

## IN PURSUIT OF EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS: FROM WESTERN PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

*This review paper begins by asking what makes few schools outstanding. What makes them successful? What have we learned from last two decades of studying School Effectiveness (SE)? To answer those questions, this paper attempts to identify the patterns and trends of Studying School effectiveness from western perspective. The main purpose of this review study was to understand and fix the criteria of assessing SE. A brief literature review was carried out to bring those factors that contribute SE. The focus is on the substantive findings that emerged from the review. Literature gives an insight that educationists have given more importance to enrolment, retention, and dropout rates, whereas many have viewed SE in terms of classroom pedagogy or teaching and learning, the content aspect etc. The large section of effectiveness studies have focused exclusively on students' cognitive outcomes in the areas such as reading, mathematics or public examination results. However, there is less evidence about the studies on school processes indicators that are important in determining the schools' success. The results from reviewed literature reveals that many SE factors, three broad key process indicators have found to be the most frequent ones, i.e. effective leadership of school heads, positive school culture and environment of teaching and learning. The critical perspective of previous literature are useful in understanding how this set of key variables as a whole defines the quality of schools at all levels. Finally, it provides few recommendations for policy development to bring about improvement.*

*Keywords: School Effectiveness, Leadership, Positive School Culture, Teaching-Learning Process.*

### INTRODUCTION

The growing interest of effective schools over the last two decades has produced a great amount of literature that describes the key features of effective schools, but conceptualizing "effectiveness" is complex. As Cameron and Whetten (1983) argue, the definitions, models and criteria of organizational effectiveness are so diverse that a single clear definition is impossible, as organizations may have multiple and often contradictory goals at different levels [4]. The closer view depicts that all schools are unique in their own ways, and many factors combine to make them what they are. In such conditions, stating that all schools work on a set pattern and fabricated with specific factors is neither easy nor correct. However, it is possible to identify a set of common characteristics like school culture, teachers' trust in head teacher or their own colleagues etc. [33] which may contribute to the effectiveness of schools.

With the aim of analyzing the key determinants of School Effectiveness (SE) in primary and secondary schools, Office of Standards in Education (OFSTED), (the UK based non-ministerial government department) commissioned the International School Effectiveness and Improvement Center (ISEIC) (Institute of Education, University of London), in 1994. This was mainly done to conduct a review on the existing literature of SE and to provide a better understanding of this notion. Moreover, for a better understanding, it is essential to subsume the connotations of SE.[18]

According to the web definition "Effective school" is both an educational movement and a body of research, which examines school-based factors, and which positively influence learning outcomes in schools. It may view the term under the umbrella of adjectives like "good, quality or successful schools". The sole notion of understanding this phenomenon is to answer the question

that “Why do some schools perform better while others do not?” “What differentiates an effective or successful school from other schools?” The genesis of these questions emerges from some gross root issues like how parents choose schools for their children and, perhaps more importantly, what we know about the characteristics of outstanding schools. This knowledge has broader implications for the school education system and society as a whole.

Thus, the situation demands a critical scrutiny of the notion of school effectiveness. In purview of this, the main purpose of this review study was to understand and fix the criteria of assessing school effectiveness in both elementary and secondary schools. This paper also includes a critical analysis of defining factors or indicators of school effectiveness, thereby examining their relevance for schools in India. Although a comprehensive, detailed and extensive review on school effectiveness already exist, the purpose here is to find the connecting cord between the different key determining factors of effective schools. Does viewing SE only from western perspective is appropriate or not? Rather than taking the position of recommendation, we leave it to the readers to decide, as the prevailing Indian notion of the concept is apparently different from what it is currently in the west. This paper represents a genuine attempt to provide important insights about the subject area to researchers, policy makers and all the stakeholders of school education who wish to improve in their spheres. It helps shed some light on the current pattern of assessing SE and ways to improve their effectiveness.

## **Method of Literature Search**

The literature search was based on the computerized search of the available previous database on the key determining factors that have been used to study school effectiveness. Keywords used for searching the database were characteristics of SE, or components of good schools, key characteristics of SE, and measures of SE etc. This was followed by a review of the main outcomes of previous researches. Finally, an attempt has been made to combine these outcomes into a more integrative framework of global key components of SE, offering

suggestions for further research. The searched literature highlights that there is a lack of empirical studies on school processes indicators. This paper reviews and discusses the key indicators of assessing SE terminology used in the International Global Leadership Literature. This paper follows the pattern of defining, measuring SE, key findings, research gaps and limitations, fixing the levels of assessing school effectiveness.

## ***Defining School Effectiveness***

Commonly, effective schools are similar to 'good' schools [27]. Based on this notion, the dictionary definition of effectiveness describes it as 'producing the intended results'. Thus, the good or effective schools are those which produce the intended results, or the performance of the organizational unit called 'school' [27]. While defining this term, Cheng (1996) views it as a concept often used in the literature of school management and improvement and often confused with school efficiency that means the capacity of a school to maximize its functions or the degree to which a school can perform school functions given a fixed amount of school input, whereas effectiveness can be described as the extent to which the desired level of outputs is achieved [8]. More precisely, effectiveness is a degree to which schools are successful in accomplishing their educational objectives or fulfilling their administrative, instructional, or service functions. Cheng (1993) has further elaborated this definition of effectiveness and efficiency, incorporating the dimensions of short-term output vs long-term outcomes [7].

In order to define effectiveness, it is important to explore the contributing components or indicators, which make a school effective, good or developed. It is clear that a school with an intake of children from good socio economic backgrounds will find it comparatively easy in getting them to learn than a school where all the children come from poor socio economic background. Scheerens (2000) found this question of SE interesting because he argues that schools differ in their performance. In continuation of this, the next question arises 'how much they differ?'. More specifically, how much schools differ in term of effectiveness when there

are similarities in terms of school management, funding pattern, rules-regulations, norms, policies, students' innate abilities and their socio-economic background. From the illustrations, it is viewed that SE is primarily an issue for individual schools. Thus, it is necessary to identify the factors or variables that enhance learning at all levels in all types of schools, irrespective of the background of teachers and children who attend them, and their abilities or the institutional arrangements.

### ***Measuring School Effectiveness***

Enormous researches have been conducted to formulate the criteria for assessing school effectiveness and most notably Coleman's report, published in 1966, forms the corner stone for school effectiveness studies. It has found little or no impact of teachers, schools and funding on student achievement, which means these indicators did not have any significant influence in causing differences in levels of achievement [10]. In this study, the inequality of educational opportunity was the central problem.

Another more specific perspective, accepted by most researchers as a starting point about school effectiveness is viewed from the perspective of schools in which students' progress further might be expected from consideration of its intake [25]. Related to this but further more focused is the view that growth in student achievement is the most appropriate criterion for assessing school effectiveness [34]. It reflects a standpoint of measuring school effectiveness through improvement in student achievement.

Other studies reject this stand and state that school effectiveness should not focus on mere academic achievement but also include other factors like classroom behavior, student participation rates, and attitudes towards learning [23],[25] or other outcome factors (e.g. satisfaction of teachers, efficient use of resources, innovativeness, socio-emotional growth of students, adaptability and goal accomplishment etc.) [4],[6],[12],[13].

Among many factors leading to SE, Ozgan & Toprak (2012) have mentioned classroom environment as one of

the most significant. According to them classroom effects constitutes the quality of classroom teaching-learning, teachers' characteristics, nature of teacher-student and student-student conflict resolution in class, learning habits and attitude towards learning [9]. In addition, how those factors are reflected on students' academic success and their social and cognitive attitudes play an important role in increasing the effectiveness of schools.

Creemers' book 'The Effective Classroom' elaborates on class context and quality of instruction and argues that the classroom is the most important place for achieving educational effectiveness [11]. Likewise, Cohen (1983) and Scheerens (1992) also note that school effectiveness is clearly dependent upon effective classroom teaching [9],[26]. Schlecty (2005) argues that all school programs that do not enhance student learning must be abandoned [29]. A school's first mission is to create safe and rich learning environments, to come up with good activities for students, and to wipe out obstacles to achieve these goals.

Researchers state that it is only in the last decade or so when the policy makers started focusing their attention on the possibilities for improving educational practices and pupil performance via more of systematic approaches to evaluation and accountability [20]. Recent researches go beyond the prevailing trend of analyzing the impact of schools, classroom processes and education on students' educational performance and move towards studying other factors those within schools, the identification of a reasonably consistent set of school characteristics that contribute to enhanced educational outcomes [32]. In the intervening years, the factors of SE researches, specifically in international context, have explored a cluster of indicators by focusing more on process aspects. They have made significant contributions to our understanding of the characteristics of successful schools.

Teddlie and Reynolds (2000) have identified nine key indicators which are being utilized by effective schools such as effective leadership, positive school culture, involving parents, effective teaching, developing and maintaining a persuasive focus on learning, creating high

and appropriate expectations for all (students & staff), emphasizing student responsibilities and rights, monitoring progress at all levels, developing staff skills at the school site. In the same line, Scheerens (2000) has also given a list of ten process indicators such as community involvement, financial & human resources, achievement oriented policy, educational leadership, continuity & consequences among teachers, orderly & safe climate, efficient use of time, opportunity to learn, evaluation of pupils progress and ratings of teaching qualities.

In order to understand SE, many researchers have also done researches on school failure, ineffective or failing schools. The characteristics of ineffective schools (like Lack of vision, unfocused leadership, dysfunctional staff relationship, ineffective classroom practices etc.) were found extremely related to the culture. Myers (1994, 1996) has speculated upon the 'deep culture' of ineffective schools and usefully explored the importance of their collected myths, which are seen as very pervasive, in addition to being very destructive and disempowering change. Myers further states the organizational problems of the school (an absence of 'effectiveness' characteristics and the presence of 'failure generating' characteristics) combine with the culture of the school and the relational patterns of staff together generate a three-dimensional block upon the possibilities of change [21]

## **Research Gaps and Limitations**

This review of above literature shows some research gaps and limitations, which are discussed as follows.

### ***Overemphasis of measuring SE via academic achievements***

The very first drawback of assessing school effectiveness has been found in previous researches which are mainly based on quantitative approaches. When schools are concerned, the measures used most often are standardized tests of the students' academic achievement in their subject matter (basic skills in reading and maths). This is because there is a dominant belief that the mastery of basic skills is an important component of effective schools. More precisely previous work had

limited its focus primarily on academic outcomes for a specific curriculum stage. However, it needs to be questioned that whether it is adequate to use the one criterion, typically students' academic achievement for ascertaining the true effectiveness status of any school. What of in situations where students are not performing at higher level, will that school not be effective? Or is student performance a necessary and sufficient condition for labeling a school effective or ineffective.

### ***Lack of empirical studies on school process indicators***

Secondly, a number of studies suggest that a large body of research has focused on classroom level practice, which is usually labeled as instructional effectiveness. From growing literature, the trend has shifted from univariate to multivariate aspects and has given more importance to the "process" aspect of SE than input correlates of school output. However, there is still a limited version of such empirical studies which views and assess SE from process indicators, and from those stakeholders' perspective who are stable entities of the organization.

### ***Small number of outlier schools***

Thirdly, for determining the characteristics of effective schools, many of the researchers have conducted their studies on a small number of outlier schools, which are either highly effective or highly ineffective.

### ***Multidimensional and multilevel construct***

After reviewing the SE indicators given in Appendix 1, it reveals that in the process of churning out the best key indicators of SE, researchers have clubbed all of them together without considering their multilayered characteristics. As all the below given factors are influenced by the stakeholders of the schools. Thus these may be used at several administrative levels or contexts, by national educational policymakers, by administrators at local level, by principals or head teachers at school level and even by teachers at the classroom level. Apart from this, it would also be difficult to find their causality aspect. For instance, it is hard to say whether a variable like "high expectations of pupils' progress" is to be seen as cause or effect of high achievement, when we have not experimentally manipulated the expectations variable.

## Lack of theoretical establishment

Without a theoretical model as a guide to further interpret school effectiveness and select criteria to assess it, it is difficult to determine whether one school is effective or not. Previous researches have also not given proper consideration in linking the theoretical models with the assessing indicators of SE, along with multiple stakeholders' perspective approach.

## Fixing the Levels of Assessing SE

After reviewing the school effectiveness researches, it has been clear that the defining construct of SE and its key components are multidimensional and multilayered. Thus, for anyone who wants to study this phenomenon, it becomes important to know that 'school effectiveness is for whom?' and for 'who's perspective? Before going into the field and tapping its nuances, it becomes essential to fix the levels and perspectives, so that it will be easy to define and understand this phenomenon. Thus, to answer these queries researcher has proposed a schematic diagram to fix the level/s. Figure 1 clearly shows that school effectiveness may be viewed from various organizational levels through different indicators and models from different or multiple stakeholders' perspective. The moment we change the levels of models, indicators or stakeholders' perspective, the defining indicators will be changed automatically. For example, if one needs to study the variables like leadership, communication patterns, school ethos, teachers' satisfaction etc. as contributing components of school success, then all these come under the process indicator, dealing with

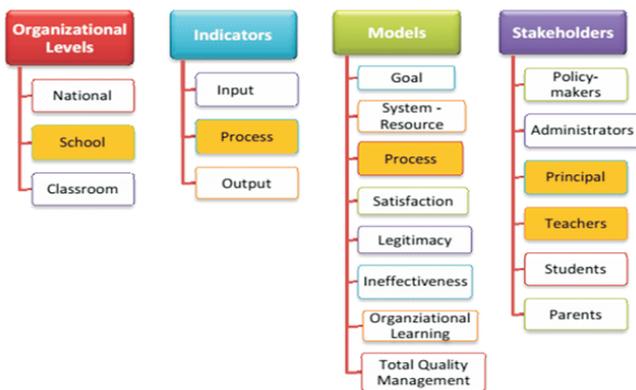


Figure 1. Schematic Diagram to fix the levels of School Effectiveness

process model (which conceptualize that if the internal functioning of the school is smooth and healthy, the organization is effective). It may be studied at school level from the different perspectives of the most stable entities (i.e principals and teachers) of the school organization.

## Major Findings

The results of these researches has converged many factors of SE, which could be shown in Appendix 1. After analyzing those evident indicators, three broad characteristics have been found to be very frequently appearing i.e 'effective leadership of school leaders or head teachers', whose primary concern is on establishing a culture of learning throughout the school. According to Mott (1972) "Among the many variables used to predict and understand organizational effectiveness leadership is central [17]." In a study conducted by Iordanides, Lazaridou, & Babaliki (2011) they have found that principal is the key motivating person, who could improve school effectiveness most by engaging others in activities that develop a good climate and ensure that appropriate resources are available for instruction [14]. The principal, with the support of his/her colleagues, simplifies the school policies and articulates school goals in a positive manner for overall improvement. Thus, in order to move schools from a state of dis-functionality to that of effectiveness, leadership within the school has to be effective.

The second evident indicator is 'Positive school culture', which is interlinked and interconnected with leadership [7]. Schein (1985) contends that the most important function of a leader is the creation and molding of organizational cultures [28]. They encourage autonomy and assist in creating such an organizational culture, which results in both leader and follower being elevated to a higher level of motivation and morality [2]. Cameron & Ettington (1988) state that culture has a powerful effect on the performance and long-term effectiveness of organizations [5]. Quality cultures are conducive to enhancing work environments and may have a positive impact with areas such as worker satisfaction, communication, effectiveness, innovation and creativity in the organizations [28]. In this kind of cultural setup, school provides a physical and social setting that is safe,

well organized and caring. In addition, school members follow good practices to ensure that teaching and learning becomes enjoyable for both the students and teachers. However, for maintaining this status quo, it becomes imperative that teachers are equipped with the right skills and training.

The very third factor of SE is the 'Environment of teaching and learning' around which other supportive factors revolve and contribute to its significance. Effective schools always ensure that teaching and learning takes place and they set high expectations for student learning, whether in classrooms or other learning contexts. They also recognize and celebrate their successful learning and high achievement. Further effective leadership is always credited for ensuring that these occur. Thus, head teachers or principals need to develop their leadership abilities in such a manner that may facilitate teachers' job commitment, helps to develop a culture of teaching and learning, and set high standards of education. Leadership abilities to establish a culture of teaching and learning, improving and maintaining high standards of education, coping with limited resources, and ensuring more accountability to the community they serve are critical [15]. In this regard, principals' leadership is accountable for school effectiveness and quality education provision[31].

## Conclusion

These findings led to some broad conclusions like, school effectiveness is not one factor; it is a contribution of many factors at different levels of school organization. Thus, one may say that SE is a multilevel, multi-context, multifaceted, and multi-model phenomenon, which may vary in their definitions by different stakeholders' perspective. Out of many indicators, three have found to be the most repetitive one i.e. school leadership, culture and teaching-learning process. Researches also show that a school leader has to create common values, shared rules and agreed-upon strategies while increasing the effectiveness of a school. From the researches, the conclusion is drawn that the leadership position of school heads plays a prominent role in shaping and sustaining school cultures that promote effective teaching and

learning. Therefore, as to achieve this end, all members of the school community have to believe in change and strive for excellence in that community. Last but not the least, school effectiveness is a long drawn process which starts with small steps, each of which needs to be taken vigilantly.

## Recommendations and Implications

The findings of the study bear implications as given below for policy and practice specifically in the context of elementary and secondary schools. What is now needed is a serious consideration of how this understanding may be meaningfully applied to improve the Principals' leadership behavior and teachers' working lives.

- As better infrastructure, teaching-learning aids and up-to date curricula by themselves may not lead to better learning. Hence, for better learning outcomes, schools need head teachers who provide effective leadership along with committed teachers who care about the quality of education.
- For effective leadership, principals need impressive skills and cultural practices that are required in our diverse school environments.
- As effective leadership plays a major role in the effective functioning of the school, to enhance the leadership skills, special in service training programmes should be organized.
- There is a need to build a school system that encourages collaboration and create a positive culture for learning with high expectations.
- An emphasis on the students' social and affective as well as cognitive outcomes are necessary to obtain an all round picture of effectiveness.
- Principals and teachers need to share a clear and focused set of school goals, with more successful improvement initiatives in the schools.
- Essentially, schools need to encourage institutional self-evaluation process.
- It is also important for good schools to celebrate its school achievements and regularize those successful practices as a cultural outcome.

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## Appendix – 1: School Effectiveness Indicators

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | School ethos  |
|  | Effective classroom management                            |
|  | High teacher expectations                                 |
| Rutter et al. (1979)                                     | Teachers as positive role models                          |
|  | Positive feedback and treatment of students               |
|  | Good working conditions for all                           |
|  | Students given responsibility                             |
|  | Shared staff-student activities                           |
|  | Purposeful Leadership by Head                             |
|  | Involvement of deputy head                                |
|  | Involvement of teachers                                   |
| Mortimore, P., Sammons, et al. (1988)                    | Consistency among Teachers                                |
|  | Structured sessions                                       |
|  | Intellectually challenging                                |
|  | Work-centered environment                                 |
|  | Limited focus in sessions                                 |
|  | Student-Teacher Communication                             |
|  | Parental involvement                                      |
|  | Record keeping  |
|  | Positive climate  |
| Smith & Tomlinson (1990) In Brighouse & Tomlinson (1991) | Effective leadership and management                       |
|  | Teacher involvement in decision-making;                   |
|  | Climate of respect between all participants;              |
|  | Positive feedback and treatment of students               |
|  | Leadership at all levels                                  |
|  | Management and organization                               |
|  | Collective self-review                                    |
| Brighouse & Tomlinson (1991)                             | Staff development   |
|  | Environment/building/uplifting ethos                      |
|  | Teaching and learning                                     |
|  | Parental involvement                                      |
|  | Professional leadership                                   |
|  | Shared vision and goals                                   |
|  | Learning Environment                                      |
|  | A learning organization                                   |
|  | Concentration on teaching and learning                    |
| Sammons, P. (1999)                                       | Purposeful teaching                                       |
|  | High expectations   |
|  | Positive reinforcement                                    |
|  | Monitoring Progress                                       |
|  | Pupil right and Responsibilities                          |
|  | Home-school partnership                                   |
|  | Community involvement                                     |
|  | Financial and human resources                             |
|  | Achievement Oriented Policy                               |
|  | Educational Leadership                                    |
|  | Continuity and consequences among teachers                |
| Scheerens, J. (2000)                                     | Orderly and Safe Climate                                  |
|  | Efficient use of time                                     |
|  | Opportunity to learn                                      |
|  | Evaluation of pupils progress                             |
|  | Ratings of teaching Qualities                             |
|  | Effective leadership                                      |
|  | Effective teaching  |
|  | Parents Involvement                                       |
|  | Developing and maintaining a persuasive focus on learning |
| Teddlie & Reynolds (2000)                                | Creating high expectations for all                        |
|  | Emphasizing student responsibilities and rights           |
|  | Monitoring progress at all levels                         |
|  | Developing staff skills at the school site                |
|  | Producing a positive school culture                       |

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