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Factors of Success for Family-owned Schools: A Qualitative Study based on the Perceptions of Principals and Teachers

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Abstract



The research study was conducted in three family-owned schools in Karachi, Pakistan. These schools were set up after the country's independence 75 years ago and began with less than 50 students on the students' roll. Today they each have approximately 2000 students and few branches across the city. The question of what makes them successful and thriving today has been researched using the qualitative method and a case study approach. The participants included principals and teachers of the schools and were interviewed using self-developed semi-structured protocols. The principals were interviewed individually and three group interviews comprising five to seven teachers each were conducted. Interviews were transcribed and data analyzed, and ten themes for the success of family-owned schools were identified. The principals perceived teachers as an important factor whereas the teachers focused more on students' holistic development through curricular and co-curricular activities. Student results, and legacy of the school were identified. The extent of how far principals and teachers have similar perceptions are discussed. Recommendations reflect the need to include more participants from amongst the senior administrative staff to identify factors that reflect those related to family ownership.

Keywords: Family-owned Schools, Factors of Success, Perceptions of Principals, Perceptions of Teachers

Introduction

After the independence of Pakistan in 1947 there was a dire need for more schools in the new country and certain philanthropists took on the challenge of opening schools, even in their own houses. Some schools continued to grow and flourish as family ventures, where family members took an active part in the management of the school. Over the seven decades these schools increased in size and become well known for their contribution in educating thousands of children at a low fee. The success story of the schools captured the attention of the researchers and a research study was designed as a case study of family-owned schools. As employees of family-owned educational institutions and years of experience working at administrative positions, the researchers wanted to identify the reasons for the success of such institutions, particularly schools. There was no research study found on this topic. The lack of available research on family-owned schools was a challenge for the researchers. However, there was sufficient literature on the success of schools and on family-owned businesses for the researchers to explore. This, when combined, was used as the base for discussing the findings. This study will contribute to identifying factors that contribute to the success of family-owned schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the success of family-owned schools and to differentiate between the perception of the principals and teachers concerning the success of these schools in Karachi, Pakistan.

Research Objectives

The following were the research objectives for the study:

1. Evaluate the success of family-owned schools.
2. Differentiate between the perceptions of principals and teachers concerning the factors of success for family-owned schools.

Research Questions

The research questions were as follows:

1. In what ways are family-owned schools successful?
2. What is the difference in the perceptions of principals and teachers about the factors of success for family-owned schools?

Literature Review

Knowledge and education are basic tools human beings have developed since the world began. These twin variables present the key to the development and progress of any society and this realization made governments and people invest extensively in education in order to broaden the knowledge base and improve the well-being of the human race. The concept of a family being involved in promoting education emerged as a result of them operating as business firms.

The basic aim of a firm is to generate value, and value creation, which refers to resources being turned into a valued asset to drive profitability in the industry. Business firms are driven to create value in the long term and family-owned businesses accomplish this through sustainability. Olatunbosun and Onuoha (2020) opine that a concrete plan for business and leadership continuity is important for succession in a family business. Onuoha, (2013) refers to the importance of this characteristic as it allows family members to participate in the operational activities of the business from generation to generation. Succession planning is a leadership process that identifies, develops, and enhances sound leadership attributes in the successor to equip them with abilities such as an effective blend of hard and soft skills essential to successfully lead the enterprise into the future. It is vital for the successors to assume leadership responsibilities when the incumbent leadership retires or becomes obsolete (Garg & Weele, 2012; Mhlongo & Harunavamwe, 2017; Onuoha, 2013). In the situation of a lack of succession planning, Bilson (2020) through his study on family-owned schools recommends the need to hire professionals to assist in the process.

Furthermore, Poza (2013) writes that establishing, administering, developing, and regulating family businesses in a global economy necessitates a set of skills, competencies, and practices that support resilience and continuation. Family-owned businesses are widely recognized as a legal entity operating in an economic sector and outliving at least two generations. According to Ahmed, Umrani et al (2018), family companies thrive in many industrialized and emerging countries around the world. These organizations play an important role in the socio-economic growth of countries such as the United States of America, Italy, and India and remain relevant for the future based on present developments (Akanazu 2020). In Pakistan there is a rising trend where many schools, college and universities are private family-owned businesses (Ahmed et al 2018). According to Reilly (2017), family businesses influence the profile of most countries by providing significant contribution to wealth development, job creation, and competitiveness (Westhead & Cowling, 1998) and are the most common type of business around the world (Bird, 2003).

With reference to the success of family-owned businesses, Mhlongo & Harunavamwe (2017) identify some factors like vigilance of the owners, relationships of the family members, a sound succession plan and the training of human resources. Other researchers on family-owned businesses also refer to similar factors, but with reference to the field of education there is little available research. Tamrat (2018) conducted a research study in Africa on family-owned higher education institutions and discovered that most of them provide vocational education and are generally small in size with a business orientation of making profits. However, there are established family-owned businesses that focus on improving the quality of education and establish educational institutions as a philanthropic venture, there are others that begin with the efforts of a single founder and soon family members get involved to assist the founder, making it a family-owned venture.

The purpose of the study was to identify factors of success related to schools owned by families, but as there is no available research on this topic, research on schools irrespective of the ownership orientation have provided a base. According to Russell (2009) the four core factors for school success are communication, observation, relationship and expectations. This provides a base to enhancing the teaching and learning processes and producing positive attitudes and behaviors, which contribute to the success of the school (Eshun, 2019).

Due to limitation of sufficient available literature on the topic, a conceptual framework is provided below depicting the characteristics of family-owned businesses and factors for successful schools. The following diagram is self-explanatory.

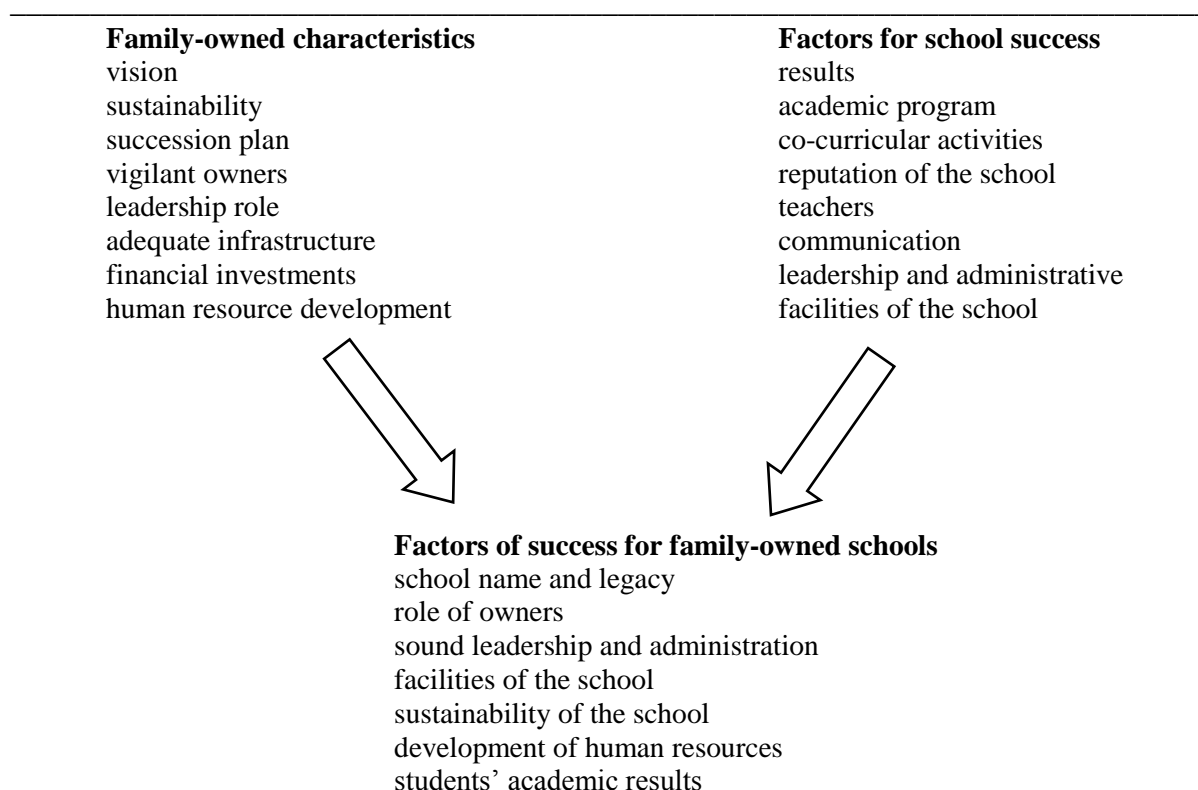


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Factors of Success for Family-owned Schools

Research Design

An interpretivist paradigm leading to a qualitative methodology was adopted for the study as it enabled the researchers to identify the factors of successful family-owned schools. Saunderson's Research Onion Model was used as a framework (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019) to guide the choice of the research design. The research onion is made up of six steps and as onions are generally peeled starting with the outer layer, the Research Onion Model requires researchers to first identify the underlying philosophical paradigm as depicted in the outer layer. This is followed by the research approach, method, strategy, time horizon, and techniques for data collection and analysis (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). The selection made for each step by the researchers is given as follows:

1. Interpretivism
2. Inductive approach
3. Qualitative methodology
4. Case study
5. Cross-sectional
6. Semi -structured interviews and data analysed thematically

Population

The population was family-owned schools in Karachi, Pakistan where the selection of schools was bounded and defined by parameters (Creswell, 2012). These were as follows:

1. The schools were established within a decade of the establishment of the country by one person or a team of family members.
2. Currently the schools are run by the successors of the founders.
3. The schools have at least 2000 students on roll currently.
4. Low fee structure with the purpose of making education affordable for children from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Sample

The sample selected were three family-owned private schools through the purposive sampling technique (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Three school principals and eighteen teaching staff members randomly selected were the participants for the study.

Data Collection and Analysis Techniques

Semi-structured interviews were used with protocol questions designed by the researchers. The principals were interviewed individually and focussed group interviews were conducted for teachers

from each of the schools. Interviews were conducted in the school premises and were audio recorded. They were transcribed and analyzed manually and the data was organized into themes.

Findings and Discussion

The following themes emerged as the factors for success of the family-owned schools and are discussed with reference to the available literature.

Factors of Success

1. The teachers

The principals expressed their opinion that the teachers were an asset of the school. Investing in the teachers' professional development was of utmost importance with coordination meetings and workshops held periodically. As one principal said, "I would say, the teachers. I think our teachers play a very important role in the development of a child. My teachers go for training and develop themselves professionally." The principal of another school added that since the school often hired fresh, untrained teachers, it became imperative for the school to train them.

Principals explained that senior most teachers in terms of service in the school were a great asset, and one principal said, "We have teachers who have been working here since 40, even 45 years. They are experienced and well versed in their subjects." Another principal explained it further by saying that experienced teachers meant that students did not need extra tuition, implying that this saved parents from spending on after school tuition fees.

Most teachers did not mention themselves as a factor of success; however, one teacher did say, "The faculty is well qualified and experienced." A junior school teacher from another school referred to pedagogy used by teachers as important when she said, "The way we teachers teach and the methodology we use is according to the students' age level." Another teacher said, "When a teacher has a command over the subject, she can explain very well." Some teachers even mentioned that it was important for them to motivate students to study.

Principals viewed teachers as an important factor for the success of the school and spoke about how professional development helped them improve their teaching skills. However, teacher participants did not praise themselves and the few who focused on teachers as a factor spoke about the pedagogy used by them and their sound content knowledge of the subject they teach. This is proven by research studies on family-owned business where Munagapati and Rao (2018) write that training of employees is important for the success of the business. Brighouse and Tomlison (1991), and Bowden et al (2021) also elucidate the importance of training teachers for the success of the school.

2. School vision and mission

Principals acknowledged the accomplishment of the school vision and mission as important for the success of the school by referring to certain words in the vision and mission statements. One principal said, "I feel that the school was started basically for providing education to all people of society rather than discriminating between the rich and poor. It continues to do this." The other two principals also made similar references to the vision and mission of the school. One said that the school made sure that holistic education was provided to its students; and the other spoke of the school ensuring that students were prepared as an asset for the country as capable citizens and workers. Holistic education and education for making students useful citizens were in the respective mission statements of the schools.

The teachers, however, did not refer to the vision and mission of the school except for one teacher, who said, "I measure success in two ways. The first is whether the school is fulfilling its mission statement ... The mission and vision of the school is for its students to do well and we have 100% good results." A few teachers did refer to holistic education but with reference to co-curricular activities.

Principals were conscious of the vision and mission of the school and spoke about upholding it as a factor for ensuring the success of the school. They realized that their role as head of the school meant that they upheld vision and mission of the school they served giving it credibility. Basco (2017) writes on the importance of the goals for the success of a family firm. Brighouse and Tomlison (1991) and Good and Shaw (2021) believe that the school vision is important for success. The importance of the vision and mission of a school is significant and principals as administrative staff members have focused on it as a factor of success.

3. Students' results

The three principals were in agreement about the importance of results for evaluating the success of the school. One principal said, "Yes, grades do matter. Those students who get high grades do get into good universities." Another expressed the view that the success of the school could only be measured by their students' success as the students were the reason for the existence of the school.

Teachers did not just focus much on the terms 'grades' and 'results', but referred to how it was important for students to achieve the purpose of education, which they referred to as holistic development of the students and they believed that it would help students get good jobs in the future.

Principals consider the importance of results and grades as a factor for the success of their schools and teachers focused on curricular and co-curricular activities that ensure student's holistic development. Brighouse and Tomlison (1991) write that student's results reflect the success of the school. High academic achievements give the schools a good reputation and students' results are important for family-owned schools too as school principals have mentioned them as a factor of success (Brighouse, & Tomlison, 1991; Bowden, Tickle, & Naumann, 2021; Good, & Shaw, 2021).

4. Academics

"We have got a very strong curriculum" was a statement made by one of the principals concerning the academic work in the school. The school offered two different board examinations for the students of Classes 9 and 10. Using the school curriculum of the board ensured that the students developed their critical skills till Class 8, which was practiced in that school. Students were then bifurcated from Class 9 into different sections for the two examination boards as there were some students who wanted to give exams that were less challenging. Thus, the curriculum till Class 8 resulted in a strong curriculum for all students. The other principals also mentioned the importance of academics in terms of having a sound curriculum.

The teachers spoke about academics and its importance in developing students intellectually. They mentioned curricular activities like project-based learning and discussions in the classrooms that helped in developing confidence, team work and other skills. In addition, they expressed the view that the holistic development of the students through different curricular and co-curricular activities was important and when students did well in their studies, they brought honor to the school.

A sound curriculum is an important factor for the success of schools. According to the principals and teachers in this study, curriculum was not just the syllabus, but all those related activities that made teaching and learning effective and were a part of having a comprehensive curriculum. This factor is in keeping with the research studies by Brighouse and Tomlison (1991), Garcia-Jimenez, Torres-Gordillo, and Rodriguez-Santero (2022), and Khattak (2012).

5. Co-curricular activities

Co-curricular activities were important for students' holistic development and was mentioned by both principals and teachers as a factor for the success of the school. The principals credited co-curricular activities as a means to students taking part in various national and international competitions. When students won at these competitions, the name of the school was held in high repute. The principals acknowledged the importance of such activities in making students confident and in their skill development. One principal spoke about developing students' leadership skills through a program known as The Leader in Me. So, it was evident that such training was also being organized in schools.

Teachers did not speak much about co-curricular activities, except for a few who were evidently involved as sports teachers. They claimed that winning at sports tournaments brought great honor to the school. Also, the language teachers spoke about the importance of debates, speeches and elocutions in making students more confident and when students won at these competitions, the school was held in high repute.

Both principals and teachers spoke about the importance of co-curricular activities which helped in developing skills and behaviors in students, which would help them as adults. In addition, when students represented the schools and won in the different competitions, it brought fame to the school.

It was evident that co-curricular activities were appreciated by the participants as a factor of success for schools and the finding is supported in the research studies conducted by Khan and Iqbal (2014) on students doing well in various competitions and bringing fame for the school; Mehmood et

al (2012) on the development of student's personality; and Jackson (2022) in getting good jobs in the future.

6. Students' discipline

The principals did not speak about discipline as an important factor for the schools' success. However, the principal of one particular school, known for its discipline, did speak about the students being well-ordered and that as a policy the school was very particular about ensuring this. It was also claimed that the sports activities in schools helped develop this trait in students. Another principal also spoke about discipline in terms of how proud she was of her students who were very organized and disciplined, particularly when they represented their school at various events and competitions. Teachers did not mention discipline as a factor for the success of schools.

The principals perceived discipline of its students as an important factor that gives their school a reputation, once again proving the importance of maintaining a good name for the school. However, a search of the literature identifies discipline as a means of improved academic results that improves the reputation of the school (Mishra, 2020).

7. Facilities in school

Facilities provided by the school was discussed as a factor for success. It was evident from the responses of the teachers of one school, that recently there were some improvements in the facilities by providing new and separate laboratories for each of the science disciplines, and that some ground in front of the school was purchased for sports activities. The principal and the sports teacher of another school spoke of the vast grounds being used for sports activities. They were quite proud that the school offered such facilities and that potential parents of the school considered it an important factor when seeking admission for their children.

The facilities of the school were spoken with reference to other factors. The science labs and sports ground were investments recently made by the owners of the school and the participants from that school perceived it as a factor that contributes to the good reputation of the school. For the other school, the sports ground had been a factor of success since the establishment of the school and the accomplishments of its students in sports further proved that providing good facilities in the school enhances the reputation of the school.

Having just experienced a pandemic and the need to adapt to teaching and learning through the use of technology had required schools to provide teachers with laptops and faster internet services. One principal said, "Our consistent efforts in upgrading ourselves with modern technologies started before, but has accelerated with COVID. We changed many things in our curriculum as we incorporated technology and this is what the parents have appreciated." The teachers referred to the support given by the school administration in training them in ICT skills. This is visible in the research studies by Noor, Isa, and Mazhar (2020) and Pozo-Rico et al (2020). As a factor, facilities related to better use of technology has helped to showcase schools as being adaptive and focussed about ensuring that the education of its students does not come to a halt.

Appropriate and improved facilities are considered an important factor by both principals and teachers and supports the views of Barrett et al (2019) and Scheerens (2000). In addition, it is a means to provide a better learning environment for the students (Barrett et al, 2019), which parents appreciate and potential parents are encouraged to seek admissions for their children in the school.

8. Legacy of the school

All three schools were established over 60 years ago and have a legacy of being well-known and effective in providing education to many students over the years and in catering to a large number of students each year. One principal said, while explaining why the school did not lack admission, "... it's word of mouth because people have something nice to say about the school." while explaining why families over many generations have studied in the school. Another principal remarked, that school values were transferred in students, which ensured that the legacy of the school continued. The third principal said that 75% of the admissions were because of the name and reputation of the school.

At least one teacher from each school spoke about the legacy in terms of generations of students studying in the school and as one teacher, who was quite senior in years, remarked, "We have the grandchildren from the first batch of students taught admitted in this school. This gives us an edge."

The three schools were all established over 60 years ago and have grown in size and number. They have a good reputation, which is a part of their legacy. Literature on the legacy of schools

depicts various characteristics, but literature on family-owned schools is mostly with reference to succession. As Chang et al (2020) write that strategic succession planning is important for the continuation of the family business, and therefore for passing on the legacy. Wambugu, (2020) express a similar meaning, but with reference to improvement in performance of the school, which is a legacy. The perceptions of the principals and teachers are with reference to the reputation of the school that exists for various reasons. They did not speak about any succession planning.

9. Administrative structure of the school

The administrative structure of the school is an important factor, but only the principals spoke about it. Principals of all three schools spoke about a department of the school that operates from the head office under a CEO or director of education as significant for the success of the school. The principals explained how such a department monitors, supervises, and evaluates curricular, co-curricular and administrative work of the school and at the same time ensures that the different campuses of the school are at par with each other.

The role of the head office staff was also mentioned by a few teachers with brief references made about certain personnel who periodically visited the school to guide and monitor the work that is done in schools.

A strong administrative structure is an asset for any school, mainly in coordinating and supervising the work of the different branches keeping them at par with each other. Literature also proves that the leadership role of administrative team is of vital importance for the school (Farchi, & Tubin, 2019), particularly for the principal (Gu, Sammons, & Chen, 2018). Principals viewed the head office role as a help in maintaining school standards.

10. The role of the owners

The role of the owners as a factor was mentioned by the principals but not by teachers. Owners worked for the school as directors or as authorized by the governing body to mentor the principal and look into the progress of the school. The principals explained how the owners motivated and encouraged them. If a new idea was suggested, as one principal explained, the owners at the monthly meetings would not immediately agree to it, instead they would play devil's advocate with the proposal before it would be sanctioned. In this way they made sure that the plan was foolproof and would be implemented with every success. The teachers did not speak about the owners at all.

The role of the owners in the family business is of great significance in the success of a business. The founders were actively involved in establishing their schools and continued to work till they were quite old and ready to retire when they finally handed the baton to the next generation. This view was formulated from the research of historical documents and videos on the websites when selecting the schools for this study. Research in family-owned schools explains the importance of succession planning and the need for the next generation of owners to play their part in the continuity of the venture. In a research study by Bilson (2020), the lack of succession planning had an adverse effect on the future direction that family-owned schools took. Lack of succession planning did not seem the case with all three schools as they were successful and well-known and apparently the principals expressed praise for their support.

Conclusion

This study identifies ten factors for the success of family-owned school. As an answer to the question on whether family-owned schools are successful, it is evident they are and the participants identified reasons for why they believed it to be so. The principals and teachers agreed on those factors related to the teaching learning process. They agreed on the importance of having a sound curriculum with co-curricular activities. They also had similar views about the results and reputation of the school. However, their views differed regarding certain characteristics applicable to family-ownership, which were mentioned by the principals. These were role of the owners, vision and mission of the school and the legacy of the school. This is most probably because these factors are not relevant to the teachers' scope of work. According to Babin et al (2017), research on family-owned businesses is unique because the family owning the venture shapes its identity. The perceptions of the different stakeholders, like the employees, consumers, suppliers, further enhance the uniqueness as each one perceives it differently. As a study, the perceptions of principals and teachers are similar in relation to academic work, yet different according to the administrative role that principals play in a family-owned schools.

Recommendations

1. For owners and potential owners of family-owned schools, it is recommended that they consider the factors that are identified by the participants. Underlying implications of the importance of the teaching and learning processes should be considered since they are the reason for the existence of a school. Investments in teacher development is of great significance in the success of the school.
2. For senior management and administration personnel, it is essential to consider the importance of the teachers' role in the success of the school and to do everything within their power to develop and train them. Also, school curricular and co-curricular activities are equally important for the holistic development of the students and should be kept in mind when planning the school year.
3. For teachers it is equally important for them to remember their role in the holistic development of their students and to uphold the legacy and reputation of the school in all their endeavors.
4. For potential researchers on this topic, it is recommended that administrative and senior management staff be included as participants when researching on family-owned schools as it could provide a better insight into the dynamics of understanding family ownership of schools.

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