

# TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS IN IRAN, AS COMPARED WITH THE CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND

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## ABSTRACT

*In this paper, the teachers' perception of the effective school will be presented. The purpose is to identify factors which influence on pupils' cognitive and non-cognitive achievement. The factors indicating effectiveness include: Curriculum, decision making, resources, outcomes, leadership, and climat. The finding have shown that the more the effectiveness indicators are true about the schools, the more effective they are, and vice versa. Besides, it has been found out that effectiveness indicators are the same in centralized educational system of Iran as compared to decentralized education system of England.*

## Introduction

Research into school effectiveness has provided an empirical basis for improvement studies and activities which have attempted to translate the characteristics of school effectiveness that have been identified into practical change in schools. As school effectiveness studies have come to be regarded as reliable under prinnings for changes in policy and practice, they should be given ample consideration, especially with reference to

centralised educational systems such as Iran, which have profound differences with the educational systems of UK and USA, where the effectiveness research initially has been started and developed.

This study is aimed at identifying the characteristics of effective schools in Iran, based on the effective studies of decentralized systems, particularly England, according to the Iranian teachers' perceptions, as well as some comparisons in this regard.

## Literature Review

The literature contains a tremendous amount of research findings and reviews of the studies and characteristics of effective school. In spite of great ambiguity about 'effectiveness' and its meaning in its early stages of research some 15 years ago, now a clear cut concept is in front of us with some definite and valid findings, although they are stated, summarised and/or grouped in different ways or even with different terms.

School effectiveness is referred to as a high correlation between what the school has set out to do and what it actually has accomplished (Madaus et al, 1980); in other words the correlation between the school's objectives and its achievements. School objectives are not generally agreed upon because of the variation from one school to another, but still some generalisation is possible. All schools' achievements can be grouped around cognitive and affective (social, moral or developmental) goals, although the assessment of the second group of goals has been neglected in most of the effective researches because of the difficulty in relation to the assessment of cognitive goals which is done rather simply by the scores on standardised achievement tests (Purkey, S. & Smith, M. S., 1983). These two broad goals are channelled in different orientations such as the distributive function, the provision of basic skills, custodial function, the discipline of knowledge function; or intellectual, moral, cultural and aesthetic, social, physical and vocational (Holmes and Wynne, 1989). The last set of broad goals and the functions, regardless of different statements of them in various writings, are generally expected from the schools.

Although schools generally function in more or less similar ways around some similar goals, they can be very different in other ways. Teachers in one school may differ in regard to intellectual, attitudinal, personality and experimental variables to the teachers in another school (Madaus et al, 1980). Students can be different from each other in their motivations,

needs, socio-economic backgrounds, attitudes, etc. Facilities, climate, leadership, priorities, community relations can differ from one school to another, too. These differentials which cause various interactions among the individuals involved in schools, as social organisations, lead to different outcomes or, in other words, 'effectiveness'. So the effectiveness of school is different.

Until nearly two decades ago the research findings claimed that schools have little influence on the child's achievements that is independent of his background and general social context (Coleman et al, 1966, and Jenks et al, 1972); students' ability is largely inherited and 80% of intelligence is genetically determined (Jensen, 1969); school achievement is more related to social class and background factors than to school resources, facilities and programs (Havighurst, 1962); schooling has relatively much less effect than is claimed in fostering pupils' achievements (Levin and Bone, 1975). But in the light of further researches, particularly during the last decade, it is clear today that:

1. Schools make much more contribution to students' achievements than do their background characteristics, sex and age (Gamble, 1987; Reynolds, 1982; Mortimore et al, 1988).
2. School membership makes a significant contribution to the explanation of students' attainments and progress in cognitive and non-cognitive behaviour (Mortimore et al, 1988; Oakes, 1985; Cuttance, 1985).
3. Students' performance in school and their decision on what to do in the future is heavily mediated through the instructional curricula and environmental resources they meet in schools, so there is little evidence of a direct biosocial bias in the education (Murphy & Hallinger, 1989; Mortimore et al, 1988).
4. Both schools and students' backgrounds have an effect on students' attainments, but the latter is far greater (Mortimore et al, 1988).
5. Schools with different effectiveness have different effects on pupils (Madaus et al,

1980; Mortimore et al, 1986).

6. Students' variation in performance is the result of pupil learning variables and school effectiveness: performance = f (pupil learning variable + school effectiveness) (Gamble, 1987).

So the schools have great effects on students' cognitive and non-cognitive achievements, and they vary in their effectiveness. What schools, then, have more effect on students' achievements? In other words, what are the characteristics of effective schools?

Excellent writings appear in the literature relating to the characteristics of effective school, from short-term or narrow-based research and analytical writings, to the long-run and vast research-based studies like the London Junior School Project (Hagedorn, 1988). Using the findings of the researches, the following, clustered in seven dimensions or sub-groups as used by Caldwell & Spinks (1988) in stating characteristics of effective schools, are the points about effective schools which appear most frequently in the literature.

### **Curriculum**

Effective schools have clearly defined official goals, agreed upon by the principal and teachers (Rosenholtz, 1985) and associated objectives translated into classroom practice, implemented monitored and coherent curriculum well planned to meet the needs of pupils (HMI, 1988).

### **Decision Making**

There is collective decision-making for selecting instructional materials, and determining appropriate instructional methods and techniques (Rosenholtz, 1985; Cladwell & Spinks, 1988; Reynolds, 1989).

### **Resources**

There are adequate resources and classroom materials for effective teaching (Cladwell & Spinks, 1988).

There are teachers who feel certain about their own capacity to affect students' growth and

development, supported by the principal to achieve instructional goals (Rosenholtz, 1985; Hagedorn 1988); are well qualified with experience and appropriate development and training (HMI, 1988); are carefully selected and interviewed by the principal to articulate the school's goals and expectations (Wynne, 1980). There is teacher awareness and less teacher turnover (Rosenholtz, 1988).

### **Outcomes**

There is low student dropout and high student success in the placement in college, universities or jobs, and high levels of students' achievements (Cladwell & Spinks, 1988).

### **Leadership**

Effective schools have strong and purposeful leadership (Rutter et al, 1979; Hagedorn, 1988) by heads, deputies, departmental and pastoral staff (HMI, 1988; Mortimore, 1988) with capacity to manage, change, solve problems and develop organically (HMI, 1988); leaders who balance between authoritativeness and listening to teachers, concentrate on curriculum and instruction rather than administration, have high expectations for all of the students, take initiatives, and take charge of their schools, while continuing their own growth and development; encourage staff development and in-service training (Weindling & Easley, 1987; Rosenholtz, 1985). They have good relations with community, parents and governors (HMI, 1988); community involvement (Rutter et al, 1979; Cladwell & Spinks, 1988); and parental involvement (Hagedorn, 1988; Reynolds, 1989).

### **Climate**

Effective schools have an academic climate of high expectations among teachers and students; a safe and orderly atmosphere, work-centered environment; positive climate (Rutter et al, 1979; Reynolds, 1988); suitable and respectful working conditions; an aesthetically stimulating environment; orderly and firm classroom environment (HMI, 1988) with an incorporative

rather than coercive disciplinary system (Reynolds, 1989). They are concerned for pupils' development as individuals in society with a commitment by staff to their personal and social development and effective guidance (HMI, 1988); "with reward-based orientation rather than punishment school ethos" (Reynolds, 1989).

### **Characteristics of Iranian Educational System as Distinct from the English System of Education.**

The characteristics of effective schools listed above would not be exactly appropriate in the Iranian educational setting not only because of the cultural differences, but also because of the different management, administration, and organisation. The main differences are as follows, and are used as a basis for altering some items in the foregoing list of characteristics of effective schools for use in a new setting.

1. Organisation and administration of educational process are highly centralised, therefore individual schools are not involved in goal setting; curriculum designing; staff recruitment; in-service planning for teachers; graduation and grade promotion requirements; salaries; and monetary rewards or punishment of staff.
2. Individual schools normally are concerned with student enrolment; appointing individuals for positions; achievement and learning evaluation; discipline problems; scheduling; student and staff attendance; identifying and assigning deputies and department heads; school hygiene and maintenance; requesting materials and resources needed; gathering needed help and monetary contributions from parents during enrolment or as needed, depending on the ability to pay.
3. Religious concerns and ethical issues are central in most aspects of school life, even in appointing individuals to school positions and responsibilities.
4. Uniformity, conformity to cultural beliefs and religious principles are praised, rather than diversity or individualism.

5. Climate and environment, management styles, instructional activities are more apt to differ from one school to another, rather than curriculum and texts, resources, goals, and decision-making.
6. No standardised tests are employed in schools, but there are coordinate examinations at the end of elementary and secondary school for student achievements at the state and national level.
7. Schools are segregated according to the sex of students, at all levels, except for the first year of elementary schools. The teachers are normally assigned to the appropriate schools on the basis of their sex, too.
8. School headteachers are supervisors rather than leaders, because they lack full authority and power, and most of their administrative rules and regulations are prescribed by the Education Department.

### **Methodology**

In order to identify the characteristics of effective schools in Iran, an instrument was developed on the basis of Caldwell & Spinks' (1988) characteristics of effective schools, and with the use of the findings from 'Secondary Schools: an appraisal' (HMI, 1988). However because of the differences between the Iranian and English education systems, some alterations, additions and exclusions have been employed as follows.

1. Six sub-groups of Caldwell & Spinks' characteristics of effective schools, namely curriculum, decision-making, resources, outcomes, leadership and climate, were kept as they are, but alterations were made in the items in each sub-group.
2. All together nine items were excluded from the initial list of the characteristics, seven added, and nine altered in content and translation to make it more meaningful for the respondents and appropriate for the Iranian educational system. Finally, the instrument consisted of 44 items, with 5,5,5,5,8 and 16 items in each of the sub-groups respectively.

### Sampling

After the research project was approved by the Research Council of Urumiyeh University, contact was made with the Educational Department of Urumiyeh. Then schools were chosen randomly and all teachers, principals and administrators of these schools were asked to respond to the questionnaire (Tables 1 to 5).

### Validity.

Validity of the instrument was considered in three ways as follows:

1. *Face (Faith) validity.* As mentioned earlier, the list of characteristics of effective schools was synthesised from different writers' opinions and the different research findings which appear in most related literature as effective school characteristics. Therefore it is quite wise to have faith in a general framework of concepts which come from the opinions of many researches and outstanding writers.
2. *Construct validity.* This was assessed by correlating the teachers' and principals' responses to the instrument, item by item, and sub-group by sub-group, in every school (Table 6). The results are further analysed in the discussion section of the paper.
3. *Concurrent validity.* The principals (and district authorities) were asked to order the list of the schools involved in the study from least effective to most effective, on the basis of their own information, judgements, perceptions, as well as their own possible objective criterion.

### Reliability

Cronbach's test of  $\alpha$  (Thorndike, 1971; Satterly, 1986) was employed to computer. The results are shown in Table 6 and further analysed and discussed in the discussion section.

### Characteristics of Effective Schools

#### Curriculum

1. All teachers are familiar with official educational goals developed and provided by

the Ministry of Education.

2. Educational goals are well-planned, balanced and organised which meets the needs of students.
3. The school has a programme which provides students with required skills and expected achievements.
4. There are adequate classroom instructions for all students according to their ability and interest and number of students in classrooms as well.
5. There are maximum communication and interaction between teachers and students in classroom about the subjects and activities.

#### Decision-Making

6. Teachers are highly involved in decision-making at school.
7. Decisions at the school are mainly collective rather than individualistic.
8. There are high levels of community involvement in decision-making at the school.
9. Decisions at the school are made after gathering necessary information and due consideration.
10. There are very few decisions which later prove to be inappropriate or incorrect.

#### Resources

11. There are adequate texts and instructional materials in the school to enable staff to teach effectively.
12. There are adequate laboratory materials and other equipment and facilities needed for use by students according to their curriculum.
13. The school has motivated, satisfied and capable teachers.
14. The school does not have any shortage of teachers.
15. The teachers teach in their own specialised subject areas.

#### Outcomes

16. There is a low student dropout rate.
17. Scores on tests of different kinds reflect high levels of achievement.

18. There is a high degree of success in the placement of students in colleges and universities; in the case of elementary or intermediate schools, there are relatively many students who succeed in entering special schools for gifted students.
19. There are many students who are successful in various academic and non-academic competitions among schools.
20. Teachers, principals and people think that students' learning is very high.

### **Leadership**

21. A principal who provides a high level of feedback to teachers in all aspects of school life.
22. Encourages staff involvement in professional development and in-service training.
23. Has a high level of awareness of what is happening in the school.
24. Establishes effective relationship with the Education Department, the community, teachers and students.
25. Is concerned with his or her own professional development. Enables the sharing of the duties and resources to occur in an efficient manner consistent with educational needs of students.
26. Has a flexible administrative style.
27. Is responsive to and supportive of the needs of teachers.
28. Involves the community in the educational life of the school.

### **Climate**

29. The school has a set of values which are considered important.
30. The school offers a pleasant, exciting and challenging environment for students and teachers.
31. There is a climate of respect and mutual trust among teachers and students.
32. There is a strong commitment to learning in the school by students.
33. The headteacher, teachers and students have high expectations for achievement.

34. There is high morale among students in the school.
35. Students have respect for others.
36. There is good discipline in the school.
37. There are only a few occasions when senior administrators in the school need to be directly involved in the discipline of students.
38. There is a low absentee rate among students.
39. There is a low delinquency rate among students.
40. There is high morale among teachers in the school.
41. There are high levels of cohesiveness and team spirit among teachers.
42. There is a low absentee rate among teachers.
43. There are few applications from teachers for transfer.
44. There are seldom problems of quarrels arising from personal matters.

### **Discussion of the research findings**

The findings of the present research show that the schools can be differentiated from each other on the basis of some characteristics which can be considered as effective indicators. These indicators cluster around six main concepts: curriculum, decision making, resources, outcomes, leadership, and climate. In other words, effective schools are those which:

1. Their teachers are aware of the educational goals and the conditions for students learning and they are able to establish sound relationship between themselves and students for the benefit of the learning process (Curriculum).
2. Their principal's support is sensitive towards the teachers' needs and support them. They participate the teachers in school decisions as much as possible. (Decision-making).
3. There are enough instructional resources for teachers to teach effectively (Resources).
4. Their students have lower dropouts, higher grades and success in entering universities (Outcomes).
5. Their principals are flexible and have good relationship with local people, teachers, students and educational department's authorities.

(Leadership)

6. There are high morale, respect, sincerity, and higher expectations among the teachers who have lower absenteeism. In general, in these schools there exists a pleasant atmosphere along with values which bring all the teachers together for effective works (Climate).

The above said points which are main concepts of the "effectiveness questionnaire" are indicators of effectiveness. The more they are true about the schools, the more effective they are, and vice-versa. The results are drawn from the application of Cronbach's coefficient of  $\alpha$  - whose correlations are significant at %1 and %5 level - and school rank order by the educational departments' authorities, show that the schools can be differentiated from each other by those indicators.

An interesting point is that the average score of principals in the questionnaire, are higher than the teachers in all schools, showing the principals' prejudice toward their own schools, but since they gave high scores for attitudes in all schools and since they all are correlated with the teachers' scores, the results draw from the study, are not only negatively affected, but also supported even more.

The final point worth mentioning only is that effectiveness indicators are the same in centralized education system of Iran as compared to decentralized education system of England, showing the same concepts being supported by teachers, principals and educational departments' authorities in both educational systems. Although other studies are needed to be done to investigate some other concepts such as: the effective schools in both systems; the relation and interaction of centralized and decentralized educational systems with effectiveness of the schools; and more evidences on outcome indicators which are the final goals of the systems, it can be concluded that the concept of effectiveness refers to the same items in the educational systems of England and Iran which can be thought of as effectiveness indicators.

Summary

In brief, it can be concluded from this study that schools vary on a continuum from non-effective to effective, with different levels of effectiveness, which are generally related to curriculum, decision making, resources, outcomes, leadership and climate. The more the schools are in a better position in regard to these main points, the more effective they are.

Table 1. Number of Schools in Urumiyeh City area of Iran

School	Boys School	Girls School	Total
Primary School	37	31	68
Guidance School	18	19	37
High School	11	9	20
Total	66	59	125

Table 2. Number of teachers in Urumiyeh City area of Iran

School	Boys' School	Girls' School	Total
Primary School	458	951	1409
Guidance School	522	445	967
High School	505	230	735
Total	1485	1626	3111

Table 3. Number of Schools in the Sample

School	Boys' School	Girls' School	Total
Primary School	2	2	4
Guidance School	2	2	4
High School	2	2	4
Total	6	6	12

Table 4. Number of teachers and Principals in the Sample

School	Boys		Girls		Total
	Teachers	Principals	Teachers	Principals	
Primary School	69	8	68	8	153
Guidance School	111	8	85	7	211
High School	127	16	94	5	242
Total	307	32	247	20	606

Table 5. Scores on the effectiveness questionnaire by the teachers and principals in all sample schools.

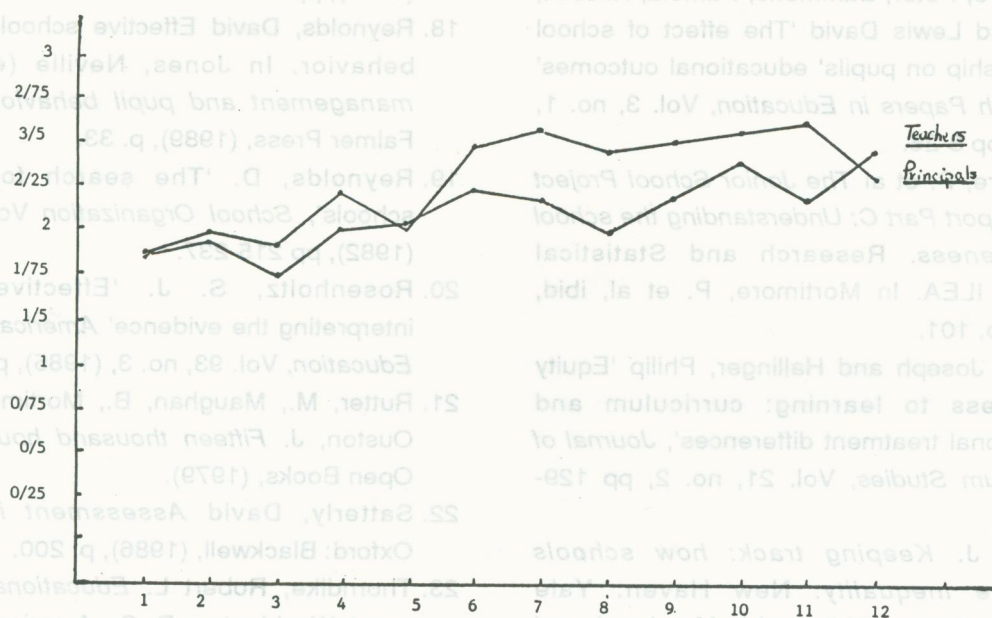
School Subgroups	Primary Schools		Guidance School		High School	
	Teachers	Principals	Teachers	Principals	Teachers	Principals
Curriculum	2/36	2/30	2/01	2/25	1/82	1/71
Resources	2/35	2/35	2/06	2/46	1/71	1/95
Outcomes	1/97	1/94	1/71	1/85	1/53	1/6
Climate	2/1	2/20	1/94	2/11	1/88	1/92
Leadership	2/41	2/61	2/45	2/73	1/95	2/19
Decision-making	2/46	2/57	2/69	2/85	2/36	2/66
Average	2/27	2/32	2/14	2/37	1/87	2/005

\* In all cases the vice principals are considered as principals.

Table 6. Cronbach's coefficient of  $\alpha$  between the scores of the effectiveness questionnaire by the teachers and principals.

School Subgroups	Primary School	Guidance School	High School
Curriculum	0/7810	0/8023	0/7550
Resources	0/6485	0/5865	0/6473
Outcomes	0/7451	0/5956	0/6108
Climate	0/7581	0/7299	0/7559
Leadership	0/8906	0/7840	0/8997
Decison-making	0/9997	0/7803	0/8164
All items average	0/7885	0/9854	0/9715

According to the table, correlation coefficient of  $\alpha$  is significant at 0.1 level in all sub groups, except the sub-group of resources and outcomes which are significant at 0.05 level.



The effectiveness scores by the teachers and principals on the basis of rank order of the schools which were made by the educational departments authorities. The numbers 1 to 12 was given to the schools instead of their names, to keep them unknown.

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