

What Parents Think about Higher Secondary Schools in Kerala, India

K. SREEJA SUKUMAR* AND SANTHOSH KUMAR S.**

Abstract

An intriguing look deep into the realities of quality of education in Kerala is depressing, even though quantity-wise the progress is astounding, as evidenced through the study reports of NCERT and such other agencies and individual research endeavours. There is a steady flight of students from the mainstream public educational facilities towards private education at extremely higher costs. Are the stakeholders of public education really unsatisfied? Is it not necessary to assess their opinion so that the government recognises the worth of public spending on education? This paper assesses the satisfaction of parents of the students studying in the higher secondary schools in Kerala, on different variables such as: infrastructure, teachers and their attitude, attitude of the principal of the school towards the parents and other supporting system; covering aspects like conduct of parent-teacher meetings, teacher-student ratio, number of working days in a year, permanency of faculty, selection of teachers, counselling for students and parents, career guidance, academic achievements of the school, and importance given to co-curricular and co-academic activities. The opinion of the parents was collected using a pre-tested structured survey schedule constructed based on a five-point Likert-type scale. Percentage analysis and descriptive statistics were computed for identifying the nature of the data. The hypotheses are tested using Z-test, one sample t-test, one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) along with least significant difference test for comparison between more than two groups and independent t-test for comparing between two groups and also correlation. The studies found that the parents are satisfied with the teaching-learning environment of government and government-aided schools but were dissatisfied with the infrastructural facilities.

* Assistant Professor, Post Graduate and Research Department of Commerce, St. Peter's College, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kolenchery, Ernakulam, Kerala-680311, India.

** Associate Professor, Post Graduate and Research Department of Commerce, St. Peter's College, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kolenchery, Kochi, Kerala-680311, India.

INTRODUCTION

Improving the quality of education has been the agenda of the governments from a very early age. The Education Commission, while describing the role of education in the social and economic transformation of India had suggested that the destiny of India would be shaped in her classrooms (NCERT, 1966). Kerala stands miles ahead of the other States of India in terms of number of important social development indicators, education being one of them (Government of Kerala, 2011). Kerala has attained this growth in education, not in a short period of time, but through the enlightened efforts of the rulers, from the very early times and the intellectual pursuit of the people, spread through several centuries (Menon, 2007). The central and state governments as well as other educational agencies have been incessantly churning out quality improvement programmes and schemes for the purpose of improving the educational quality. An intriguing look deep into the realities of quality of education is however depressing (Government of Kerala, 2004), even though quantity-wise the progress is astounding, as evidenced through the study reports of NCERT and other such agencies and individual research endeavours. Studies on an all-India basis, conducted by National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA) and other studies like the Midterm Assessment Survey (MAS), conducted in 1997, show that there is improvement in

the average performance of students in language and mathematics from 1994 to 1997, but still, the mean score across the states is low and far below the expectations. The situation in Kerala is no different. The percentage of students in Kerala not achieving 'minimum levels of learning', is high. This is further confirmed through the surveys conducted by voluntary agencies like Kerala Sasthra Sahitya Parishat (NCERT, 1966; Kumar, 1998; Ramakrishnan, 1998; Prakash, Gautam, Bansal and Bhalla, 1998). Parents and people in general are not satisfied with the achievements made by government-run schools and aided schools. This is one of the reasons for the flight of students in search of quality to other schools and for the increasing number of uneconomic schools (Prakash et al., 1998).

The above scenario called for a drastic change in each of the components of the system of higher secondary education, starting from the administration, right down to the individual schools. It is in this background that the applications of the concepts of Total Quality Management in education are being experimented on a large scale in Kerala. The government has been taking initiatives for imparting training and education to teachers for imbibing the philosophy of TQM into them; significant changes were made in the curriculum and in the administration of the education system. Much effort is also being given to building infrastructural

facilities. In 2004, following the 'Total Quality' envisaged by the educational authorities, a vision-mission statement was developed in a Training Need Analysis (TNA) Workshop, and ever since it has been used in all official documents (Government of Kerala, 2012). The vision envisages a central agency of the state government to promote all-round excellence in higher secondary education, by establishing appropriate philosophies, adequate institutional network, effective administrative systems, and well-qualified, competent and motivated staff necessary to carry out academic and administrative responsibilities. The mission provides to serve as a professional institution in formulating and maintaining the standards of higher secondary education and in providing need-based, time-bound, effective and sustainable services to the students and teachers (Government of Kerala, 2012). It is indispensable for our education system to achieve success in its quality pursuit with the wholehearted support of the teachers and other stakeholders. The satisfaction of the students, parents and other stakeholders are to be given prime importance, so that they continue to enjoy the benefits of one of the world's largest, reasonably priced, more or less free education, equitably provided to all sections of the society, whether rich or poor, to all types of castes and creed. It is important to sustain the life of this unique system of education. Of late,

observations show that there is a burgeoning tendency for the people to seek education in private schools which boast of finest infrastructure often foregoing the quality and experience of teachers and the parents are willing to bear the cost. This paper examines the satisfaction of the parents of students of higher secondary schools in Kerala belonging to the government and private-aided and private-unaided sectors.

OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

The study has been designed with the objective of examining the satisfaction of parents of the students of higher secondary schools in Kerala. Based on this objective, the following hypotheses were formulated for the study.

1. The overall satisfaction level of parents achieved, as part of application of TQM in the higher secondary schools in Kerala, is moderate.
2. The overall satisfaction of parents is the same, irrespective of the type of ownership, studentship and location of schools.

METHODOLOGY

The study is descriptive in nature examining the application of TQM in higher secondary schools in Kerala. The sample of the study comprises parents of the students belonging to the government, aided and unaided higher secondary schools coming under the Directorate of Higher

Secondary Education in Kerala. There were 760 government higher secondary schools, 686 aided and 461 unaided higher secondary schools in the state in the year 2010–11, making it 1,907 higher secondary schools in all (Government of Kerala, 2011). From the total number of schools in the state, about 1.5 per cent (30) schools were selected for the sample through a multi-stage sampling process. Schools were included in the sample proportionately from government, aided and unaided sector. Thus, 13 schools were included from government, 11 from aided and 6 from unaided higher secondary schools. For getting a complete representation of the state (14 districts in all), it was divided into three zones—northern, southern and central. From each of these zones, a district was selected and from each district government, aided and unaided higher secondary schools were selected proportionally. Thus, altogether 10 schools were selected from each district. From each of the school selected, 10 parents were

selected, totaling to a sample size of 300 parents, one of the parents of a student was selected.

The opinion of the parents was collected using a pre-tested structured survey schedule constructed based on a five-point Likert-type scale. Percentage analysis and descriptive statistics were computed for identifying the nature of the data. The hypotheses were tested using Z-test, one sample t-test, one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) along with least significant difference test for comparison between more than two groups and independent t-test for comparing between two groups and also correlation. The level of significance was fixed at 5 per cent.

DISCUSSION

General Profile of the Parents

When the parents were classified as per age, it was found that 82 per cent of the 'father parent' belonged to the age group of 40–50 years and majority of the 'mother parent' came under the age group 'up to 40 years of age' (Table 1).

Table 1
Classification of Parents based on Age

Age group (years)	Father		Mother	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Up to 40	33	11.0	159	53.0
40–50	246	82.0	139	46.3
50–60	21	7.0	2	0.7
Total	300	100	300	100

Source: Primary data.

The educational level of parents was studied and it was found that most of the parents had completed their studies till the high school level. In the case of the mother parent, majority had completed high school. However, it is interesting to note that mother parents who had completed degree (21.3 per cent) are more than father parents (15.7 per cent) (Table 2).

(Covering such aspects like conduct of parent-teacher meetings, teacher-student ratio, number of working days in a year, permanency of faculty, selection of teachers, counselling for students and parents, career guidance, academic achievement of the school, and importance given to co-curricular and co-academic activities)

Table 2
Classification of Parents based on Education

Education	Father		Mother	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Up to High School	59	19.7	66	22.0
High School Completed	121	40.3	106	35.3
Diploma	20	6.7	14	4.7
Degree	47	15.7	64	21.3
Post Graduation	26	8.7	28	9.3
Others	27	9.0	22	7.3
Total	300	100	300	100

Source: Primary data.

Descriptive Statistics on Satisfaction of Parents

The satisfaction of the parents was assessed on different variables such as:

1. Infrastructure
2. Teachers and their attitude
3. Attitude of the Principal of the school towards the parents
4. Other supporting systems

The percentage score depicting the satisfaction level of parents are given in Table 3. The results show that the parents are least satisfied with infrastructural facilities when compared to the satisfaction level of the other variables. The overall satisfaction of the parents is at 62.91.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics on Satisfaction of Parents

Variables	No. of items	Mean	Std Error	Percentage score
Infrastructure	11	32.93	0.56	59.87
Teachers and their attitude	9	30.30	0.43	67.33
Attitude of Principal	4	12.91	0.24	64.55

Other supporting systems	12	37.11	0.44	61.85
Overall satisfaction of parents	36	113.24	1.23	62.91

Source: Primary data.

Satisfaction of Parents under Various Dimensions of Study

The satisfaction level of the parents was assessed under various dimensions like ownership of the school, location and type of school. The schools are classified based on gender-wise combination of students; like boys only, girls only and co-educational schools. The parents of

students belonging to government, aided and unaided schools have the same level of satisfaction in the case of 'teachers and their attitude', 'attitude of principal', and 'other supporting systems'. However, it is found that there are significant differences in the matter of satisfaction on 'infrastructure' and 'overall satisfaction'.

Table 4
Satisfaction of Parents based on Ownership of Schools

Variables	Type of Schools	N	Mean	Std Error	F-value	P-value
Infrastructure	Govt.	130	28.94 ^c	0.71	26.116**	<0.001
	Aided	110	34.74 ^b	0.87		
	Unaided	60	38.27 ^a	1.30		
Teachers and their attitude	Govt.	130	30.57	0.74	0.169 ^{NS}	0.845
	Aided	110	30.16	0.65		
	Unaided	60	29.95	0.83		
Attitude of Principal	Govt.	130	13.11	0.35	1.252 ^{NS}	0.287
	Aided	110	12.43	0.43		
	Unaided	60	13.35	0.47		
Other supporting systems	Govt.	130	36.40	0.69	2.323 ^{NS}	0.100
	Aided	110	36.96	0.56		
	Unaided	60	38.92	1.20		
Overall satisfaction	Govt.	130	109.02 ^b	1.86	6.421**	0.002
	Aided	110	114.29 ^{ab}	1.79		
	Unaided	60	120.48 ^a	3.05		

Source: Primary data.

Notes: ^{NS}: not significant at 0.05 level; **: significant at 0.01 level; Means with same letter as superscript are homogeneous.

In case of 'infrastructure', the parents of unaided school students (mean=38.27) were more satisfied than aided school students (mean=34.74) and they were in turn more satisfied than parents of government school students (mean=28.94). The parents of government school students were, thus, lesser satisfied than the other two groups with regard to infrastructural facilities (p-value less than 0.001). In the case of 'overall satisfaction', there is significant difference between the parents of government school students and unaided school students, but, there is no significant difference between the parents of aided school students and government school students (p-value=0.002). In the case of 'overall satisfaction', the parents of unaided school students were more satisfied than parents of government school students. It is interesting to point out here that the difference in the satisfaction level is not due to differences in the level of satisfaction on 'teachers and their attitude', 'attitude of Principal' or satisfaction on 'other supporting systems', but on a more rectifiable factor, 'infrastructure'. If the satisfaction was less due to teachers and their attitude, then the problem of attaining quality through teacher development is an uphill task. There is question of upgrading teachers and also terminating those who are not

up to the mark, which again invites collective restraints from the part of the teachers' union. Correction of infrastructure is only a matter of identifying new sources of finance. This finding emphasises the teaching-learning quality of government and aided schools.

Satisfaction of Parents based on Type of Schools—Gender-wise

The satisfaction of the parents may change according to the student-gender combination of the school. The study found that there is significant difference in the satisfaction level and the differences in the satisfaction level is found to be highly significant in the case of all variables. Parents of students of girls-only schools were found to be more satisfied than parents of students of boys-only and co-educational schools, in the case of all the variables except in the case of 'teachers and their attitude'. The parents of boys-only schools were found to be the least satisfied in the case of the variable 'teachers and their attitude' (p-value=0.001). In the case of 'overall satisfaction', the differences in the level of satisfaction of parents is highly significant and thus the parents of students in girls-only schools were found to be more satisfied than parents of students in boys-only and co-educational schools.

Table 5
Satisfaction of Parents based on Type of Schools — Gender-wise

Variables	Type of Schools	N	Mean	Std Error	F-value	P-value
Infrastructure	Boys-only	40	30.38 ^b	1.19	11.619**	<0.001
	Girls-only	90	36.84 ^a	1.02		
	Co-educational	170	31.46 ^b	0.73		
Teachers and their attitude	Boys-only	40	26.13 ^c	0.97	11.651**	<0.001
	Girls-only	90	32.64 ^a	0.74		
	Co-educational	170	30.04 ^b	0.57		
Attitude of Principal	Boys-only	40	12.28 ^b	0.63	9.492**	<0.001
	Girls-only	90	14.44 ^a	0.38		
	Co-educational	170	12.24 ^b	0.32		
Other supporting systems	Boys-only	40	34.50 ^b	1.05	22.928**	<0.001
	Girls-only	90	41.30 ^a	0.73		
	Co-educational	170	35.51 ^b	0.55		
Overall satisfaction	Boys-only	40	103.28 ^b	3.27	25.308**	<0.001
	Girls-only	90	125.23 ^a	1.91		
	Co-educational	170	109.24 ^b	1.55		

Source: Primary data.

Notes: ** : significant at 0.01 level; Means with same letter as superscript are homogeneous.

Satisfaction of Parents based on Location of Schools

The satisfaction level of parents was found to be different depending on the location of the school.

The parents of urban school students were found to be more satisfied than rural school students in the case of all variables used

for assessing satisfaction. The differences in the satisfaction level of parents are highly significant in the case of 'overall satisfaction' (p-value less than 0.001). In the case of 'overall satisfaction', the parents of students in urban schools were found to be more satisfied than parents of students in rural schools.

Table 6
Satisfaction of Parents based on Location of Schools

Variables	Location	N	Mean	SE	t-value	P-value
Infrastructure	Urban	150	34.15	0.64	2.205*	0.028
	Rural	150	31.71	0.90		
Teachers and their attitude	Urban	150	31.47	0.60	2.770**	0.006
	Rural	150	29.12	0.60		
Attitude of Principal	Urban	150	13.67	0.30	3.280**	0.001
	Rural	150	12.14	0.36		
Other supporting systems	Urban	150	38.36	0.57	2.896**	0.004
	Rural	150	35.86	0.65		
Overall satisfaction	Urban	150	117.65	1.44	3.671**	<0.001
	Rural	150	108.83	1.93		

Source: Primary data.

Notes: *significant at 0.01 level; ** significant at 0.01 level.

Overall Satisfaction of the Parents

The overall satisfaction of the parents was subjected to Z-test. The Z-value, 4.276 is found to be significant at 0.01 level of significance (Table 7).

The mean value 3.1456 is considered to be higher than the central value (3) of the five-point Likert-type scale of measurement. Therefore, it can be inferred that the overall satisfaction of the parents of the students of higher secondary school education in Kerala, is above moderate.

CONCLUSION

The new method of activity-oriented student-centered learning replaced the traditional teacher-centered education system in the higher secondary school education in Kerala from the year 2005 onwards. As part of this, the continuous and comprehensive internal evaluation introduced, emphasises on the assessment of the multi-dimensional competencies of the learner. Efforts are also made by the government to improve the infrastructural facilities.

Table 7
Hypothesis Testing of Overall Satisfaction of Parents

Variable	Mean	Z-value
Overall satisfaction	3.1456	4.276**

Note: ** significant at 0.01 level.

The government is also investing in providing training and education to the teachers so that they could engage the classes in a more efficient manner. These efforts indicate customer focus and the intention of the government to

enhance the quality of education for the satisfaction of all the stakeholders of education. This study shows that the satisfaction of parents of the higher secondary school education in Kerala is above moderate.

REFERENCES

- GOVERNMENT OF KERALA. *Higher Secondary Education* (C-DIT, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM). Retrieved 13 March 2012, from Higher Secondary Education: www.old.kerala.gov.in/dept_highersecondary/hs_index.htm
- . 2004. *Education for the New Age: Report of the Kerala State School Education Commission, 2003–04*. Thiruvananthapuram: Government of Kerala.
- . 2011. *Economic Review*. Thiruvananthapuram: Government of Kerala.
- KUMAR, B.V. 1998. Poor Quality of Education in Kerala Examination Reforms at School Level. *National Workshop on Education*. Thiruvananthapuram.
- MENON, A.S. 2007. *A Survey of Kerala History*. Kottayam: D.C. Books.
- NCERT. 1966. *Education and National Development Report of the Education Commission*. New Delhi: Ministry of Education.
- PRAKASH, V., S.K. GAUTAM, I.K. BANSAL AND M. BHALLA. 1998. *Mid Term Assessment Survey: An Appraisal of Students' Achievement*. New Delhi: Educational Consultants India Limited.
- RAMAKRISHNAN, C. 1998. *An Action Research Project to Improve the Teaching Learning Environment and Number of Working Days in Schools in Kerala Through a Participatory Intervention Strategy*. Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala Sasthra Sahitya Parshad.