emerging from the quantitative survey and school quality profile in the sections above. It comprised of focus group discussions with parents and where it was possible head teachers, teachers and management staff were engaged in discussion. A total of 210 parents were invited to the focus group discussions. All parents were identified by schools. Each focus group was formed of 8-12 parents from school's population. Research team had also provided refreshments for the Focus Group Discussion (FGD).

The ethnographic component of the study also included exploring a student's one school day experience to simply understand how these students experience indicate quality. These students were identified by the focused schools (primary and secondary). These students were shadowed by the researchers. The shadowing and the focus group discussion allowed the researcher to observe teaching and learning techniques in the classroom, observed the governing structure of the school, as well as to garner a lived perspective of schooling and a local voice via the student. The data generated for this component contributed to the understanding of school quality and related issues emerging from survey and focus group discussions.

Piloting of the Study

The questionnaire was piloted in public and private schools. The respondents were invited to the schools in which their children studied. The researchers explained the research and also introduced them to the questionnaire. The focus of the pilot was on the following:

- Manageability of the tool by the potential respondents in terms of time and understanding of the contents/items of the questionnaire

- Identification of study focus related areas which can also be included in the questionnaire.

Content Validity

The piloting of the questionnaire was also followed by the review of this tool by two experts of methodology and content. The methodology expert was chosen for her expertise and technical know-how in quantitative research with a particular reference to developing questionnaires for surveys. The content expert brought his expertise in the areas of school improvement and school quality. Content validity addresses the adequacy and representativeness of the items to the domain of testing purposes. This was an attempt to validate the contents of the questionnaire if the subscales and items were adequate and represent the focus of study. Both the reviewers agreed that the questionnaire captures important dimensions of school quality and therefore, they should be retained. The synthesis of literature helped review the items in subscales of the questionnaire. In addition, to provide more space for descriptive responses three open ended questions items were included in the questionnaire.

Sample size of 2500 school parents whose children studied in 9 focused and 22 other schools (primary and secondary) were invited to participate in the study. The questionnaire was distributed to all 2500 parents and response rate was 70%.

Establishing Reliability

According to Fink and Kosecoff (1998) "one way to ensure the reliability and validity of survey is to base the survey on one that, someone else had developed and test. The Parental Perceptions about School Quality Questionnaire (PPSQ) has been established and is considered to be highly reliable since its reliability coefficient is 0.93.
In order to examine reliability (internal consistency), Cronbach's alpha was computed.

The total reliability estimated of the 1755 completed survey questionnaires for the 84 items in PPSQ is above 0.70 which is an optimal alpha value (Singh, 2007; Field, 2005). The acquired values of alpha demonstrate the reliability of this instrument to examine the parental perceptions about school quality in Pakistani context.

Data Management and Analysis

The survey data were entered into SPSS and analyzed to identify trends in parental perceptions about school quality with reference to the respondent groups on the basis of geographical regions, gender and school system (government/public and private). Qualitative data of the three open ended in questions was analyzed to identify patterns.

The normality of the distribution of mean responses was assessed through different graphically methods (*i.e.* Box-whisker plot, P-P plot) and different numerically methods (*i.e.* Kolmogorov-Smirnov tes[4]t, skewness criteria[5]). The distribution was found to be non-normal (skewed) which led to adopt non-parametric tests for analysis. We used the Mann-Whitney U[6] test to compare differences between two independent groups and Kruskal-Wallis Test to compare three or more sets of scores that come from different groups.

Major Findings

This section of the report presents the results of survey study which was carried out in Karachi and Matiari (a district) of Sindh, Pakistan. In the first part, survey findings are presented which is followed by the outcomes of ethnographic component.

Demographic Characteristics of the Survey Participants

The section of the questionnaire on demographic information of the participants inquired about types of schools (e.g. government or private, primary or secondary) their children were attending, the gender of the respondents, the medium of instructions in these schools, their geographical context (Karachi, Matiari), language/s spoken by them, and their religion. A synthesis of the data is given below to highlight the demographic characteristics of the participants.

Survey: Parental Perceptions about School Quality

The aim of this survey study was to explore parents' perceptions about school quality. The section begins with a description of the research participants' profile. This profile is followed by the discussion on the key findings of the survey.

School Systems

The participants of this survey study represented the parents whose children go to two different school systems: Government (n=942; 54%) and Private (n=813; 46%). Of the 1755

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[4] It tests whether the distribution of target variable is significantly different (P<0.05) from normal distribution)

[5] If the value of skewedness is more than double of standard error of skewedness then the distribution is considered skewed.

[6] MW test is a non-parametric version of independent t –test. The distribution in this study is skewed therefore Mann Whitney was used to compare two groups.

participant in the study, there were 46% parents with children from primary level and 54% parents with their children from secondary level of schooling.

Participants' Gender

Of the 1755 participants of the survey, there were 47% female and 53% male. It is important to note that, majority of participant in sample, were male (31.0%) in government system and female (24.6) in private system.

Religious Background

The demographic data shows the religious diversity among the participants. A majority of participants were Muslims (96.3%) while a small number of participants were Hindus (3.1%), Christians (.4%) and others (.2%). The data also showed more religious diversity in the schools (53.3%) runs by the government education department as compare to that of in private schools (46.7%).

Linguistic Background

Linguistic diversity among the participants was an important highlight of the analysis of demographic data. While Urdu was language of the majority (65%), a significant number of parents also spoke Sindhi (25%) and other languages (7.0%). Out of 442 participants with Sindhi background, 289 lived in Matiari. Karachi, nevertheless, presented more linguistic diversity.

Parental Perceptions across Different Quality Indicators

The survey aimed at exploring parental perceptions of school quality in the focused schools of two different geographical contexts of research. A five point scale (1=unimportant to 5=very important) questionnaire was used to ask the respondents to rate the importance of each item under six subscales according to their perceptions about school quality. These subscales included physical conditions, teachers, curriculum, teaching and learning, governance, security and gender. Considering the linguistic diversity among potential respondents, the questionnaire was translated in Urdu and Sindhi. Here the key findings of survey are explained beginning with the overall analytical presentation of the perceptions of all the participating parents. The proceeding part presents analysis which explains the difference and effect size of different groups.

FIGURE 2: OVERALL SUMMARY

PC: Physical Conditions
Trs: Teachers
CTL: Student Learning Outcomes
GnL: Governance and Leadership
SS: Safety and Security

Eq: Equity
CE: Co-education
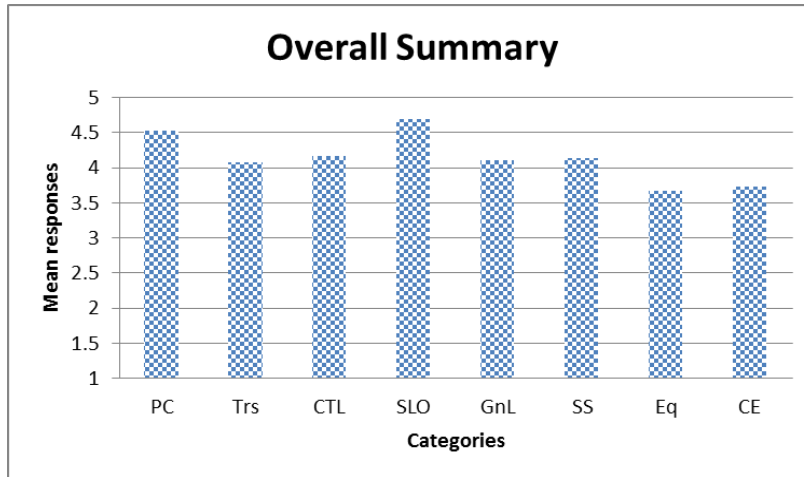
Overall Summary

Figure 1 captures an overview of parental perceptions on various subscales which reflect the quality indicators ranging from physical condition to equity and co-education. It is obvious from the graph that subscale "Students learning outcomes (SLO)" scored higher (M=4.7) than all other subscales. The items in particular subscale asked parents how important they considered students' regular attendance and punctuality, their good academic performance and them being happy with the school. The parents' views were also sought to see what value or degree of importance they accorded to students learning social skills and good manners, developing confidence and good manners, and appreciating students' performance through awards and scholarship. The study found a unanimous agreement among parents about the value of all the indicators of quality which reflect students' learning and at school. In line with the assertion made by Andrabi (2008), Tooley and Dixon (2007), Alderman et al. (2001), Orazem (2000), Kingdon (1996) Farah (1996) about parents' opinion, the parents from urban and semi-urban research contexts also recognized the achievement of students as a major indicator of school quality. Children' ability to learn [and practice] social and life skills (Farah, 1996), and developing confident and polite demeanor also emerged as important quality indicators.

The survey revealed the parental perceptions about the subscale 'physical conditions' which was rated as second top indicator (M=4.5) of school quality. In particular, the availability of clean drinking water, and clean and well maintained school building seem to take majority of parents' priority as important indicators of quality. Other aspects of physical environment rated by parents were availability of fans [with electricity], functioning toilets, playground, furniture, large and airy classrooms, well quipped computer and science laboratories, and library.

The survey data revealed equal value accorded to the subscale teachers (Tr), curriculum, teaching and learning (CTL), governance and leadership (GnL) and safety and security (SS) as parents rated them at around same level (M=4.2).

Teachers' professional qualification and experience and their regularity and punctuality were rated higher within the subscale on teachers. On the other hand the study participants seem to have unanimous agreement on the little value they see in considering teachers' religious background. In the subscale 'Curriculum, Teaching and Learning' parents emphasized on

provision of value based education and school's performance in public examination as key indicators of quality. Punctuality of the students was also rated the highest by parents. Similar emphasis was also given to students learning good manners in schools. The subscale 'Governance and Leadership' inquired parents' views about various dimensions of school governance and leadership which ranged from the provision of textbooks and transport facility to parents' involvement in school and effectiveness of the head teacher. The study highlighted parents' consensus on the need of a safe and secure environment of a school. Safe location of the school, secure building with proper walls, school home distance, and counseling for students' social and emotional needs were important items in this subscale. Restricted access of outside community into the school was rated as the most important dimension of a quality school. Availability of healthy food options also topped in the parental priority list of quality indicators.

The subscales "Equity (Eq)" and "Co-education (CE) scored around same level (M=3.7). Parents across the regions valued students' diverse background, respect for all and transparent school policy as important markers of equity in schools. Similarly a great majority of parents considered the nuances of coeducation in terms of separate toilets, and different rules for boys and girls.

Parental Perceptions about School Quality: Qualitative Analysis

Considering the limitation of a survey for its close ended questions, three qualitative open ended statements were added to elicit parents' views on a) the core purpose of schooling, b) important outcomes of schooling, and c) critical factors which parents would consider while selecting a school for their children. Here a brief analysis of the qualitative data is presented.

Core Purpose and Outcomes of Schooling

The analysis of qualitative data of the survey questionnaire reveals a unanimous agreement among parents regarding the core purpose and outcomes of schooling. These core purposes of education can be divided into two categories. One category concerns itself with intellectual growth and nurturing of young minds. Making the child conscious and aware of the world and with the day to day affairs is seen as a purpose of education. Preparation for future life emerges as another core purpose of education. In particular, learning from education/schooling should prepare children to walk along in the modern competitive world so that they don't lag behind and can meet modern day's requirements. Schooling for some parents is to unfold the human capacities and to creating the ability of individuals to face odds in their lives. Bright future in terms of financially, socially and academically sound position with an ability to support their families is seen as both purpose and outcomes of education. Preparing children to secure a respectable place in society is also seen as an outcome of education highlighted by the parents across systems and regions.

Children's development in affective domain is emphasized by parents. In particular, character building and making the youth ethical beings and "good human beings" emerge as

important purposes of schooling. Ability to distinguish between right and wrong and good and bad is considered important value that youth develops through education. Children learning discipline and punctuality, and developing self- confidence are a consistent emphasis by the parents. Two quotes from parents about schooling's role "for mental and social growth [of children]" and "Maturity of his [her] mind educationally and fit physically" also explain what parents expect from the schools/education.

Education's [schooling] role was also seen fundamentally important in developing among children a sense of patriotism. For instance, the expectation that education makes them dutiful citizens and helps them to work towards making their nation and country advanced nation indicates parents' sense of belongingness to the nation state.

Schooling for developing religious values among students to make them 'good Muslim' was seen an important purpose of education by few parents. Some, nevertheless, emphasized on schools' role in imparting both religious (with an emphasis on Islam) and secular knowledge.

The data analysis reveals parents' views about purpose of education and the outcomes of schooling were quite general in nature. They did not identify any specific knowledge or skills which they expected their children to learn from schooling. Instead many parents shared that schooling is to enrich children's information and knowledge and is to develop their aptitude and skills. Similarly, many parents emphasized intellectual growth as an important role of schooling. Very few identified specific knowledge and skill domains within school disciplines. Particularly, learning of reading and writing was perceived as an outcome of schooling by very few parents.

Critical Aspects of a School

The survey also included some open ended questions which sought respondents' views about the critical aspects of a school they would consider while selecting a school for their children. The analysis of this qualitative data will take into account the convergence with the survey findings. Some reference to the parental views as shared in the focus group discussions is also made.

The responses received can be broadly categorized as following:

- Enabling learning environment
- Academic credibility of school
- Qualified and experienced teachers
- School discipline

The value of appropriate physical environment for teaching and learning process has been highlighted in school improvement initiatives undertaken by AKU-IED since 1999. The direct relationship between student learning outcomes and physical environment has been established in a recent study conducted by the STEP at the institute. The study (Ali & Ali, 2011) with a focus on students' learning outcomes found that the students from the schools with better physical facilities performed better than the students at schools without or minimum facilities. Parental consensus in the present study around physical setting further reinforces the similar

emphasis on safe learning environment in the framework developed as Minimum standards by INEE. Enabling environment was reported here as one important consideration while parents make a decision of enrolling their children in a school. The enabling learning environment for parents meant a school with physical facilities, such as presence of big airy classrooms, electricity, clean drinking water, computer facility, sports ground and library etc. Availability of transport facility for children to commute consistently emerged as an important concern for parents in the focus group discussions as well. Nominal or affordable fees, distance between home and school, cleanliness are other important indicators of quality as reported by parents. Separate buildings for boys and girls for some parents was an important consideration. The ultimate outcome of providing students with enabling learning environment is summed up here by a mother, "The education [schooling] should lead to happiness for parents and children and should not cause pain."

A consistent emphasis on the availability of qualified and experienced teachers transpires in parents' views in survey and focus group discussion. Parents enunciated the presence of well qualified, knowledgeable, ethical and experienced teachers with effective ways of teaching a matter of great concern. Good teachers, good syllabus and children's ability to learn were seen as interconnected quality indicators as summed up by a mother, "If there are good teachers, he/she will give good education to children. The school syllabus should be good too so that the children can learn new things." Another parent felt that such qualified, dedicated and committed teachers would be able to effectively transfer knowledge. Relationship and coordination between parents, teachers and the students was perceived as important dimension of a quality school.

A great majority of parents also concerned themselves with the academic credibility of the school as a major and critical consideration while identifying a school for their children. This credibility includes aspects such as high standards of education, schools' academic results, modern updated curriculum, English as a medium of instruction, combination of religious and secular education, teaching of important subjects including reading and writing, and co-curricular activities. The location of school, its background (e.g. faith-based, political backing, community run or public sector) and administrative and management structures play an important role for the considerations, background of the school. School's name and reputation [for its academic performance and non-political environment] do matter as these might be reflective of certain level of quality. School's stance on equity appeared to be an also important consideration for parents. This emphasis meant to enhance equity of opportunities as one parent shared, "Monthly fee should be affordable for the middle class parents. All children [should] have an opportunity to progress and avail scholarship without any discrimination. The [School should be] of best standard" (Female parent/respondent). Another parent' stance reflected similar views as she explained, "[I will look for such school] to which [access] should not be limited to elite only but should be for everyone, [the child] participates in all kinds of activities, school should have all kind of discipline" (Female parent/respondent).

Discipline in terms of abidance of school rules and abstaining from any political activities in school was another important indicator of school quality. Security and related matters for the

majority of the respondents were identified as important considerations. The consistent emphasis on security as a major quality indicator by the parents and other stakeholders in survey and focus group discussions can be well explained by the prevailing law and order situations in the country at large. Political influence and schools' involvement with individuals holding political influence was considered detrimental for the school quality.

"Unfortunately parents have limited options to choose from the schools which they can afford financially and are located within their areas (male parent)" were the words of a father who reflected on the dichotomy between the ideal and reality of school quality. While many parents explained the critical dimensions of school quality they would like to consider for their children, they were quite cognizant of their limitations, a sense of compromising on their ideals of school quality for their children's education. The schools in the vicinity are either under-performing public schools or a poorly performing school owned by an individual or a private sector organization. In both cases, the school quality is far less than satisfactory. While public sector schools have purpose built building and all trained and qualified teachers, various other factors (e.g. poor governance, lack of accountability and monitoring) constrain the achievement of desired quality. The private sector schools are generally functioning in private residences with poorly qualified teachers. Absences of necessary infra-structure, frequent turnover of teachers and proper monitoring by the government have been viewed largely as reasons for poor quality of these schools.

A review of findings of survey and qualitative data above suggest a variety of parental perceptions around school quality which, nevertheless, indicate a conversion than diversion. Parents regardless their difference location (urban and rural) and access to different schooling system (public and private) where their children study have unanimous agreement about the key indicators of school quality. For instance student learning outcome, physical environment and qualified committed teachers emerged as absolutely fundamental to the existence of quality school.

Profiling Schools

A total of nine schools participated in the study for all three components of the study which included parental perception survey, school profile and ethnographic component. The findings of the survey have been reported in earlier section. Here, the findings of school profiles and ethnographic component are presented. The findings here are organized around the themes emerging from the analysis of the profiles of all nine schools. A separate theme "Students' experience" report a concise analysis of the data of 'shadowing' in all the participating schools.

Historical Background of the Schools

The schools which participated in the research varied in terms of historicity. While one school enjoyed a history of one and half century, the others were established around four decades back. Majority of these schools are recognized for its illustrious alumni who made great strides

in the socio-political and cultural history of the regions and country. Particularly, the two public sector schools with a longer history take pride of its alumni who has contributed to the national and regional scenes in past. The analysis of the school magazines and other materials reveal a sense of celebration of the past. A reference to its alumni of the recent past particularly by the historically well reputed public sector schools, however, does not bring enthusiasm in the narration of yester years. This difference indicates the lost groundings of these schools over the years and the huge shifts of its clientele from upper class and upper middle class to the lower middle class or practically daily wage earning group. Although, the schools were unable to provide data about teachers for the past years, the analysis of the academic and professional qualifications of the teachers at present indicate a caliber (at least on paper) which may not differ radically from the strength of the teachers in these schools in past. The three private schools in the study also enjoyed a history of varied years ranging from more than half century to three decades. A consistent urge to improve the school quality was quite evident in the analysis. While the school with the history of six decades took pride of its alumni who have been contributing to the fields of medicine, art, culture and education, the second school expressed its delight in its graduates' entry in professional institutions for tertiary education.

Vision / Mission

A review of all participating schools indicates special junctures in history that led to establishments of these institutions. For instance the school with the longest history was established during the colonial era with probably developing indigenous leadership. The same philosophy underpins the creation of at least two private schools. One of these two schools came into being due to the efforts of two farsighted siblings who felt the dire need of opening up quality facility for early year's education to the distraught nation just after the great patrician took place in the sub-continent. Over the years, the school has progressed with multi-campus presence in the metropolis. The focus on providing quality education at affordable cost has remained consistent during the all these years. The second private school was also established with the same spirit by a group of individuals who concerned themselves with the masses' lack of access to the quality education. The efforts of this group, in particular, were, "centered chiefly on improving education standard at primary and secondary levels and providing new school systems to address the needs of youth in rural areas and urban fringes"(Official website of SGA). It was also recognized that "In Sindh, except a few elite schools, the formal education provided by the state and the private sector is highly insufficient, besides being ineffective. They have not even matched the progress in the field achieved in other parts of Pakistan" and that the "Girls often face neglect or discrimination in the schooling process" (Official website of SGA). With opening of more schools in the different parts of the province Sindh, a centralized governance system has been now developed. Certain quality indicators (specific number of students in each class, physical facilities etc.) are also recognized as this school system expands over the year.

In general, vision and mission of all these schools, including the ones administered by the government, centered on the equal provision of quality education for all. A reference to

"access to education", "Preparing enlightened and civilized individuals who are committed to the cause of Islam" has been made on the official website of the Education and Literacy Department of Government of Sindh (http://www.sindh.gov.pk/dpt/EducationFinal/index.htm). The website also makes a reference to Quaid-e-Azam's emphasis on kind and purpose of education that he deemed important for the youth of the new born state. The emphasis of the Quaid includes education for bringing up future citizens, for economic prosperity through scientific and technological education and finally for the character building of the youth. An overview of the stated vision and mission highlights unanimous consensus among the key stakeholders about aspired purpose and outcomes of schooling.

School Management Structure

School management varied in all these schools due to variation in the management structures and practices of the organizations with which these schools were affiliated. The dynamism of these organizations has reflections in the schools as well. Two of the three private schools are governed by management structures which bring together the professionalism and volunteer passion for the promotion of education. For instance, the Rahber School has a governance structure in which the Founding Trustees, Advisors, Trustees (chair person, general secretary, member trustees), Heads of the departments, chief accountant, director of all campuses and executive secretary all contribute to school management. Similarly, the Sunrise Organization along with the school level management team headed by the head teacher with administration staff play active role in governance. The management is further aided by various internal committees. Whether it is changing affiliation with public examination board or teaching and learning of English, a continuous urge for improvement is felt in the way these organizations managed these schools. Third private school in the study, as stated earlier, has experienced deviation from its original vision and has gone down to the route of commercialization. Now, the two school functions in two shifts (morning primary, afternoon secondary). Current owner, the administrator or principal and the head teacher form the overall conventional management structure.

Five out of six public schools are governed by the Education and Literacy Department of Government of Sindh. The education minister, secretary education and with respective highest officials according to the local administrative system of the provincial governance are key pillars of rather hierarchical governance and administrative body. The middle layer consists of officials such as education officers and supervisors who establish the connection between the top officials and the schools at the grassroots level. Theoretically, the governance is managed by the head teacher and the School Management Committees (SMCs) at the school level. The SMC consists of five members, three from parents (including the chairman) and two from teachers including the School Head as a General Secretary. This committee is formed for two years and supposed to have a meeting on monthly basis. However, it was reported that almost all the SMCs were elected some years back (e.g. around five years back) and that many committees have not been meeting regularly per approved mandate.

> In the government schools all the important decisions are taken in education offices without analysing schools' needs. One more thing I want to share. In our schools, SMCs have been established in response to the governments' directives. The main goal of establishing SMCs is to improve government schools in terms of quality of education as well as providing required resources, but in actual SMCs are not working per its objectives because these are also powerless because EDOs and DOEs did not want SMCs to work freely. There is lack of supervision as well. (A female parent/teacher, govt. school Matiari)

Local level management is reported to encounter serious political influence. This is also true for the sixth public school in the study which is governed by the Federal Ministry of Education. In particular, the appointment of the teachers and other staff in these schools are guided by the political interest and affiliations instead of schools' needs and merits. The individuals appointed through such process, hence, protect the political interests of their patrons. It was reported that the wider interests of the school and the students are thus pushed aside with the head teacher's little or no control over the conduct of these teachers and staff. Little or no autonomy and lack of powers to exercise the role of the local manager seriously constrains school management processes. A female parent who also is a teacher has alluded to this issue in the quote below.

> The standard of government schools is declining due to many reasons i.e. lack of resources, limited budget, mismanagement in monitoring, and irresponsibility of higher officials. Head teachers are powerless if they want to replace a teacher with a good one, they have no authority to do so because all transfers and appointments are in the hands of EDOs and DOEs, they even don't ask the head teachers when a new teacher is inducted or any teacher is being transferred from the school. Due to this mismanagement sometimes they send a teacher (subject teacher) who is not needed. Head teacher has no power to induct or transfer any teacher if he/she needed one. (A female parent/teacher, govt. school Matiari)

The power, autonomy and the voice of the head teacher (or principal) is perceived crucial to the school quality. In the circumstances mentioned above, majority of these head teachers apparently struggle to maintain the status quo to protect their personal interests against all the odds. The management of the federally governed school illustrates somewhat different scenario. The principal with a significant level of autonomy manages the multi-section school. Apparently with his own political groundedness he attempts to refute the factors including political influence which hinder school's smooth management. Somewhat similar example of management surfaced in a primary school which is part of the historically recognised large school. The head teacher with his political wisdom managed to change the medium of instruction to English and also managed to generate necessary resources using his acquaintanceship. He was thus able to attract parents and raise ever falling enrolment. Visible political patronage or political influence is the most widely observed lived experiences of the management officials and other stakeholders in these schools.

An example of SPHSS illustrates how constant presence of negative political influence derails school's quality reputation. The school in 1855 had already had long history of repute before Indo-Pak partition in 1947. The quality and reputation of this institution gradually declined post partition and the school was in complete disarray when Mr AR Khan was appointed as a head teacher in 1972. AR Khan did two tenures as the head teacher and principal between 1972 and 1996. He reported teachers in the early 70s enjoying great political patronage and hence resisted Khan's corrective measures by reporting to then minister of education and by making attempt on his life. He was even refused entry into the school due to his stance of management. Such was the power of the teachers in this schools which, according to Khan, had pulled the institution down from the heights of its prominence. Increase in enrolment, a basketball court, separate school for girls, and the up-gradation of the school to the higher secondary level were some successes of Khan's time. Today, these three achievements of Mr Khan are there but with little usage. The school continues to experience the political influence which constrains the quality of teaching and learning processes. This has been explained by one key stakeholder of the school, "Teachers' attendance is 1/3rd every day. Teachers come late or leave early because of their domestic tasks. If I even try to stop them they tell me what I can do. It's because they are very much politically powerful and my [little or no] authority cannot harm them".

The analysis of management practices of all nine schools does not highlight role of the community and parents in the school management. A rather deficit image of parents is portrayed with reference to their role in their children's school performance. The establishment of SMCs reflects an attempt of the government education sector to engage parents in the school governance. However, the data analysis also suggests the implementation issue of this theoretically well-conceived concept of parental and community involvement in school governance and management.

Provision of Facilities and Amenities

Facilities in school's physical environment (Tooley & Dixon, 2007; Farah, 1996; Marzano, 2003) and cost-effectiveness of school resources (Orazem, 2000; Andrabi, 2008; Alderman et al., 2001; Tooley & Dixon, 2007; Kingdon, 1996) are recognized as important indicators of school quality. Considering the data available from the focus schools, the study attempted to look at the available resources as a quality indicator. Physical environment includes school building, boundary wall, functional washrooms, water and electricity, a boundary wall, science laboratory, computer laboratories.

All nine schools had purpose built buildings. A sign of out of planned extension in the buildings was visible in the private schools while the schools run by the provincial government had a set pattern in terms of number of rooms, and other rooms (e.g. labs) to accommodate the strength of the students. For instance the two primary schools in the study had six classrooms with five or six washrooms in each of these schools. The high schools, on the other hand, had huge buildings with a number of rooms in each. The maximum number of room in a high school

was 60 while minimum number was 20 and30 rooms in the girls and boys secondary schools (Matiari respectively. The science and computer labs were also present in the two high schools mentioned earlier. The huge building of historically recognized school had 7 labs (physics, biology and chemistry, computer), library, assembly ground, basketball ground (unused), and toilets. The rooms were generally found spacious with an exception of girls secondary school which reported to have at times more than 70 students expected to sit in a moderate size classroom. The teachers and parents reported overcrowded classes one major reason for girls' absenteeism in this particular school. The utility of these classrooms is also a question. Absenteeism is a general pattern of the boys' high school as well. It was reported by the teachers and the in charge head teacher that since the school started offering free education with free textbooks, an increase in enrolment is seen. However, all the registered students do not attend school regularly because despite their absenteeism everyone is allowed to sit for exam. The school also has "no student fails" policy. All those who sit in exam are promoted to the next class regardless their performance in exam and throughout the year. A classic example of underutilization of school building is Sindh Public Higher Secondary School. The enrolment in the 60 room school is only few hundred students. All the public schools reported to have functioning washrooms and the number of these schools varied. The quality of this available facility in terms of hygienic conditions and running water was not examined. No special arrangements for continued supply of the electric supply were observed as the schools also had their share of general power crises. The schools in rural Sindh particularly reported to experience the worst of power crises due to the scorching heat in the long summer days.

The parents in the survey rated physical environment as the second highest indicator of school quality. In the focus group discussion the quality of the physical environment was also discussed. For instance, parents (mothers) in the primary school were very concerned about the boundary wall half of which had collapsed. They felt that the absence of proper boundary wall risks their children's safety as they may venture outside the school unguarded. Similarly, the availability of clean drinking water was another concern. Mothers felt that availability of clean and cold drinking water would have been healthier option for children who either carry water from home or remain without water during the whole school day.

The federally administered school has a grand building of 8 blocks with a library, museum and art gallery, 3 computer labs, auditorium, teacher development canter, mosques, playground, and conference hall. Utilization of classrooms and other facilities was observed during the school visits. Furthermore, the documentary evidence was also available in the school magazine which captured the students' performance in debates, sports and other occasions. Since the school did not provide the data of number of enrolled students, the proper utilization of this grand facility could not be assessed.

The private schools in the study also had sufficient number of classrooms and other facilities. School building showed sign of need based extended construction as the schools went through up-gradation and inducted more students over the years. The physical facilities in these schools included the classrooms, computer and science laboratories, library and staffroom.

However, the quality of these facilities varied. For instance Noor Jahan Private School had all 32 rooms constructed in the small area which let no open space for a playground. The little available area spared from the construction of the rooms on the ground floor was also covered due to the constructions of the rooms on the first floor. The open space becomes quite congested when the students assemble for assembly and breaks. One exit and entrance point due to the covered area indicates security and safety risk in the case of an emergency. Other two schools (Rahber Private School and Sunrise School) have good to moderate level of physical facilities. The quality of the resources and utilization of space in the latter (urban private) was evident in the school and classroom observations. The libraries and the labs were seen used and updated. Students from primary section were observed engaged in exercises as the school band played for them. The courtyard cum playground in the centre-with some greenery and the huge shading neem tree seems to signify the historicity of the place. Well utilized playground for sports and band/ PT, library, staff rooms, School Health Service and Clinic, English Language Resource Room (books, journals and Audio-Visual-aids), classroom libraries, computer, biology, physics labs, School canteen and home economics lab/kitchen are the key resources which contribute to the physical environment of the school. School's ability to maintain certain standard of its physical environment is apparently a major contributing factor of sustaining image of the school as a family school. Parents having studied in the school themselves reported to have their second generation in the school. The purpose built building of the Sunrise Private School (rural) with its moderate facilities consist of a total of 14 classrooms, 1 computer lab, 1 science lab, 1 library and 1 Head Teacher's office. A playground cum area for morning assembly can also be seen as we enter the school. Apparently, there is an attempt and desire to further improve the facilities.

Teachers and Students

The table below provides specific details about the number of students and teachers in the school. It is obvious that all the schools in the study have a reasonable student teacher ratio. In the public schools it was reported that a specific number of the teachers is absent or on leave on any given day. All the teachers are academically and professionally qualified. A detail study of teachers' profile and what drives their motivation will be important to further understand their contribution to school quality.

Name of School	Students		Teachers		Ratio
	Primary	**Secondary**	**Primary**	**Secondary**	
Sindh Public Higher Secondary School (SPHSS)	207 (boys & girls)	60 (Boys, morn. Shift) Sindhi med.) 47 (Girls, afternoon shift, Urdu med.)	17	33 Boys Sindhi med Sc. Data not available for girls school and for Boys Urdu medium school	
Noor Jehan Private Secondary School (NPSS)	930 (as per 2010 record)		62 and was 60 teachers from 2001 to 2008.		1 teacher for 15 students
National F. Higher Secondary School (NFHSS)	Data not provided		30		
Rahber Private Secondary School (RPSS)	699 (as per 2011 record)	630 (as per 2011 record)	66 (as per 2011 record)		1 teacher for 20 students
Sher Govt. Boys Primary School (SGBPS)	622		27		1 teacher for 23 students
Ujala Govt Girls Primary School (UGGPS)	220 (including 92 students only in nursery class which was initiated and supported by an NGO)		10		1 teacher for 31 students'
Noor Govt. Boys High School (NGBHS)	1732		84		1 teacher for 21 students'
Sunrise Private High School (SPHS)	517		19		1 teacher for 27 students'
Newstar Govt. Girls Secondary School (NGGSS)	1359		45		1 teacher for 30 students'

Teaching and learning (strategies, resources, teacher/student relationship, assessment)

Parents rated students' learning outcomes as the most important indicator of school quality. Similar emphasis during the focus group discussions with parents and other stakeholders necessitates critical analysis of the observation data to develop insights into the teaching and

learning processes as they were happening schools managed by different school systems. The analysis will be guided by the view that teaching and learning strategies, resources, teacher/student relationship and assessment are the fundamentals dimensions of teaching and learning process.

A cursory analysis of teaching and learning in these schools indicate the use of monotonous teaching and learning strategies across the schools with some exception in the Rahber Private School. The strategies teachers adopted generally included copying, dictation, text book reading by the teacher and students and explanation of the text. A general sense of what Freire (1972) has termed as 'teacher narrative' (p.44) prevails in the classroom with the students playing a role of passive recipient. Teacher narrative, as is obvious in the excerpt from an observation below, is more of mechanical routines and not well thought through teaching plan. Teaching strategies may also be guided by the realities of classrooms and teachers' limited ability to shape their pedagogies. The phenomenon of large classes is quite prevalent in the public sector schools in rural and even in urban setting. Hussain, Shah, Waqar and Rana (2009) in their study of the prevalence of large classes in Sindh have indicated the challenge for teachers to cater for a large number of students who generally have diverse background, age and needs. In the case of SGBP schools, to engage a group of 114 young students, the teachers have to be very dynamic. The analysis of observation excerpt below reveals that both the teachers apparently resolved to dictation and reading as the most viable teaching and learning strategies in a large class. Students' learning was also assessed through dictation.

Revision of syllabus contents which had already been taught was yet another frequently observed phenomenon. In observers' presence many teachers engaged students in revision some time by giving them test or by asking them to read the subject matter quietly without much comprehension.

An emphasis on maintaining certain level and kind of discipline is revealed in the data analysis. An evidence of teachers' such effort is present in the observation excerpts above and below. To discipline student the teacher shouted and hit male students. In other example, the teachers verbally reminded the students to keep quiet. Minimum talk by the students or teacher directed talk was dominant feature of the classroom activity across the different schools. It was reported that the teachers spent more than 50 percent of their classroom time in making students quiet. Students were generally observed following teacher directed conversation or activity. An analysis of students' participation in the teaching and learning reveals that there was a general sense of compliance to teachers' directives which included physical movements, answering teachers' questions, reading from the textbook, telling the meaning of a word, copying from the board, changing sentences from affirmative to negative in a language class, and problem solving on the board. In private schools, students were also observed making oral presentation and sharing their point of view on some topics. Students asking a question was rarely observed phenomenon. In one of the classes, the observer noted the kind of questions asked by the students during an observation of a Sindhi lesson, "Mostly the students' queries were related to where to write, color of pencil, physical neatness and few spelling and reading problems".

Similarly, teacher guided students' interaction with other fellow students was also observed in few classes. For instance, the chemistry teacher divided students in the groups and gave them some group task. Few more examples of teachers encouraging student-student interaction are available. However, students' own attempts to interact with other students were not encouraged and were dealt as discipline issue by the majority of teachers.

Correction of students' work on the homework notebooks, *slates/takhti* and in the classwork notebooks consumed plenty of teachers' classroom teaching time. While correction was done in the classroom the feedback or assessment was not communicated to the students during the teaching and learning.

English language teaching was observed across the schools with a dominant use of grammar translation method. The teacher in the observation excerpt below demonstrates conventional way of teaching English. Unnecessary hassle using Urdu before the target language is also obvious in the observation notes below. Teaching of different languages including Sindhi and Urdu are also dealt with same method which included meanings of difficult words, dictation, and textbook reading.

Textbooks, chalk, and board were generally used resources by the teachers across the school systems. With an extensive use of revision, the use of chalk and board was seen minimum. Few examples of teachers using other teaching materials and knowledge resources (other than textbooks) were also observed. One such example is noted below by the observer in the primary section of Rahber Private School. The teacher, while teaching science, used different resources to help students understand the solar system. General practice of revision also seems to be defied by the way the science teacher approached it as a reinforcement practice. Observation of a science class in another school also highlights teacher's somewhat different approach to revise already taught scientific concept. The students were asked to draw and label the diagram of human respiratory system and the flower of brassica.

Student teacher relation was an important dimension of the teaching and learning processes. The data analysis highlights the position of the learners' vis-à-vis teachers. The learners are expected to listen to the content taught by the teacher, memorize and reproduce the same. The teachers, on the other hand, are expected to direct the classroom proceedings, use the textbook content to teach, assess learning by asking short questions, written tests, problem solving on the board. Maintaining discipline with a focus on keeping student silent while they are busy in teacher directed classroom teaching activities surfaced as an import task of the teacher.

Students' Experience

The analysis of parental perceptions about school quality has highlighted a unanimous agreement among parents about the high value of students' learning outcomes. This emphasis further necessitates developing insights into students' experiences on a given school day. Two students from each school unit (primary and secondary) were shadowed by a member of the research team on a school day. After a discussion on the criteria, the schools proposed name of

some students who were then observed by the member of the research team. Here, a narration of two students' (one male student from public sector high school and one female student from the primary section of a private high school) experiences is given to critically view their day long accounts with a school quality angle.

The school assembly is a ritual that all the students experience regardless their rural or urban setting or public and private school. The recitation from Holy Quran, poetry in praise of Allah Almighty and Prophet Mohammad (Peace be upon Him) and the national anthem are the routine practices for a morning assembly. A detail analysis of students' morning assembly experience would certainly be helpful to delineate learning from this morning exercise. A cursory analysis of the morning assemblies in these schools only showed some different activities which were carried out along with routines in some schools. For instance, school prayer (in the RPSS below), special day proceedings and some physical exercises are generally some additions to the morning assembly.

> **Z**ubair experienced unexpected shorter day which was probably a decision made by the head teacher at the spur of moment. First half of the day has been all but revision in English and science. However, the data analysis shows that Zubair was least bothered for revision during these two subjects. He was constantly busy with either reading a book on Life Skills or writing (copying) a sick leave application or writing on the desk. A lecture on ethics by a teacher in Urdu period was yet a classic example of coercive discourse of ethics and integrity which these students including Zubair have little chance to see demonstrated by their teachers in reality. The science teacher comes 15 minutes late and the identification of important questions is the only important work he made students to do. Zubair apparently is busy writing something on his desk instead of writing in his notebooks. Interestingly, his attitude showed little compliance to his teachers' dictum. One explanation of this non-compliance could be
>
> Zubair's ability to recognize the dichotomous nature of his experience of teaching and learning. He is also experiencing a transition from a period of childhood to a life of adolescence. His ability and desire to make sense of the world around him could be one explanation of his noncompliance to teachers' dictations. The observation data shows that more than half of the total registered students in class nine were absent. There could be various explanations for this trend of absenteeism (e.g. children supporting their families, distance from home, lack of time for studying and poor infrastructure). However, poor quality education, irrelevant curricula, lack of teacher preparation, and ineffective pedagogies can be regarded major factors for students for large scale regular absenteeism. The school teachers reported that all students, regardless their absenteeism, are allowed to appear in exam which could be yet another significant reason for low attendance of students. Regular low attendance, nevertheless, has implications for the motivation of students who attend the school somewhat regularly.

A typical school day of Shania, a student of a private primary school, illuminates her quality of experience.

> **S**hania studies in the primary section of RPS school which was established immediately after country's independence from British rule in 1947. Provision of quality and affordable education is the goal of this school. Her school day sounds quite an experience. While teaching and learning here also revolved around revision of already completed syllabus,

Shania experienced that the teachers approached this phenomenon of revision for exams differently. While many used conventional test writing to make students revise, others used different resources to reinforce students' learning. Interestingly, students were observed discussing their experience with a different teaching approach during the break as well.

In a coeducation setting, Shania also experiences the differences in how girls and boys relate to their teachers and classroom environment. Importantly, she also witnesses teachers' different approach to discipline boys and girls. Considering the formative period of their age, it is significant to note that Shania and her classmates, through these classroom based experiences, develop a sense of gender relationship around them. Earlier during the morning assembly, boys and girls from the same class stood in separate lines and they even used different points to enter their classrooms. This is what Thorne (1993) has considered as gender segregation within the coeducation setting of schools. According to her, schools and the teachers teach young girls and boys how they are different from each other and hence learn a great deal about their gender identity while being in the primary school.

Overall classroom environment and the school milieu for Zubair and Shania are remarkably different in terms of how these two could contribute to these youth's quality school experience. The purpose built grand building of Zubair's school reveals its grandeur in past. The present reality is a school building which requires serious maintenance for long and classrooms with barren walls. Zubair's classroom has only one chart displayed which still contributes to students' learning who copy the leave application from this chart. Shania's school also enjoys a grand past but the attempts to maintain that quality today is a lived experience of students and teachers. Well maintained classrooms and the playground are quite engaging. This contributes to the motivation level of the teachers and students alike. Class size has recently been given critical consideration by Shania's school where despite high demand for admission the management decided to restrict the number of students to 35. Contrary to this change in RPSS school, the class size in public sector schools is never defined. In fact, through various interventions by the Government of Sindh with support from international community "Net primary enrollment in Sindh increased by 25 percent between 2002 and 2007 — from 40 to 50 percent. Gender parity got a big boost with girls' enrollment increasing by more than 45 percent; the transition of rural girls from primary to secondary school jumped from 42 percent in 2006 to 51 percent in 2008" (IDA- The World Bank, Sep, 2009). This increase in enrolment has, nevertheless, created a challenge of making learning a possibility for all those who were inducted in the school. Similar situation of large class has been also reported by the stakeholders of Girls High School in Matiari. Parents and teachers reported that lack of space to accommodate large classes has resulted in frequent absentee among girls.

A cursory analysis of the students shadowing data reveals teachers' varying level of preparation. Though majority teachers had engaged students in revision work, a sense of the teaching ability of some teachers was obvious. Except few none came with any kind of teaching aids. Very few schools had any displays on the walls. The classroom teaching and learning

processes with some exceptions followed the traditional pattern across the study schools. Chalk and talk and lecture method were mostly observed in the classrooms. The routine tasks (the set pattern in majority of the government and private schools in Sindh) of reading lesson, dictation of difficult words, word meaning and question answer were followed during teaching the students. Memorization was practiced widely which cannot help understand if the cognitive development was happening. While the demographic data indicates availability of facilities such as science laboratories and libraries, no students visits to these facilities were documented during the observations and shadowing. Similarly, during the research team's school visits one or two instances of students' participation in co-curricular activities were observed. Students, in general, remain seated throughout the school day with some exception of morning assembly and recess period.

Key Issues

The ethnographic component of the study has highlighted some pertinent issues confronting the schools that participated in this study. A brief description of these issues is given here.

Political Influence and Patronage

All participating schools were studied in order to develop insights into school profiles and to determine factors affecting the quality of these schools. It has been shared earlier that the vision of the organizations running the private schools had positive influence on the development and quality of these schools. A study of the profiles of public sector schools has also identified steady decline in the overall quality. Particularly, the schools with well recognized reputation in past have lost the credibility over the years. The analysis of the profiles of these schools shows a unanimous agreement among the stakeholders about the detrimental impact of ever increasing political influence on education in general and on schooling in particular. One of the public schools seems to have historical experienced the continuous presence of political influence of varying degree in its affairs which, as reported by the stakeholders has a detrimental effect on its quality.

The most common manifestation of political intrusion is the appointment and transfers of the teachers refuting all the merit based criteria which are developed to induct the teachers on merit. The particular needs of these schools are also ignored while making these politically guided appointments as explained by one of the head teachers, "political interference in appointment and transfers [is an issue]…many times a good teacher is transferred and sometimes a school suppose already has 10 teachers, the 11th is also sent there without understanding the need. The school practically needs only 8 teachers." As explained earlier, the teachers with political backing generally refuse to comply with the school rules and policies as a result their conduct as teachers is not liable for the scrutiny of the management. A particular number of teachers in all these schools will be absent on any given school day. This is done by the teachers through internal negotiations and cannot be questioned. The political patronage is also key

defining factor for the conduct of senior management in education. During one of the field visits, the research team met with a senior education official who was not allowed to enter the limits of his jurisdiction because of the opposition of a political leader.

The study also revealed positive impact of political patronage on schools. The Sher Government Boys Primary School in the rural setting particularly seems to be benefitting from its political benefactors. The school building was being renovated and the school has also been promoted through participation in different regional activities. The total enrolment of this school is above 600 as compare to the girls primary school in the vicinity with mere enrolment of 220. A total of 92 students of this number are enrolled in the early childhood and Education group which has been initiated with the complete support (includes resources, teacher salary) by an NGO. National F. Higher Secondary School is yet another example of political patronage in a positive sense. Here the principal with his own political groundedness not only makes an attempt to defy the political influence on school matters but also uses his political prowess to promote the status of this historical school as an alma mater of important national and regional leaders. This principal has been there for some period and has established his authority inside and outside the school. He uses his insights into the socio-political situation for the promotion of school. With a recognition that much has changed in school, he makes an attempt to present a reflection of the past glory of this institution today. The school prospectus is upgraded every year with regular scholarly work/publications by the principal to highlight school's significance in national scene.

The primary section of the Sindh Public Higher Secondary School also offers an example of head teacher using his political prowess for improving the school quality. Worried by ever decreasing enrolment, the head teacher used his contacts to get official permission to switch the medium of instruction from Sindhi to English. This change has attracted many parents who are convinced that the qualified teachers here are better prepared to teach their children. He also reported to have successfully generated resources through his contacts. In sum, the study schools provide examples of how the political patronage or interference can hinder or in some cases, may also improve the school quality.

Accountability and Monitoring

Accountability and monitoring are considered to carry fundamental importance in smooth functioning of the school. The study reveals that private school, big or small, all has certain mechanisms of accountability and monitoring which generally lead to the regular attendance of teachers and students. A study of the educational management in the public sector explains the presence of well-thought structures in place. The secretory education district education officers, and the supervisors are all there in every administrative zone to support the quality schooling processes. However, these systems do not function according to the terms of reference and the schools hardly experience any support from the officials in this system. A head teacher explains her view on this matter, "officers do not visit us. The teachers are also not happy with this. If they visit us in the morning, they would get to know what time the teachers and the head come to school or whether they come at all". She further extended her point, "one year has passed and

nobody has visited us. The supervisor comes only if she has her own personal agenda. Otherwise she would not come. A teacher comes at 10:00 while the other arrives at 9:30 am. I cannot do much about it if they give you a family reason. The school is far, which is the reason few teachers actually [despite their officially approved appointments] come here." Another head teacher explained the engagement of teachers in all other activities (e.g. elections, polio drives, flood/disaster relief work, census) but their genuine engagement in teaching and learning is not monitored. Each public school has enough human resources but not used effectively. The lack of proper monitoring and accountability seems to be severely lacking in public schools system which reflects in the poor school performance despite the presence of well qualified teachers. The private schools, on the other hand, had strict monitoring mechanisms. A detail study on private school management may reveal the challenges and good practices in this regard.

Lack of Developmental Stance in Public Schools

A developmental stance with a focus on quality growth was obvious in the two out of three private schools. However, the public schools generally lack a developmental stance and the energies are focused on maintaining status quo, good or bad. Each stakeholder recognizes the core issues but the collective thinking and reflections even at the level of the school community do not take place and hence the schools are not able to disengage themselves from the discourse of deficit and loss. While complexity of the issues require a complete systemic overhaul, school level developmental initiative will surly lead to initial but significant change.

Value and Sustainability of Reforms

Certain interventions in the province have introduced some reforms in the public school system which includes introduction of School Management Committees. Since the establishment of this structure, proper monitoring in terms of viability and effective sustainability has not been done. The SMCs of majority schools are not functioning according to the approved Terms of Reference. Similarly, enrolment in the public schools have increased since the government decided to offer free education, textbooks and some incentives for girls such as monthly scholarship. However, the impact of this increased enrolment has not been studied. The teachers and head teachers have complained about absenteeism among students. According to these stakeholders, parents and students do not value attending school because they [parents] do not make even a minimal contribution to their children's schooling. Furthermore, the province has been instructed not to fail any student. All those who are enrolled are promoted to the next grade if they have appeared in exams regardless their poor abilities and low academic performance. This practice while has enhanced the enrolment data, it has apparently also contributed to the deficit image of these public schools. Students, their parents, teachers, head teachers and other stakeholders all have accepted these public schools as "sinking schools".

Unpacking the School Quality

The findings of the parental perceptions survey and the ethnographic component of the study suggest that school quality has to be taken up as serious discourse by the all stakeholders who are involved in the provision of education in the province of Sindh. Parents considered student learning outcome, their academic performance and their personality development are the most important indicators of school quality. The school environment and physical conditions/facilities as highlighted by Tooley and Dixon (2007), Farah (1996) and Marzano (2003) were seen as the second most important indicators of school quality. Teachers, governance and leadership and curriculum, teaching and learning are the other most significant factors contributing to school quality. The ethnographic component of the study identifies key factors affecting the school quality and students' quality learning experience in a school setting. While the study practically confirms some of the assertions made by the scholars earlier in the school quality debate, it has also extended this debate by adding some other contextual references.

Punctuality and regularity of teachers (Andrabi, 2008; Shamim, 2008; CQE, 2007; Farah, 1996), Teacher's competence (Farah, 1996), Teacher accountability and their motivation (to teach) (Tooley & Dixon, 2007), and the personal character of teacher/head/school administration (Farah, 1996) have also emerged as the key quality indicators in the context of schooling in Sindh Pakistan. The critical role of leadership (Andrabi, 2008; Shamim, 2008; CQE, 2007, Farah, 1996; Marzano, 2003) elsewhere has limited focus on the head teachers. The present study has highlighted the breadth of the leadership and management which influences school quality. None of the schools in this study were solely managed by the head teachers. The SMCs, the supervisors, education officers, department/section heads are integral part of school governance and hence play important role in establishing school quality. Parents and community ownership/involvement (Farah, 1996; Marzano, 2003) remains an issue of school quality which needs to be further discussed for developing a consensus which should be equally applicable in the private schools too.

Achievement of students (Orazem, 2000; Andrabi, 2008; Alderman et al., 2001; Tooley & Dixon, 2007; Kingdon, 1996; Farah, 1996), positive student-teacher interaction and [Student teachers] time spent in classes (Farah, 1996) as the manifestation of school quality have emerged as a major finding of the study. Quality learning opportunities inside the classroom also emerged as an important quality concern. Appropriate pupil-teacher ratio (Tooley & Dixon, 2007; Farah, 1996) appears in the study as another problematic of students' quality learning. The notion of appropriate discipline (Farah, 1996) was also highlighted by the parents but the teachers' emphasis on a particular type of discipline makes this quality indicator problematic. A consensus needs to be developed among different stakeholders about the definition and its approved manifestation at the levels of school and classroom.

The importance of schools' boundary walls is highlighted elsewhere with a specific reference to girls' schooling and their retention in schools. The, present study, however, has specifically identified safety and security as a major indicator of school quality. There was a

unanimous agreement among parents that security (and safety) is always a major consideration while they enroll their children in the schools. This could be explained as a reflection of global, national and local level security threats and concerns.

The present study while confirms school quality indicators as highlighted by earlier researches, it also does significant additions in the discourse of school quality. The arguments developed in the study are significant as they are rooted in parents' voices, views and perceptions about school quality. It is important that the discourse on school quality with an angle of parental perceptions is furthered to make the argument comprehensive and representative by engaging parents from other regions of Pakistan.

Conclusion, Recommendations, Way forward

The findings of the parental perception survey, the school profiles and the ethnographic component of the study have indicated a relationship of dichotomy between the perceptions of parents about the school quality, the quality offered by the schools and the quality that students experience. The reality of the quality on the ground, particularly for the public schools is far less than satisfactory despite the presence of important human and material resources. The broad and hierarchical management system and the lack of commitment to deliver the required quality by all the stakeholders require serious deliberations so that a consensus on the school quality can be developed. Importantly, integration of parents' voices in the discussions on the policy forum will be fundamentally important to develop a consensus on the definition and the standards of the school quality. Ensuring that the schools (public and private) meet the required standards of quality would require stringent mechanism and processes in place with effective monitoring system. Furthermore, de-politicization of the schools and education would be vital to improve the school quality.

Present study has made important contribution to the body of literature around the school quality in general and parental perceptions about school quality in particular. With its unique design and focus, the study adds to the debate around school quality by identifying a dichotomous relationship between parental perceptions of school quality, the quality offered by schools and the quality as offered by the students. Furthermore, the instrument of the survey is available for use and adaptation by the researchers who wish to conduct a study with a similar focus in the context like Sindh.

The study has made an attempt to examine the school quality as it is perceived by the parents and as it is demonstrated by the schools and as it is experienced by the students. Policy dialogue is proposed for the education stakeholders including the decision makers to discuss and debate the findings of the study for the changes in policy and practice around the school quality. It is equally important to draw the attention of the academicians and researchers about highlighting the value of school quality discourse with a reference to the local nuances. Dissemination of the research findings in national and international conference is, therefore, important way forward.

To draw implications for national level policy debate on school quality, the extension of this study in the other provinces and Gilgit-Baltistan would be important. While the public schools in the study may be somewhat representative of the characteristics of a majority of these public schools, the same is particularly difficult to determine for three private schools. Currently, no data base for the private school is available despite the mushroom growth of such schools across the country. A nationwide study on private schools needs to be carried out to develop the data base and also to establish the range of characteristics of these private schools.

School Quality – Conversion of three Components

- The study has highlighted the fact that regardless the presence and absence of school quality, schools do recognize it as a major concern.

- Importantly, as school quality remains a fluid term, determination of responsibility for it is another undecided matter.

- Analysis in all three components also presented situations where stakeholders either colluded for improving school quality and at times offered resistance against it.

- Dichotomous relationship between the ideals and the realities of the school quality remains a challenge for parents.

Way Forward

- Drawing policy implications- 18th constitutional amendment has made education a provincial subject. This now allows proper implementation of National Education Policy 2009. As committed in the policy, improving quality of teachers, curriculum, assessment will certainly improve the quality experience of students in schools.

- The study has emphasized on serious engagement of stakeholders around the 'quality' question. This engagement while will bring policy makers for improving school quality it would also make an attempt to bring parents' voice in the discourse of improving school quality.

- Developing a consensus on the quality indicators is the most important step which would help necessary steps towards ensuring quality in schools. A standard approach needs to be used to allow schools perform at the continuum of performance indicators of quality. No schools will be allowed to perform below the minimum standards. Monitoring of implementation of such indicators will reinforce intentions and commitments of the state around providing quality education to all.

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