

## **An Exploratory Analysis of Parents' Perceptions of the Physical Learning Environment in Private Higher Secondary Schools of Southern Punjab, Pakistan**

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### **Abstract**

*The main purpose of the current research was to analyze the Parents' Perceptions about the physical learning environment of Private higher secondary schools of Pakistan. The objectives of the study were; to find out the Parents' perceptions about the learning environment of private schools; to analyze the differences in the perceptions about the learning environment of higher secondary private schools on the base of gender and to propose recommendations for improving the learning environment. The study adopted a descriptive research design. The research population was to be comprised of the parents of all students of higher secondary classes studying in grade 11 and grade 12 in these schools of south Punjab of Pakistan. Parents of 400 students of higher secondary section of the sampled schools were selected by using simple random sampling technique. Quantitative data was collected through four-point Likert scale. The collected data was analyzed by using SPSS Version 21.0. The simple percentages mean score, independent t-test, and P –values were calculated. The findings revealed that the physical learning environment of the private schools is a contributory factor in developing the students' interest in study. Majority of the parents are satisfied with the physical learning environment of the schools. The same model can be applied to other public sector educational institutions of Pakistan.*

**Keywords** *Learning environment, Physical Learning Environment, Private Schools, Higher Secondary Schools*

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### **1. Introduction**

Process of learning strengthens an everlasting change in an individual's cognitive, social or motivational capabilities. An efficient learning takes place in the social fabric of society that brings change, and develops an urge to learn and excel. Learning environment is a support system that organizes the conditions in which human can learn in a best possible manner (Schuetz, 2005). It accommodates the learning process as per the requirement of the learner. Learning environment of a school is embodiment of components and various activities where learning takes place. It encompasses social, emotional, and pedagogical frameworks where learning occurs and it affects students' achievements and attitudes (Lim and Fraser, 2018). It denotes infra-structure, various physical localities, cultures and different communities which inspire learners to gain knowledge and proficiency. Students require such an environment where they can nurture and learn. Thus, learning environment can be a sum of material and non-material factors. All of these have their respective and specified role in an upbringing and development of students (Pardo and Siemens, 2014). However, it is imperative to pay attention to the inter-dependency of societal collaboration, physical resources, spatial possessions and pedagogical aims; these are all part of the learning environment and mutually constitutive" (Niemi, 2020).

"Learning environment of the school may be set and shaped by numerous aspects ranging from leadership style to cultural characteristics, to human capital to organizational history (Zysberg and Schwabsky, 2020)". It may be defined as the sum of daily experiences of the members of the school community, reflecting their perception of the organization's physical, interpersonal and professional aspects. It offers cultural physical and academic opportunities for children and encourages them to reach their full potential (Gibbs, 2020). Numerous physical places, setting, and cultures by which the schoolchildren learn constitute learning environment of a school (Strafford 2020). Learning environment is a system of complex relationships that exists among the physical structure (size and arrangement of a room), a teacher, and a student" (Kopeck 2006). This narrative helps to classify the school not only in physical environment but as a highly multifaceted social mechanism.

Education system in Pakistan is a legacy of British rule in the sub-continent. At the time of independence (1947) both public and private institutions were providing education at primary and secondary levels (Iqbal, 2012). Both the public and private sectors are engaged in providing education to the masses. The current study is focused on the physical learning environment of the private schools of Pakistan. It is an attempt to find the Parents' perceptions to the physical aspect of private schools' environment that is located in Southern Punjab of Pakistan.

## **2. Research objectives**

1. To find out the parents' perception about the learning environment of higher secondary private schools.
2. To analyze the differences in the perceptions about the learning environment of higher secondary private schools on the basis of gender.
3. To propose recommendations for improving the learning environment of higher secondary schools.

### **2.1. Delimitations of the Study**

This study is delimited to the higher secondary private schools present in the district Bahawalpur and Multan of south Punjab of Pakistan.

## **3. Literature Review**

Learning environment has various elements that are defined by many researchers in their studies. Preston (2016) offers eight elements of the learning environment of a school that are implemented through an organized and reliable framework for creating deep contacts, commitment to the task, and good results. These elements are “Rigorous curriculum and instruction, Assessment and accountability, Teacher quality a professional development, Student and family supports, Stake holder engagement, Leadership and governance, Organization and structure, Resources for sustainability”. However, on basic level, main elements of a learning environment are viewed as teacher, curriculum design, teaching competencies, assessment criteria, student and faculty members’ interaction and institutional setup i.e. rules, regulations and procedures (Biggs, 2011). Numerous physical places, setting, and cultures by which the schoolchildren learn constitute learning environment of a school. “It encompasses social, emotional, and pedagogical frameworks where learning occurs and it effect students’ achievements and attitudes” (Lim and Fraser, 2018). The main aspects of school environment are Physical Environment; Psychosocial Environment; Academic Environment.

The academic aspects of the school are the environment in which teaching learning activities run smoothly for achieving the objectives of schooling successfully. Academic aspects are connected with students’ academic outcomes, a class that is prepared with the appropriate tools and complete required learning activities (Gibbs.2020). “Psychosocial school environment can be defined as the social situations existing at school related to pupil’s work situation (such as teacher support, work demand ,and influence over school work) and learners’ peer relations” Haapasalo(2010). Ucci (2015) stated that the physical environment might be an overall construct including any man made aspects (manmade parks ) as well as a natural ones . He further describes factors of physical school environment that are; School grounds and designs; Design of school building; School facilities( such as obstacle courses, games equipment, play- ground marking and vending machines); Breakfast clubs, cafeteria; Class rooms which can be used in all weathers; hall for co-curricular and other activates; Facilities of library, laboratory; Provision of rooms for administrative offices work facilities of pure drinking water; toilets for students and staff and Transport facilities . Students’ achievements, cognitive skills and approaches to school work are positively impacted by physical environment. In the academia, the terms ‘physical’ and ‘built’ environment are frequently substituted by one another. The physical dimension of a learning environment encompasses the physical structure, including technologies, tools, and furniture (Hannafin and Land 1997). Research has also shown that colour, texture, views, light, acoustics, temperature and air quality are important elements of the physical learning environment (Marmot 2014), while aesthetic aspects are perceived as less relevant (Beckers ,2019).

#### **4. Research Methodology**

The current research study mainly focused on physical aspects of learning environment of higher secondary schools in private sectors. Descriptive approach stands on an appropriate option to investigate this complex phenomenon. The research population was to be comprised of parents of all students studying in grade 11 and grade12 of private higher secondary schools of southern Punjab. The researcher has chosen 4 private elite schools each from 2 main Divisions of Southern Punjab (Bahawalpur and Multan) as a research sample by using convenient sampling technique. Quantitative data was collected from the Parents of 400 students of these schools selected by simple random sampling technique.

On the basis of relevant literature view, a self-constructed questionnaire was designed. Questionnaire

was allocated into two parts: part 1 contained “demographic information” about the gender, locality. While Part 2 comprised of 15 statements presented at a four-point Likert response scales from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”. These statements were specified to explore the parents’ perceptions about the different aspects of physical learning environment of the school. Survey questionnaire was sent to five experts for checking the face and content validity. A pilot test was established by measuring the perception of 20 parents. However, 379 questionnaires were returned after the final distribution.

### 5. Data Analysis and Findings

The quantitative data was inserted and analyzed by utilizing Statistical Package for Social Science SPSS type 21.0. The simple percentages, mean score and independent t-test were calculated. The result was presented in tabulated form by their total number of frequencies, percentage, mean, standard deviation, t-value and significance etc.

**Table 1 Parents’ Perceptions about the Learning Environment outside the classroom**

#	Statements	SA+ A		DA+ SDA	
		F	%	F	%
1	Students are always carefully dressed and neatly groomed	324	85.5	55	14.5
2	School provides transport for students	310	81.8	69	18.3
3	Students are able to access information technology resources	273	72	106	28.0
4	Students are able to access Library resources	255	67.3	124	32.7
5	Students feel secure in the presence of monitoring cameras and security guards	284	75	95	25
6	Students enjoy having lunch in the	257	67.8	122	32.2

	school cafeteria				
7	Students have equal opportunities to play in Playgrounds	306	84.7	58	15.3
8	Students have access to use science Laboratory	250	66.0	129	34.0
	Average percentage	75	25		

It is shown by the table that 85.5% students agreed with the statement ‘Students are always carefully dressed and neatly groomed’, however 14.5% students disagreed with the statement, moreover 81.8% parents School provides transport for students while 18.3% students disagreed with it.

Data further shows that 72% parents agreed that the students are able to access information technology resources whereas only 28% students disagree with this statement, 67.3% parents agreed that the students are able to access Library resources while 32.7% disagreed. 75% parents agreed that the students feel secure in the presence of monitoring cameras and security guards however 25% parents disagreed.

It is clear from the data displayed 67.8% parents agreed with the statement that the students enjoy having lunch in the school cafeteria while 32.2% parents disagree with it, 84.7% parents say that Students have equal opportunities to play in Playgrounds whereas 15.3% parents do not agree with the statement, 66.0% parents agreed that Students have access to use science Laboratory however 34% students disagree with this.

**Table 2 Parents’ Perceptions about Learning Environment inside the classroom**

Sr#	Statements	SA+ A		DA+ SDA	
		F	%	F	%
1	Students have equal opportunities to participate in classroom activities	356	93.9	23	6.1

2	Students have adequate space here to do the academic work.	301	79.4	78	20.6
3	Classroom are provided with effective lighting	346	91.3	33	8.7
4	Classroom furniture is appropriate for study	262	69.2	117	30.9
5	Classroom audibility and room temperature is suitable for study	306	80.7	73	19.3
6	Teachers motivate the students emotionally	282	74.4	97	25.6
7	Classrooms are spacious and airy	268	70.7	111	29.3
	Average Percentage	79.9		20.1	

It is shown by the table that 93.9% parents agreed with the statement ‘Students have equal opportunities to participate in classroom activities’ while 6.1% parents disagreed with it, 79.4% parents agree Students have adequate space here to do the academic work.

that however 20.6parents disagree with this, 91.3% parents agreed with the statement that the Classroom are provided with effective lighting while 8.7% parents disagreed. 69.2 % parents agreed that the Classroom furniture is appropriate for study Moreover, the collected data displays that 80.7% parents agreed with statement that the Classroom audibility and room temperature is suitable for study whereas 19.3% parents disagreed with this, 74.4% parents have perception that the teachers motivate that the students emotionally while 25.6 perception is against the statement, and 70.7% parents are of opinion that the Classrooms are spacious and airy however 29.3% parents disagreed with the statement

**Table 3 Gender-Wise Comparison of Parents' Perception about the Learning Environment out of the class of Higher Secondary School**

Gender	N	Mean	SD	T	Sig.
Male	305	22.4066	3.76077	6.311	0.03
Female	74	25.2838	2.24231		

It is represented by the above mentioned table that the variance between the “mean score” of male (M=22.4, SD=3.7) and female (M=25.2, SD= 2.2) units which is not very high. The significant value is not greater than 0.05,  $t(379)=6.311$ , Sig=0.03 which exhibits that significant variance is present between the views of male and female units about the physical Learning Environment out the class of Higher Secondary School

**Table 4 Gender-Wise Comparison of Learning Environment in the class of Higher Secondary School**

Gender	N	Mean	SD	T	Sig.
Male	2.43482	20.6623	2.43482	6.400	.373
Female	2.54715	22.7568	2.54715		

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It is represented by this table that the difference between the “mean score” of male ( $M=20.6$ ,  $SD=2.43$ ) and female ( $M=22.7$ ,  $SD= 2.54$ ) units which is not high. The significant value is greater than 0.05  $t(379)=6.40$   $Sig=.373$  which exhibits that the difference is not significant between the views of male and female units about the physical Learning Environment in the class of Higher Secondary School.

## 6. Conclusion and Discussion

Majority of the parents have the positive perceptions about the private schools as they are quite satisfied with the performance of their children. They were also satisfied with their children's health as these schools are remained concerned with the cleanliness of the entire school area (classrooms, corridors, bathrooms, play grounds and school cafeteria). Children enjoy having lunch in cafeteria. Majority of schools provide transport, Students are able to access Library resources school, computer labs and science laboratories. And as the students feel secure in the presence of monitoring cameras and security guards hence their parents are satisfied. However, the variance is observed between the gender perceptions. Almost the mothers are satisfied with the physical environment of the schools presents outside the classrooms as compared to the fathers. However, the difference is not significant between the views of male and female units about the physical Learning Environment inside the classrooms of Higher Secondary private Schools. Parents are satisfied with the classroom furniture, Classroom audibility and room temperature and lighting that is suitable for study. Teachers motivate the students emotionally and provide the students equal opportunities to participate in classroom activities. Findings of the current study were supported by the study of Nazneen. L. & Ahmad, S. (2020) as it is concluded by them that It is a common observation in Pakistan that people tend to admit their children in private rather than government schools because they are considered as having a better environment and more learning opportunities for students. Most of the private schools are English medium and the teachers employed there are also very much qualified and trained. Similarly, other facilities in the classrooms of private schools are also superior to the government schools, for example sophisticated materials for different creative activities. Experience with advance equipment in English medium schools enhance students' skills and their level of achievement (Shabbir et al., 2014). Most of the research studies reported that English medium schools have better technical facilities including computer, multimedia and access to digital libraries as compared to Urdu medium schools (Dogar, Butt, Butt & Qaisar, 2015; Khurshid, Shah & Reid, 2016; Siddiqui & Gorard, 2017).

Ultimately it is concluded by the current study that it is a key apprehension of the Pakistani parents to prefer such schools for their children with an excellent learning environment, which may lead to their better adjustment in society and academic achievement.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The fee structure of Private schools must be reduced so that so that they are accessible to majority of public.
2. Private schools should provide fresh food in their Cafeterias.
3. Door to door transport service should be provided to the students.



4. Scholarships should be provided the gifted students.
5. Evening sessions must be conducted for the deserving students to become effective citizens.
6. The policies of these schools should be implanted in the government institutions for the betterment of entire country.

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