

Parent Perception on Government Rural School Functioning At Upper Primary Level during the COVID-19 Pandemic

P. Ponnusamy¹, G. Kowsalya² and P. Pavithra³

*Department of Education, The Gandhigram Rural Institute (Deemed to be University),
Dindigul District 624 302 Tamil Nadu, India
E-mail: p.ponnusamy@ruraluniv.ac.in*

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ABSTRACT The school's academic atmosphere reflects its physical and psychological features that are more dynamic in nature and that generate the necessary preconditions for teaching and learning. Students, teachers, non-teaching staff, parents, and other community members can all contribute to improving a school's academic culture by expressing their ideas and opinions about it. The study's key goal is to find out how parents feel about function of government rural schools at the upper primary level using survey method of research. The Parent Perception Scale on School Functioning was administered to 140 randomly selected rural parents, whose children were pursuing studies at rural upper primary schools, in the Dindigul district of Tamil Nadu, India, to obtain the necessary data. The study's main finding shows that majority of parent opined that the functional status of government rural upper primary schools was at moderate level.

INTRODUCTION

Individuals can achieve upward social mobility and avoid downward social mobility by investing in education (Xie and Zhang 2020). As a result, most parents now acknowledge that school safety, teacher teaching quality, students' learning environment, and family support and encouragement were the most important factors in defining their children's school experiences (Mapp 2003; Baker et al. 2016). Furthermore, there is a strong link between the learning environment at school and academic accomplishment (Demirtas-Zorbaz et al. 2021). The students' family environment, which includes the family's cultural and financial position as well as the parents' talents and educational accomplishments, has a substantial impact on the students' abilities and educational accomplishments (Elliott et al. 1999; Rainey and Murova 2004). Students' academic achievements help them learn more about themselves as responsible community members and promote a positive life culture in society. As a result, instead of being valued simply by parents and society, the educational system must be promoted and conserved.

The COVID-19 outbreak and subsequent lockdowns have wreaked havoc on society, putting many people's physical and emotional health in jeopardy (Chakraborty and Chatterjee 2020; Imran et al. 2020). All academic work at various lev-

els of the education system failed in this pandemic situation. Learning gaps among students at all levels of education have significant negative consequences for education, resulting in larger learning gaps among students at all levels of education. Prior to the outbreak, pupils went to school and learnt the majority of what was required for each grade level in a regular way. Many various types of learning took place throughout the lockdown, including at the school level, and pupils insisted on learning digital skills through the use of television, radio, smart phones, computers, and laptops (Iivari et al. 2020). The benefits and drawbacks of learning with digital technology are discussed (Baber 2020; Sharma et al. 2020). In the right learning environment, students may be able to use a number of technological tools for educational purposes. Others have been left out of the educational system, particularly pupils with poor parental motivation, low socioeconomic family status, and students who lack technical abilities (Iivari et al. 2020; Ponnusamy et al. 2021).

The educational system encourages parents and community people to establish support mechanisms for schools in order to tackle the educational challenges posed by the epidemic (Iyengar 2021). Education is no longer solely the responsibility of the school, and it is becoming increasingly necessary for families and communities to work together for the benefit of children (Epstein 2010). By incorporating parents and the community into the educational process, the quality of

educational activities in schools can be improved and strengthened (Jean-Baptiste Sanfo 2020). Parental involvement in school functions aids in the reduction of absenteeism as well as the improvement of student behaviour and adjustment (Sanders and Sheldon 2009).

Parents' involvement in education also guarantees that limited educational resources are maximised, appropriate curriculum and learning materials are developed, and educational barriers are identified and addressed (Singleton 2005). As a result, parents and the community play a crucial role in school success by assisting schools in increasing access and student enrolment (Stern 2003; Santos 2018). Every parent in a society plays a critical role in assuring the quality of the school education system (Aronson 1996; Wolfendale and Bastiani 2000; Beveridge 2005), and their participation in school functions helps the school system improve considerably in both academic and infrastructure aspects (Verspoor 2005; Ahmad 2013). Without the involvement of parents and the community, education cannot achieve its aims, and society cannot regard education. As a result, shared accountability among parents, teachers, and school administrators is essential for enhanced school performance and for the future citizens of parents' children (Berends et al. 2002). With this background of understanding about the importance of school functioning, the following objectives were set for this study.

Objectives of the Study

1. Obtain parents' perspectives on the functioning of government rural schools at the upper primary level during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Assess the level of school performance as seen through the eyes of school parents.
3. Examine the strengths and weaknesses of the school's functioning.
4. Investigate the impact of a parent's gender, age, and educational background on their perceptions of school performance.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Research Method

The researchers utilised a survey method to gather information from parents regarding their

perceptions of how government upper primary schools functioned.

Sample

A random sampling method was used to select 140 parents whose children attend adjacent upper primary schools from 10 rural villages in the Dindigul district of Tamil Nadu, India. Table 1 shows the demographic information for the sample.

The demographic information in Table 1 is self-explanatory. 70 (50.00%) of the 140 parents chosen were male and 70 (50.00%) were female. Furthermore, there were 46 (32.86%) members under the age of 35 years, 59 (42.14%) members between the ages of 35 and 50 years, and 35 (25%) members above the age of 50 years. There were also 54 (38.57%) members who completed elementary school education, 53 (37.86%) members who completed secondary school education, and 33 (23.57%) members who completed higher education.

Instrumentation and Procedure

The Parent Perception Scale on School Functioning (PPSSF) was designed in a bi-lingual version (Tamil and English) to examine parents' perceptions of school functioning. It is a four-sub-scale Likert Scale developed by the researchers using all standardised techniques, and it includes school management, teachers' teaching, students' learning, and school safety measures. Each sub-scale contains ten statements, each of which is rated on a four-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Each subscale has a maximum score of 40, and parents' scores on the composite scale (maximum score 160) generated from all 40 items represent their assessment of school performance. The study tool's validity was determined using face validity, and the tool's reliability was determined using the test and re-test approach. The tool completed the reliability test with a correlation coefficient of 0.79, indicating that it is extremely dependable for use in research projects.

Test of Normality for the Parent Perception Scores

Table 2 shows the results of the descriptive data analysis used to get the mean perception scores of parents.

Table 1: Demographic data of sample

<i>Sample</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Education qualification</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Male</i>	Below 35	Elementary Education	9	6.43
		Secondary Education	9	6.43
		Higher Education	5	3.57
		Total	23	16.43
	Between 35-50	Elementary Education	14	10.00
		Secondary Education	9	6.43
		Higher Education	7	5.00
		Total	30	21.43
	Above 50	Elementary Education	4	2.86
		Secondary Education	8	5.71
		Higher Education	5	3.57
		Total	17	12.14
<i>Female</i>	Below 35	Elementary Education	8	5.71
		Secondary Education	9	6.43
		Higher Education	6	4.29
		Total	23	16.43
	Between 35-50	Elementary Education	15	10.71
		Secondary Education	9	6.43
		Higher Education	5	3.57
		Total	29	20.71
	Above 50	Elementary Education	4	2.86
		Secondary Education	9	6.43
		Higher Education	5	3.57
		Total	18	12.86
<i>Total</i>	Below 35	Elementary Education	17	12.14
		Secondary Education	18	12.86
		Higher Education	11	7.86
		Total	46	32.86
	Between 35-50	Elementary Education	29	20.71
		Secondary Education	18	12.86
		Higher Education	12	8.57
		Total	59	42.14
	Above 50	Elementary Education	8	5.71
		Secondary Education	17	12.14
		Higher Education	10	7.14
		Total	35	25.00
		Total	140	100.00

Table 2: Descriptive data of parents perception scores in general

<i>Descriptive data</i>	<i>Score value</i>
Mean	103.16
Lower Bound	102.21
Upper Bound	104.10
Median	103.00
Std. Deviation	5.64
Minimum	92.00
Maximum	117.00
Range	25.00
Skewness	0.29
Kurtosis	-0.55

Source: Research Data under NCERT-ERIC Project, New Delhi, 2020-22

The selected sample's mean and standard deviation scores on the perception scale are 103.16 and 5.64 respectively, according to the data in the table. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and the Shapiro-Wilk test were employed in the study to see if the scores were normally distributed, and the results are shown in the Table 3.

The test statistics for the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests, as well as degrees, are used to test the normality of score distribution. The Kolmogorov Smirnov statistic value is 0.076, and the Shapiro-Wilk statistic value is 0.981, with p-values of 0.050 and 0.054 respectively, as shown in the table above. Because these p-values are greater than 0.05, the parent percep-

Table 3: Test of Normality for parent perception scores of the sample in general

<i>Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test</i>			<i>Shapiro-Wilk Test</i>		
<i>Statistic</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Statistic</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p-value</i>
0.076	140	0.050	0.981	140	0.054

tion scores of the chosen sample are assumed to follow a normal distribution.

RESULTS

Levels of School Functioning

Based on the results of the data collection instrument, the functioning level of government rural upper primary schools was classified into three categories. If an individual participant's perception score differs by more than one standard deviation from the sample's mean score (mean + SD), the parent participant believes the school is functioning well. Similarly, if an individual member's perception score is less than one standard deviation from the sample's mean score (mean - SD), the parent member believes the school's operating level is poor. Also, perception scores in the middle of these two ranges indicate that the parent believes the school's functioning is moderate. Table 4 depicts the school's operating levels based on a review of parent perception scores in general and school component-by-school component.

Table 4: Level of school functioning

<i>Parent perception score</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>High</i>
Mean (M)	97.52	22	90
Standard Deviation (SD)	108.8	(15.71%)	(64.29%) (20%)

The mean and standard deviation scores of parents in Parent Perception Scale on School Functioning (PPSSF) are 103.16 and 5.64 respectively. When the mean perception score of parents was compared with individual's perception score, it was observed that 15.71 percent had scores less than 1 SD of the mean score and 20.0 percent had scores greater than 1 SD of the mean score. According to the findings, 15.71 percent of parents believe that the functioning level of government

rural upper primary schools is low, while 20.0 percent believe that the functioning level of government rural upper primary schools is high. However, the majority of parents (64.29%) believe that government upper primary schools are run at a moderate level. In Table 5, parent perception scores are analysed in relation to the school's functional components.

Table 5: School functional profile

<i>School functioning component</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Remark</i>	<i>Result</i>
School management	140	22.73	< GM	Weak
Teachers' teaching	140	24.86	> GM	Strong
Students' learning	140	24.08	> GM	Strong
School safety measures	140	21.52	< GM	Weak
Grand mean (Mean of Mean)		23.30		

By comparing the grand mean score to each component of school functioning, the weak and strong components of school functioning can be identified. The mean of the mean scores of the school functional components of school management, teachers' teaching, students' learning, and school safety measures, yields the grand mean score (GM). As a result of the table data, government rural upper primary schools are strong in their teachers' teaching and students' learning components, but weak in their school administration and safety measures. Table 6 summarises parents' perceptions based on their gender, age, and educational background.

Parent Perception on School Functioning-Gender, Age and Education Wise Analysis

Table 6 shows the comparison between the mean scores of male and female sample on the parent perception scale.

The data in Table 6 shows the difference in mean perception scores between male and female

Table 6: Gender wise analysis based on Mean and Std. Deviation Scores

<i>Gender</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Male	70	102.01	4.86	2.44	0.02
Female	70	104.30	6.15		

parents. The mean score of female parents on the perception of school functioning scale is higher than that of male parents, and the estimated *t* and *p*-values (*t* = 2.44; *p* = 0.02) show that there is a significant difference between male and female parents' perceptions since the *p*-value is less than 0.05. Table 7 compares parents' perceptions based on their ages.

The data in the F-Table 7 shows a comparison of mean perception scores of parents of various ages, that is, below 35 years, between 35 and 50 years, and above 50 years. The F-table results (*F* = 6.39; *p* = 0.00) suggest that there is a significant difference among the perceptions of parents with age groups of below 35 years, between 35 and 50 years, and above 50 years since the *p*-value is less than 0.05. Table 8 shows the results of a post-hoc test to determine which two age groups of

parents have a significant difference in their perceptions of how government rural schools function at the upper primary level.

The mean difference between the perception scores of parents in the age groups of below 35 years and above 50 years is 4.35, and their *p*-value (=0.00) is less than 0.05, according to the data in the Table 8. As a result, there is a significant difference in parents' perceptions of how a government rural upper primary school functions by age group below 35 years and above 50 years. Table 9 shows an investigation of parent perceptions of school functioning based on educational qualifications.

The data in the F-Table 9 shows a comparison of the mean perception scores of parents with various educational backgrounds, including elementary school, secondary school, and higher education. The F-table results (*F* = 0.60; *p* = 0.55) show that there is no significant difference between the perceptions of parents with educational qualifications backgrounds of elementary school, secondary school, and higher education because the *p*-value is greater than 0.05.

Table 7: Age wise analysis based on One Way ANOVA

<i>Parent perception scores</i>	<i>Sum of squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Between groups	376.96	2	188.48	6.39	0.00
Within groups	4043.59	137	29.52		
Total	4420.54	139			

Table 8: Age wise analysis: Post-hoc Test

<i>(I) Age</i>	<i>(J) Age</i>	<i>Mean difference (I-J)</i>	<i>Std. error</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Below 35	Between 35 and 50	2.08	1.07	0.16
	Above 50	4.35*	1.22	0.00
Between 35 and 50	Below 35	2.08	1.07	0.16
	Above 50	2.27	1.16	0.16
Above 50	Below 35	4.35*	1.22	0.00
	Between 35 and 50	2.27	1.16	0.16

Table 9: Educational qualification wise analysis based on one way ANOVA

<i>Common perception scores</i>	<i>Sum of squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Between groups	38.25	2	19.13	0.60	0.55
Within groups	4382.29	137	31.99		
Total	4420.54	139			

DISCUSSION

The main findings reveal that the majority of parent members viewed the functioning level of government rural upper primary schools at a moderate level, which contradicts the study result of Nishimura et al. (2009) but agrees with the result of Meier and Lemmer (2015). According to Radhika (2019), the main causes of the poor functioning of schools and the reasons why they fall short of parents' expectations include a lack of infrastructure, inadequate teachers, and unsatisfactory teaching and learning resources in the majority of rural schools. In this study, it was found that the government rural upper primary schools were strong in their teachers' teaching and students' learning components, and this result matched with the findings of Haller and Novita (2021). Nowadays, females prefer the teaching profession at school level and, mostly, they prefer to work in urban areas for many reasons. Rural areas are not attractive to them, and therefore many schools in rural areas are suffering from a shortage of teachers. In particular, head teachers have to take dual roles and face many challenges (du Plessis 2014). Further, the study findings of Seo et al. (2022) reveal that rural schools reported more incidents of school violence than urban schools. The present study result also reveals that the school administration and safety measures were weak according to the perception of rural parents, and this result is similar to the findings of Walker et al. (2010) and Diaz-Vicario and Sallan (2017). Furthermore, there is a considerable disparity in judgments of the functioning levels of government upper primary schools between male and female parents. Also, there is a substantial variation between the perceptions of parents with different age groups and those of parent members with varied educational levels, which is coincidental with the result of a study conducted by Soliman et al. (2018).

CONCLUSION

The functional performance levels of government rural upper primary schools were moderately good, according to rural parents whose children are pursuing school education at the government upper primary school level. They also believe that rural upper primary schools excel in teaching and student learning but fall short in school management and safety. According to the

parent perception score analysis report, there is a substantial variation in parents' perceptions of their gender and age, but not of their educational background. Many studies in the field of school education have discovered that parental involvement in school activities improves the functional quality of schools at all levels. When parents and the community participate in the functioning of rural schools, the educational outcomes improve. No student should be left out of the educational system. According to all government laws, everyone has the right to a good education. To comply with government policies, each school must operate efficiently and maintain the educational system's quality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

School infrastructure facilities, teacher resources and role of leadership determine the quality functioning of a school system. Most of the rural schools are not functioning with the needed and adequate academic facilities and hence lead to the poor academic performance of students. Functional efficiency of school has a strong relationship between the input academic resources and students' learning outcomes. National development depends on the development of rural areas and its educational status. Hence the government school authorities should concentrate on improving the school facilities, especially in rural primary and upper primary schools. Teachers are recruited with all of the necessary qualifications for the teaching profession in all government schools, including upper primary schools in remote areas. Further the school administrators must design strategies to engage parents and community members in school activities in order to increase student access and enrolment, particularly at the government primary school level. School heads may also receive assistance from parents and other community members by organising school management committee meetings at least once a month in order to improve the school's functioning performance and academic excellence.

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