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## ROLE BASED EVALUATION OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS: PERCEPTIONS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN PUNJAB

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| KEYWORDS | ABSTRACT |
|---|---|
| Role based Evaluation, Perception, Qualitative Approach, Instructional Leader | The study focuses on perception of student specifically about their principal. How the students perceive their principal's behavior from their own capacity in school is the main objective of this study. A qualitative approach was used to document and analyze perceptions of secondary school students about their principal in context of Punjab culture. A descriptive method was used to carry out study. An interview protocol was developed to use for the interview of students. Interviewees were both male and female students of secondary schools. Fifty-five interviews with secondary school students, five private school located in Lahore were conducted to capture their perception exactly about principal and generally about schooling. These general perceptions of students about schooling were considered relevant with specific perceptions about principals. Study concludes that students' perceptions about principal is the matter which can not only help educationist to resolve many issues regarding dropping out, dissatisfaction, changing schools and restlessness among students rather it can bring a tremendous change in principal's role as an instructional leader.<br> |
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## INTRODUCTION

Literature on students' perspective is reviving and students' voice is getting its importance again from last few decades. Research shows that when students get the feelings that their voices are being heard, they are more likely to focus on learning and they feel comfortable at schools (Mitra & Gross, 2009). Perception is very complex, cognitive and natural process in which people give their own meaning to their surrounding and diverse entities (Perrotta, 2019). Perception varies from person to person. Different people have different perception

about the same entity. Similarly, different students have their own perception for principal of their school. Actually, people try to give their own meaning to the world around them, now how far they are justified in ascribing a certain attribute to any entity is another issue (Franz, 2022). Literature on students' perspective is reviving and students' voice is getting its importance again from the last few decades. Similarly, people perceive things according to their interest, intellectual level, and ability, bent of their mind, their need and with their psychological and emotional attachment with that particular entity. In this regard, insight varies from people to people as in case of a school perception of every student is different from each other.

This study investigates the perception of student specifically about principal and generally about school. There is much different type of leadership styles and in these different styles a principal plays different role in the context of schools. These leadership styles and roles adopted by principals often determine perception which students have about them (Şenol & Lesinger, 2018). Students' voice in beautiful manner that it is not merely a sound exactly speaking rather it is presence, involvement, and power of individuals to influence decision making process with their relation to that particular organization, people working there, to institution and its practices. In this connection, Erikson (2018) describes perception through his specific term, common and unique meaning. He further argues that a thing which has a very common meaning for most of children may have the unique meaning for one of them. Erikson (2018) emphasizes that all educators especially principals must be conversant with the understanding of perceptions of students about them as it will help them a lot in their daily practice. In this linking, through the perception of students, a principal can overcome many issues which create anxiety and tension among the students (Matthews, Serafini & Watson, 2021).

Students are important "stakeholders, it's their education" "in chorus of ideas and counter ideas the only group whose voice seems strangely absent is that of students themselves". (Johnson, 1991) Student voice can be described as a specific perception of students about their schooling and education. The student voice is like opportunity through which student can convey their influence regarding policies, procedures and programs of the education (Charteris & Smardon, 2019). It is not concerned with any individual student rather it is the collective effort which represents perspective of many students. Students have a specific bent of mind and views can be very much beneficial if used by educationists, teachers and principals of schools. Dewy (1916) spread the need and importance of including students' perspective in the processes of schooling. The literature on students' perspective is reviving and students' voice is getting its importance again from last few decades. In this linking, research shows that when students get the feelings that their voices are being heard, they are more likely to focus on learning and they feel comfortable at the school (Reimer, 2020; Mayes, 2020).

**Objectives & Questions**

1. To find out the pattern of the general perception of the secondary school students towards their principal,
2. To find out if their perception may depend upon such factors as school rules, their participation and involvement in school affairs, fair school environment and respect between students and a principal.
3. This research answered the questions that how do the concerned students perceive their principal? and
1. What is it that makes them like or dislike their principal (personality, human skills, knowledge & administration)?

**Significance of Study**

1. This study is important because it will provide valuable information upon students' perception of school principal.
2. It will serve as a resource material for others who want to carry out research in the related research areas.
3. It will guide school principals to revise their professional practice by providing them with insight what students think about them and what changes they need to make themselves more proficient in eyes of students who are most important and key stakeholder of a school.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Talking about the student voice does not just simply mean listening to what students are saying rather it is more than listening. Actually, it means giving values to what students' views are, and including their perspective in decision making of school affairs and matters which are related to their learnings. Longobardi, Pagliuca and Regoli (2022); Beaudoin and Roberge (2015); Singh and Loock (2016); Barrese 2014; Pihie and Bagheri 2013; Rachman and Maryani, 2018; Johnson (1991), contend that the students get confidence when they are being listened to and as result, they take more interest in studies. Parker (2020); Ruttledge (2022); Mavilidi, Drew, Morgan, Lubans, Schmidt and Riley (2020) believe that this process of listening to students gives them a sense of ownership and develops self confidence in them and eventually increases their learning, because learning is a very active process and it does not occur by just passively sitting in the chair, listening whatever teacher is saying, going through the pages of the books and writing your assignments, rather it increases through sharing.

Ikeda, Mavoa, Cavadino, Carroll, Witten and Smith (2020) say about listening to students' perspective that it makes school stronger by saving its time, money and energy, because in this way school is in the better position to modify its policies according to the desire of students who are the key stakeholder of education. A principal is the one who represents

whole school so we can derive its meaning in this way that knowing students' perspective about principal is beneficial for school in all the way. Fielding and McGregor (2005), Bradley, Deighton and Selby (2004); Johnson (1991) are supporters of the students' voice and all of them argue that only students are those primary stakeholders who are most affected by the reflection, discussion, dialogue and action of school affairs. Halliday et al (2019) describe the students' voice in very beautiful manner that it is not merely a sound specifically speaking rather it is presence, involvement, and power of individuals to influence decision making process with their relation to that certain organization, people working there, to institution and its practices.

**Principal Perception About Students**
Strong link between school principal and his/her students is an aspect which affects other stakeholders as well. For example, parents always try to approach principal regarding any issue which their children face in a school. Whether it is student's clash with his/her peer, teacher or any school personnel, parents just come straight to the principal's office to talk to him/her (Şenol & Lesinger, 2018). I would like to mention here a story. It is about Jon and his parents. Jon is a seventh grader boy. Once his parents come to attend the parent's teacher meeting in the school. Thus, they wait hours to hear about their son's academic performance in the class. Eventually after a prolonged wait, Jon's class teacher calls his parents. After greetings and talking about the weather condition for some time Jon's class teacher pulls out the grade book of all students and searches for Jon's name in the list. Then she reads his grades and comments that it seems Jon is doing fine in the class. She was unable to tell anything else about Jon and his academic performance in class. Jon's parents become totally surprised and get the feelings that Jon's class teacher has a vague sense about him.

After leaving from there Jon's parents think of their son's principal and try to meet him. They are more shocked now that even the principal is also totally unaware about who Jon is, and in which grades he reads. Now what kind of impression do parents of the Jon get about their son's teacher and specifically about school principal? A principal is the person who is responsible for academic results of each and every student of his/her school. And what we should say about principal who is too careless to remember the names of his/her school students. Now what else can we expect from such kind of principal. Rob Mackinnon (one of Canada' outstanding principals who received honor in February 13, 2013 from the Toronto District School Board) shares his experience of principal-ship in this way that in his first-year assembly he assured students that 'every person in this building is here to help you; use us.' This assurance from principal to students that he was all time there to listen to whatever they had to share with him, gives more strength to our discussion that those principals deserve honor of outstanding principal who are seriously interested to give an ear to students' voice.

Harper and Leicht (2018); Kumar (2018) suggests that very fast world and society around us are changing and the school is the part of the rapidly changing society so the role and responsibilities of a principal are increasing. They argue that whatever change takes place in a school, it flows from a principal's office. It is very common fact about school principal that behind every great school there is a principal and in multiple tasks which a principal performs in a school most important is dealing with issues related to students (Mahfouz, 2020). Rob Mackinnon shared another quality of his principalship that students are always excited to get feedback, Rob was very generous in this matter. He never hid his feelings on different issues of school. This is value of strong bond between a student and principal. May be Rob wanted to imply that this is because of the students that he got this honor of being entitled as an outstanding principal. Quaglia and Fox (2020) share with us a story which they experienced during their visit in an early elementary school. This experience of Quaglia and Fox indirectly throws light on how important it is for principal to know his/her students, as principal is considered the leader or the representative of the governing body of the school.

Once Quaglia and Fox had an experience to meet kindergarten student named Luke, who had repeatedly told him that he was always thirsty. Now Quaglia and Fox become curious and tried to inquire more about Luke's thirst, it made them think about his health. They began to concentrate on reasons of Luke's thirst and one of them, the parent of Luke or administrator of school were responsible for this, "was Luke a diabetic patient? Or water at his home was contaminated?" He could not describe the reasons of his thirst in words, and then Luke smiled and said, "I can show you." Quaglia and Fox became a bit curious again about what Luke might show her, but saliently followed him where he was going. Soon they reached down hallway and she came to know that Luke was not tall enough to reach the water fountain! Although this seems mistake of school management that they were unaware about height of a kindergarten student and they did not put the steps up in front of water fountains at beginning of school year, yet to some extent it is mistake or failure on part of principal of school who is careless enough about problems faced by students (McKenna et al., 2012).

And apparently this seems a very minor issue yet a deep thought makes its significance clear and helps us realize that how important it is for a principal to dig deeper;
- ✓ To know students,
- ✓ To take the responsibility of all the matters of school,
- ✓ To get perception of students,
- ✓ To keep his eyes and mind open,
- ✓ To be well aware about different problems faced by students

Such kind of minor issues are a matter of whether to go school or not for the students like Luke. We may say that these kinds of things happen when there is the communication gap

between students and principal. A principal must be the fatherly figure for all the students. Students' perceptions about principal are a matter which can not only help educationist to resolve many issues about dropping out, dissatisfaction, changing schools and restlessness among students rather it can bring tremendous change in principal's role. He never hid his feelings on different issues of school. This is value of strong bond between a student and principal. Walker, Topping and Rodrigues (2008) state that research on student experiences, their expectation and their perception has been neglected and is very often unclear. Akbay (2022) identified relation between principal and students' approaches to learning as area demanding further investigation. Törnsén (2009) in one of her articles discusses requisites for principals' success in different Swedish environment, and friendly relationship between students and school principal is one of her central findings on which she emphasized most in all her work.

Figure 1 Factors that Influence Perception
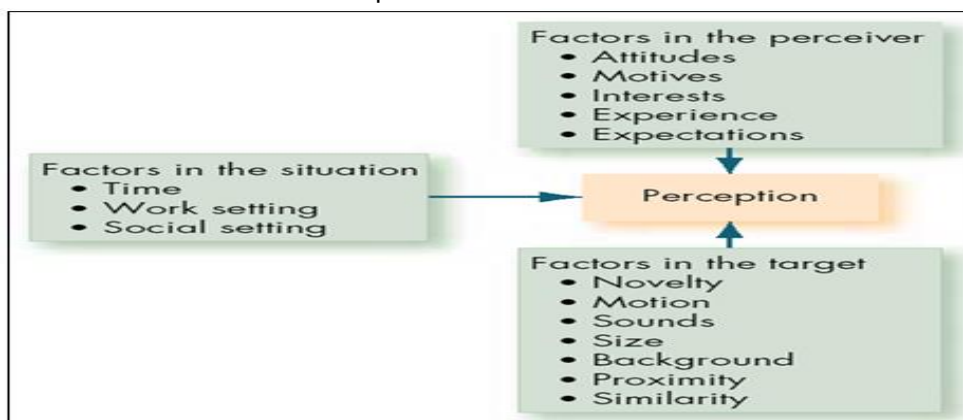


**Relationship Between Students & Principal**

The respect can be identified as giving importance to someone's views. If we talk about getting students' perception then the role of respect is very important here. Cotton (2003) discusses the traits of a successful principal in a manner that care and love for students are most essential and dominant part of it. Hallinger et al. (1996) said in this connection that it is principal who creates such an environment in which all stakeholders respect each other. He further says that only a principal can shape teacher attitude towards students that they listen to students' opinion and do not hold their views as something ordinary. A principal provides direction and effect to others over ability and behavior (Leithwooed & Riehl, 2003). Cotton (2003); Harris and Lowery (2002) are of opinion that although a principal has many responsibilities yet respect, support and care for students. In this linking many researchers believe that if a student has the feeling that he/she is ignored, misunderstood, devalued, or disrespected by principal, may develop negative emotions that will result in something bad for child as well as for the school. Stronge (2002), supports argument that a successful

principal provides such warm atmosphere to students in which they feel that they are cared, respected and listened.

Students, especially adolescents are very touchy and serious about the behavior of others with them. When students perceive that they are treated fairly about rules and procedures of school, they feel that the principal, teachers, and school personnel have regard for them and they feel respected. Praising students for their effort to learn is also a way to show the care and respect toward them (Brophy, 1981). But differentiation between appropriate and ineffective praise is necessary because ineffective praise for the student will just create the negative feeling for school. Therefore, if a principal expresses realistic high expectations for a student, then the student also tries to meet those expectations (Kloosterman & Cougan 1994). And in this way student lives up to principals' standard and earns his/her approval. And this approval creates self-confidence, motivation and persists in students' efforts to achieve high academic results (Mulford & Silins 2003; Pugh, 1976). Thus, another way to develop the feelings of respect among students is that they get the impression that they are heard and their views and opinion are of the utmost values and importance. And to promote a constructive involvement, commitment and participation this feeling of respect works effectively.

**An Ideal School**
Nieto (1994) is among the greatest supporters who give importance to students' opinions. He is in view that for solving educational problems, students' perspectives and their views are hardly and rarely considered. He emphasizes the fact that the students are the primary stakeholders of a school and their minds are full of those ideas which can enlarge the kind of the principal and can work for school affairs by many ways. He further says that if we discourage their participation, it is similar to depriving ourselves of an important source of information. It is important to clear here that when Nieto repeatedly talks about including students' opinion in school matters; he never means that to change school students have final word, rather he points out that a principal must consider students' views as it is their education. Barone (1997) also advises educationists to engage students in schools' matters. He suggests that a principal who is dominant figure in educational inquiry must attend the voice of students. Alvermann et al. (1996); Erickson and Schultz (1992); Saldana (2000); Stevenson (1990) are also in favor of listening to students' voice. Greene (1974) urges that for solution of biases and issues of education those voices need to be heard that have kept silent for generations.

Ramey et al. (1998) conducted a survey in which they relate the academic performance of students with their liking and disliking of school. In their report they mentioned that those students who have a positive perception of the school, show higher academic results than that of those who have negative opinion about schooling. Ladd, Buhs, and Seid (2000) are also in the opinion that those students who like their school are more incline to participate

in classrooms and this element affects their academic achievement. Boesel (2001), Pan and Farrell (2006) point out that the attraction and liking for school have its effect on students' grades. Now the summary of all these above-mentioned researchers aims to identify the role of a principal to make a school attractive or unattractive. These researchers argue that these are the characteristics of a principal which influence the sentiments of a student for liking or disliking for a school. To shape students' experiences in school a principal plays a major role. It is interesting fact that although students have direct interaction with teachers and these verbal and nonverbal interactions with teachers affect the students' feelings about school, yet principal is that important person who selects and recruits those teachers who are expert enough to perform such a serious task (Noddings 1992, 2003). She further says that only those persons deserve to be the principal who have the feelings of love, care and respect for students.

**METHODOLOGY & PROCEDURE**
The research design of the study is primarily based on qualitative paradigm. The interview conducted by students has been important source for data collection, yet content analysis of the transcribed interview has also been conducted to make the data more detailed and reliable. Five private reputed schools were selected as sample spots. From these schools, permission was sought to approach class 7th, 8th, and 9th students to gather perception about the principals' role/the ways of interacting with students. The option was given to the students to be part of study. Those who volunteered were approached for interviews on the specified day as and when they were free and could spare time to respond. In this connection, the respondents who participated in the study were a total of fifty-five in number. The interviewees were both boys and girls. The age of interviewees was 12 and above. Their academic level ranged from 7th to 10th class. All of them were from schools situated in Lahore. Thus, to focus the talks on the core issues the answers provided by the students were clustered around a concept irrespective of the fact the answer was provided to what question.

Figure 2 Sampling & Sample
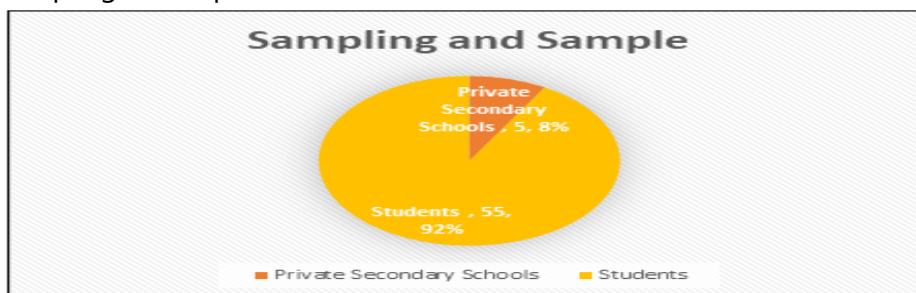


**Instrumentation**
A semi structured interview protocol was devised to cater the purpose of the study. There were ten questions in this interview protocol. Face validity of this protocol was determined

by the experts. The interview was applied to the students of a similar school but not included in the sample. The questions were asked of the students, their clarity and ease of response were considered and where it was possible language was made softer and more understandable.

**Validity & Reliability of Instrument**

The interview protocol was applied to the students and on basis of the understanding that students understand what is being asked, time taken to think and respond was another factor that was considered in finalization of the interview protocol. Yet another factor that was considered was diversity of responses but their convergence to core concept which made researcher conclude that interview protocol has become dependable to be used as a tool of research.

**Organization of Data**

To focus the talks on core issues, the answers provided by students were clustered around a concept irrespective of the fact that answer was provided to what question. There were grouped as;
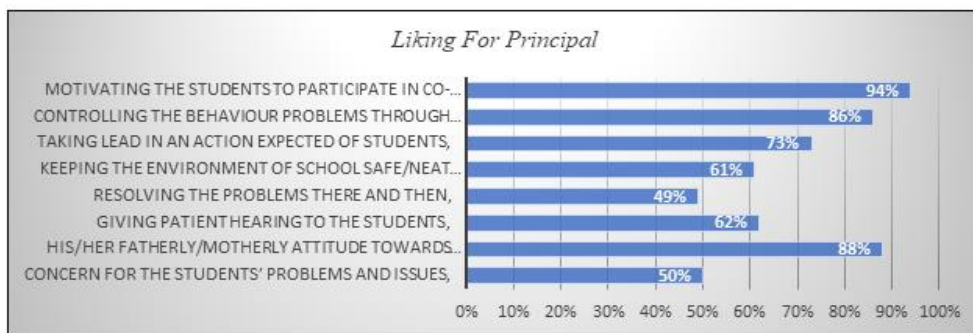
- Most liked and talked about by students,
- The obligation on the part of the students, but not disliked by students,
- The obligation and equally disliked by students.

These three profiles were separately prepared out of which;

- The amiable traits of the principals,
- The strong parts of the roles discharged by the principals,
- The weaknesses in the discharge of roles,
- The leadership style emerging out of the perceptions of the students about their principals.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

Q1: Do you like your principal, why? All students expressed their liking towards their principal because of the following reasons showed in the bar chart.



*Liking For Principal*

| Reason | % |
|---|---|
| MOTIVATING THE STUDENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN CO-... | 94% |
| CONTROLLING THE BEHAVIOUR PROBLEMS THROUGH... | 86% |
| TAKING LEAD IN AN ACTION EXPECTED OF STUDENTS, | 73% |
| KEEPING THE ENVIRONMENT OF SCHOOL SAFE/NEAT... | 61% |
| RESOLVING THE PROBLEMS THERE AND THEN, | 49% |
| GIVING PATIENT HEARING TO THE STUDENTS, | 62% |
| HIS/HER FATHERLY/MOTHERLY ATTITUDE TOWARDS... | 88% |
| CONCERN FOR THE STUDENTS' PROBLEMS AND ISSUES, | 50% |

Q2: How supportive/helpful your principal is? In what ways: Response was Supportive to some extent as shown in the below bar char/
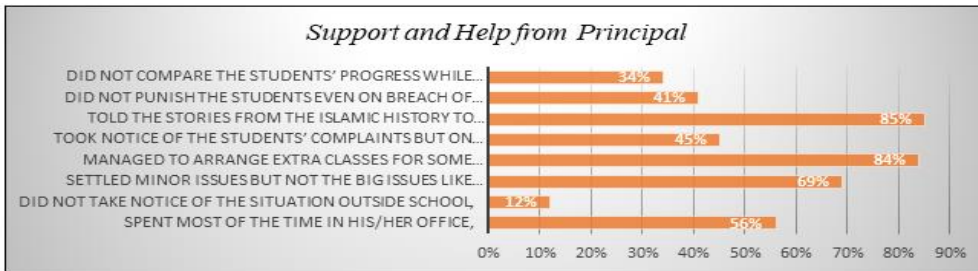


Following is some of the areas in which students think that the principal must support or at least take care of;
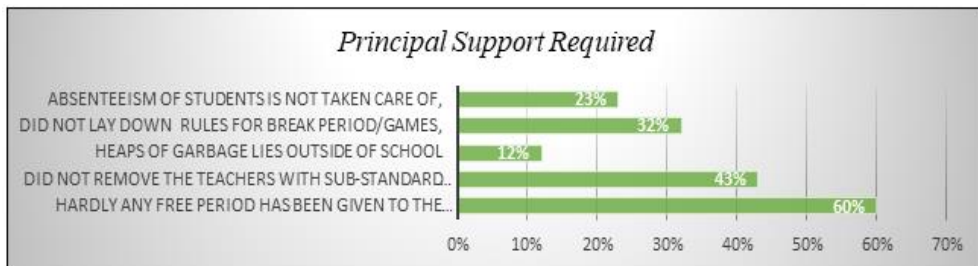


Q 3: Does the principal do the same, what he/she say he/she will do? Principal takes ethics and practices these by repeated talks, reflection of the behaviors, taking actions
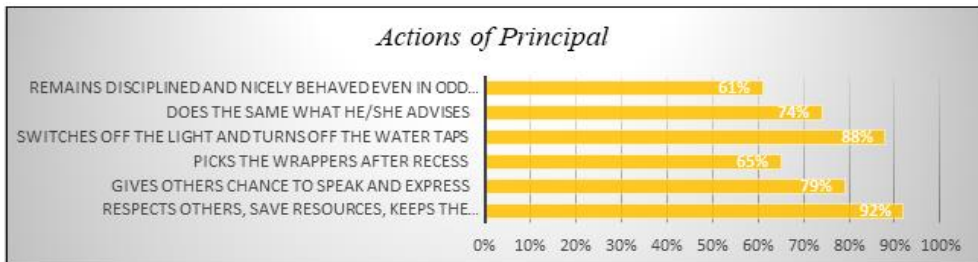


Following are some of the areas in which students think that the principal must take some actions;
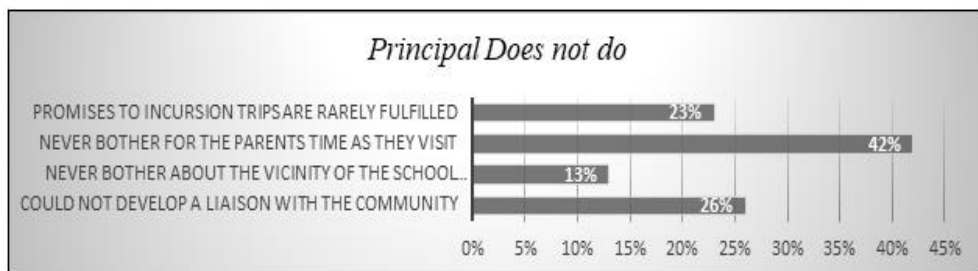
Q 4: Do you find your principal a knowledgeable person during his/her speech in school functions, important events, the sports days etc.? Principal is a knowledgeable person as revealed by participants
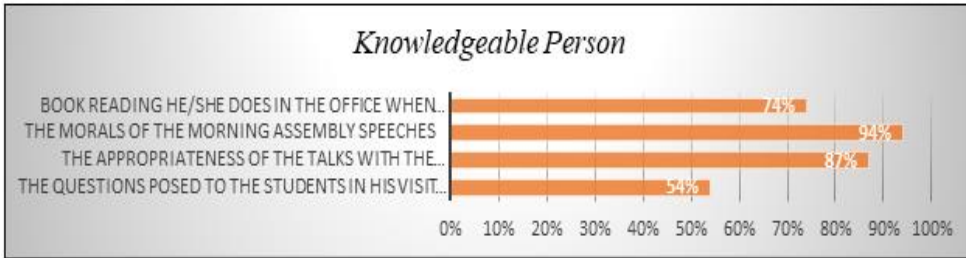


Following are some of the actions of the Principals disliked by students
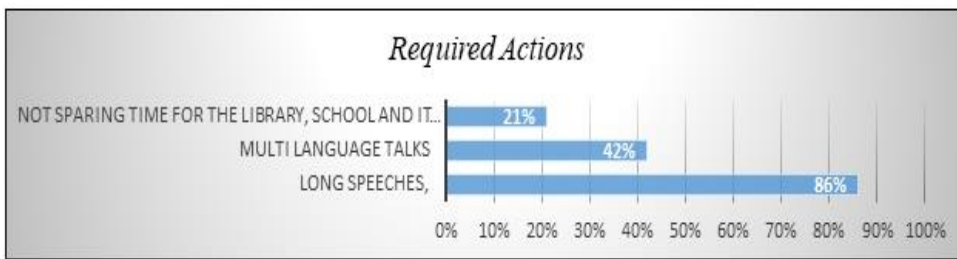


Q 5: Does the Principal motivate and encourage students to go for high achievement? And has the principal ever praised/criticized you? How you feel about that? Principal motivates and encourages as revealed through his/her gestures
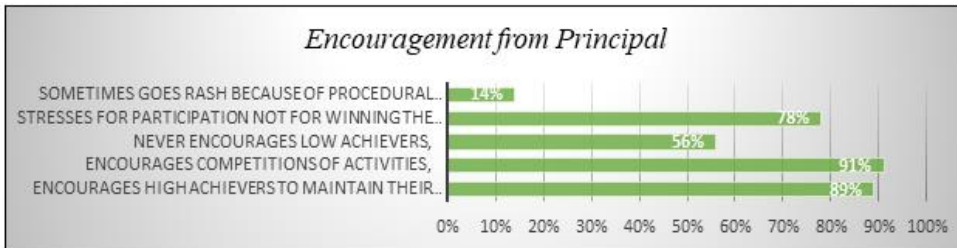


Q 6 Are school rules fair?  Does everyone know what the school rules are? The punishment for breaking school rules is the same no matter who you are? Rules are fair enough and make the students realize their position through
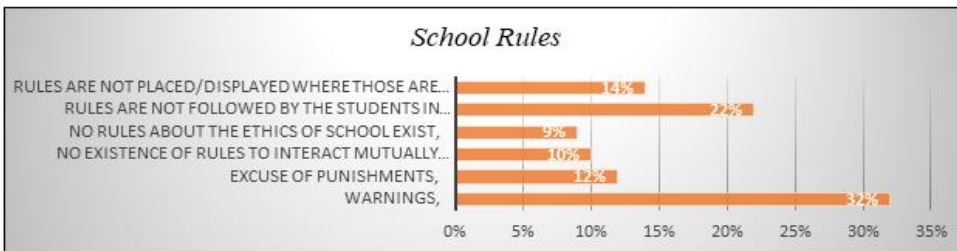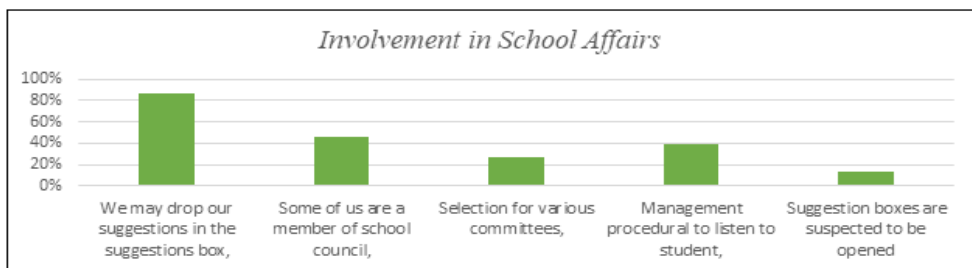
Q 7: Do you think you are getting the appreciations, you expected? Yes, we as students get proper respect as reflected at the varied occasions.
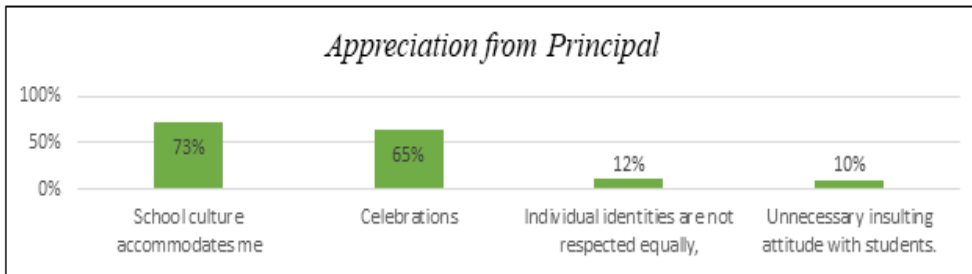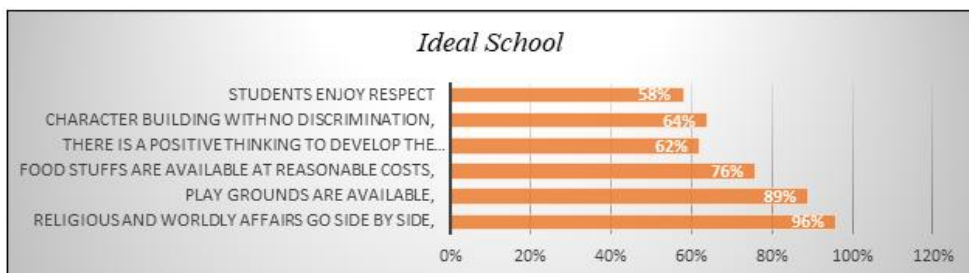


Q 8: Does your school foster fair environment within its walls? School environment is fair because;
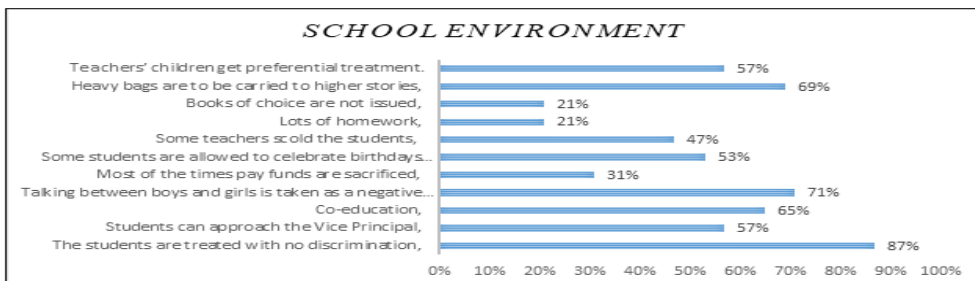


Q 9: Do you think that you are being involved in the affairs of the schools? We feel our involvement in school because;



Q 10: How you will define an ideal school? A school is an ideal because;

**Summary**

It is not customary that school students are required to see principal but on odd instance or when called for. A Principal is the last authority at school level not expected to be a terrifying person rather one who could mold the behaving pattern of students. Students when come across the principal are not required to react rather accept the instructions or the directions. This study was designed to know that how students perceive the principal's role and what comes out in shape of the behaving pattern of both principal and students. The main objectives of the study were to;

- ✓ Explore students' perception specifically about the principal,
- ✓ The amiable traits of the principals
- ✓ The strong points of the roles discharged by the principals,
- ✓ The weaknesses in the discharge of roles,
- ✓ The leadership style emerging out of the perceptions of the students about their principals.

Three prestigious schools could be selected as the sample spot out of the convenience recommend from the lot of schools which were asked to extend permission to interact with class 7th to 10th students. Only three schools volunteered. The time, date, day and venue were decided with school authorities. Students were asked to turn upon per their availability. The researcher passed one complete day at each school. Each of the students was asked ten questions as their perception about their school principal. The perceptions were recorded and thereafter transcribed in relevance to questions and the core concept that could emerge. The safe conclusion has been situational leadership as prevalent trend of the principals.

**DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION**

Fifty-five secondary school students were interviewed who pointed out factors which are necessary to be a successful principal. Though some students have a different opinion yet most of students identified that successful principals have the following characteristics; They involve others in decision-making. They are fully aware of issues faced by students (Kamran, Afzal & Rafiq, 2022). It was also found that principals may exercise their authority in such a way that influences the lives of other people (Kamran, Afzal & Rafiq, 2022). They have the knowledge about human nature. They take responsibility and hold themselves accountable (Rafiq & Qaisar, 2021). Their position calls for tremendous knowledge of different issues in schools regarding the working environment and the rights and duties of their staff (Rafiq, Afzal & Kamran, 2022). Principals play different roles with honesty. Most of interviewees emphasized that principal being ''people person'' must possess social skills such as joy and humor, respect for others, and democratic qualities meaning listening to others and giving importance to their ideas.

An effective principal spends time with people and does not confine himself to the walls of his office. Almost all of interviewee students mentioned that being visible in the schools is most important factor which usually successful principals exercise, and they are present in the school in such a way that they have a keen ear for every student of their schools. They are very much concerned about issues which are faced by students. Interesting part of this article which is relevant to my research is that in answer to question that what they would do if they had time. Most of these successful principals expressed that they would love to spend time with students. This is how we come to know how much it is vital for principal to spend time with students and get perception of him if he really wants to include himself in list of successful principals.

**Recommendation**
1. The job description of the principal should be clearly known to the students as well as to the principal,
2. Principal should be exposed to training in socialization, value characterization, and instructional leadership and as custodian of the school,
3. Performance evaluation of school should be divulged to the students with parents of concerned and to the management,
4. A joint action committee of the principal may be made for deliberation and decision making on delicate issues.

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