

How Much Child-Friendly Are Our Schools?

The Opinion Of Students On Teachers' Support, Instructional Practices And Community Participation In Their Schools

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Abstract

After the environment of home, it is a school that influences the entire well being of children, therefore environment of school must be child-friendly. The present article uncovers the status of schools of Varanasi district on the different dimension of child-friendliness as teachers' support, instructional practices and community involvement through students' opinion. To achieve the objective of the study, sample of 500 school students were selected from the 9th grade and 10th grade. A child-friendly school opinionnaire was used to collect the data and frequencies were calculated. Analysis of the data showed that schools of Varanasi district are not child-friendly enough for the wellbeing of students.

Keywords: School Environment; Secondary School Students; Child-Friendly Schools; Teachers' support; Instructional Practices; Community Involvement

1) Background

After the environment of home, it is the school which influences the entire well being of the child most, therefore environment of school must be child-friendly. According to Shaffer(1999) A Child-Friendly school means “ inclusive, healthy and protective for all children, effective with children, and involved with families and communities - and children”. Young(2002,p. 18) focuses on the role of child-friendly school in his definition as “Child-friendly environment aims to develop a learning environment in which children are motivated and able to learn. Staff members are friendly and welcoming to children and attend to all their health and safety needs”. Stating the role of teachers in a child-friendly school UNICEF (2009) states “Teachers and heads do not simply work in these schools, they make school child-friendly and maintain schools' child-friendly nature.” Therefore, it can be said that teachers' support, instructional practices and, community participation are the very important dimensions of child-friendly schools.

1.1) Teacher's Support

Studies suggest that teachers' involvement seems to be the strongest predictor of students' academic engagement (Furrer and Skinner, 2003; Skinner and Belmont, 1993). Teacher

support is conducive to the sense of belongingness to school (Hallinan, 2008) academic achievement (Konishi, 2010; Niehaus, Rudasill & Rakes, 2012), adaptive motivational beliefs and engagement behaviors (Fraser & Fisher, 1982; Pakarinen et al., 2014), attendance (Klem & Connell, 2004; Moos & Moos, 1978), and learning motivation (Ahmed, Minnaert, van der Werf & Kuyper, 2010). Studies have also found positive relationship between perceptions of students towards teacher support and students' motivation, interest and belongingness to school along with greater expectancies for success (Goodenow, 1993; Midgley *et al.*, 1989)

1.2) Instructional Practices

Effective Instructional practices are a major component of a child-friendly school. Instructional practices are range of curricular and co-curricular activities done by teachers or students to achieve meaningful learning objectives. Which instructional practices can be called effective? It is contextual, no one strategy can be called effective in all situations, in all subject, in all topics, with all learners. Effective instructional strategies are about choosing and blending best among all the strategies according to the need and demand of learners. The present paper focuses on use of variety of teaching methods, teacher's responsiveness towards students' questions, individual attention given to students, students' active engagement in teaching learning process, providing meaningful feedback, etc.

Importance of instructional strategies can be understood with the reference of various studies. Adunola (2011) suggested that in order to bring positive changes in students, instructional strategies used by teacher should be best for the subject matter. Chang(2002) maintained that instructional strategies work effectively if they suit needs and demands of every learner in the classroom.

1.3) School-Community Partnership

School community partnership is another important dimension of a child-friendly school. Jeynes (2003) suggested that a strong school and community partnership affects positively the academic achievement of minority students. Henderson, & Berla (1994) cited evidence that school-family partnership results in improved attendance, higher grades and test scores, more positive attitudes, and better graduation rates. Bergman, Walker, & Garfinkel (1992) have also documented the positive role of community groups in the social education of young people. Alleman and Neal (2013) suggested that school and community partnerships increase student academic preparedness for college. Strong school-family-community partnerships foster higher educational aspirations and more motivated students (Barton, 2003). A study undertook by National Center for Family and Community Connections to Schools (2002) suggested improved emotional and social skills among students as an effect of school-community partnership.

2) Methodology

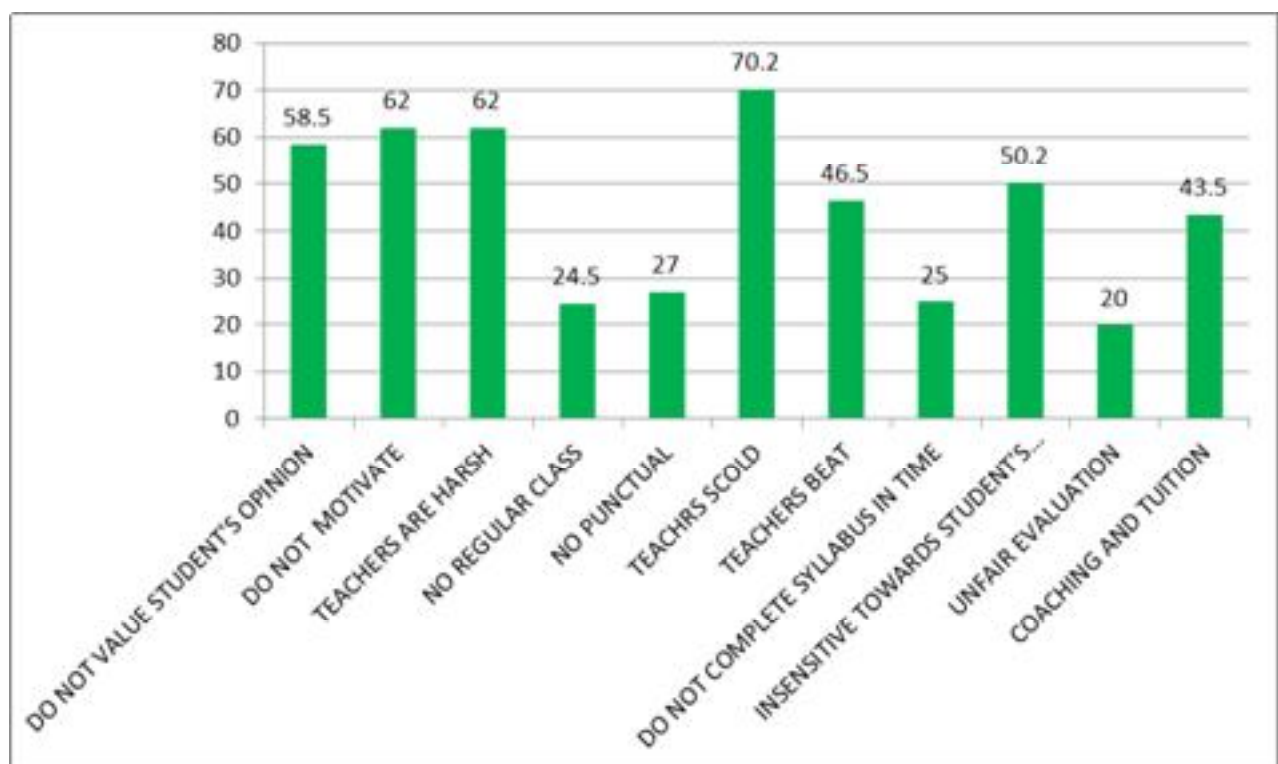
In this study, Normative survey method was adopted. For collection of data Child-Friendly School Opinionnaire for Students(CFSOS) was developed by the researcher consisting the dimensions of Inclusive environment, Health and safety, Physical resources, Teacher's Support, Learning Environment, and Community Involvement. The study was conducted in three-phase. In first phase of study 34 schools were selected randomly by the researcher from the total list of secondary schools of Madhyamik Shiksha Parishad, Uttar Pradesh(U.P.

Board), and Central Board of Secondary Education(CBSE) of Varanasi District. After selecting the schools, researcher selected 500 secondary school teachers randomly and collected the data regarding their level of awareness towards child rights. In first phase of data analysis, schools having the teachers of high child rights awareness, and low child rights awareness were identified on the basis of the mean scores of teachers of respective schools. After first phase of data analysis, four schools having high child rights aware teachers and four schools having low child rights aware teachers were selected. All students of those eight schools constituted the population for second phase of study. 50 students of 9th and 10th classes from each school were selected randomly. The total sample consisted 400 secondary school students. The present paper is focused on second phase of the study for that population was secondary school students of Varanasi district and sample consisted 400 secondary students.

3) Result and Analysis

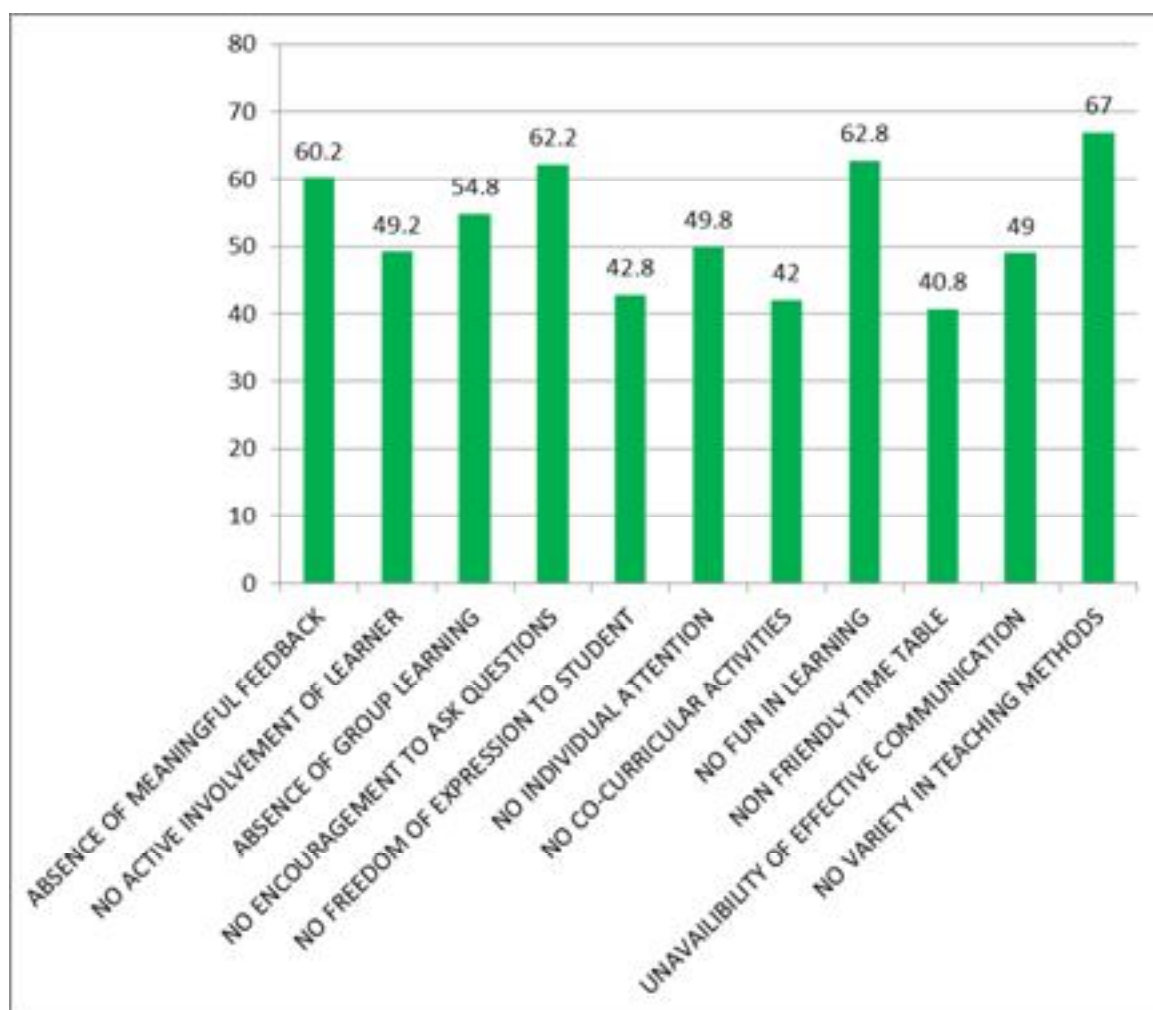
On the dimension of teachers' support, 102(25.5%) students have indicated that their teachers' support is poor. 202(50.5%) students have indicated that their teachers' support is satisfactory, Whereas, 96(24%) students have indicated that their teachers' support is good in their schools. Subsequently, it is found that the major problems of teachers' support opined by the students are that the teachers scold students, they are harsh, they do not motivate students, they do not value the opinion of students, they are insensitive towards the problems of learners, they give physical punishment to students, and they teach in coaching and tuition classes(Figure 3.1)

Figure 3.1: Status of school on teachers' support



On the dimension of instructional practices, 137(34.25%) students have indicated their schools poor, 209(52.25%) students have indicated their schools as satisfactory, and 54(13.5%) students have accepted their schools good. Subsequently, the major threats to effective instructional practices of schools opined by students are monotony in teaching methods, no fun in learning, lack in proper feedback to students on their success or failure, lack of environment to encourage asking questions(Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2: Status of schools on instructional practices



On the dimension of community involvement, 217(54.25%) students have indicated that their schools provide them poor opportunity to involve with the community. 166(41.5%) students have indicated that their schools provide them satisfactory opportunity to involve with community, and 17(4.25%) students have indicated that their schools provide them good opportunity to involve with community. Subsequently, major problems with community's involvement in schools which opined by students are regarding SMDC, PTA, absence of

sharing and collaboration between parents and teachers to improve students' learning experiences(Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3.: Status of schools on community involvement

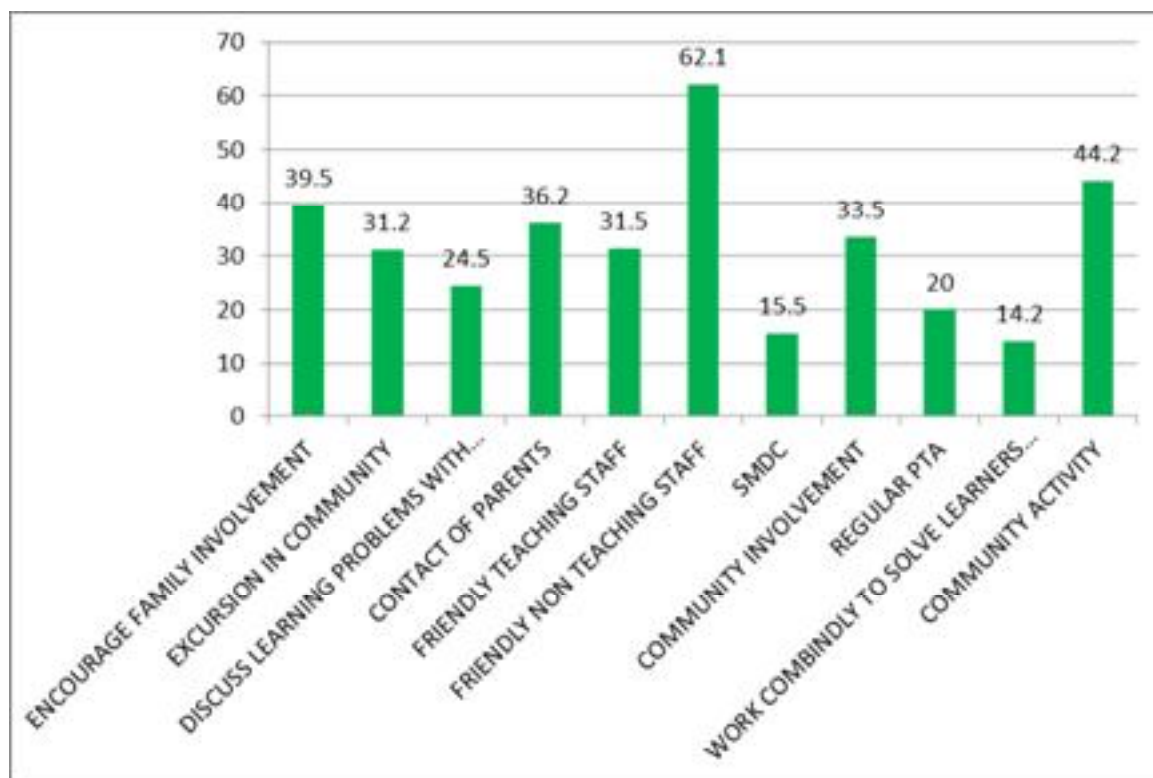
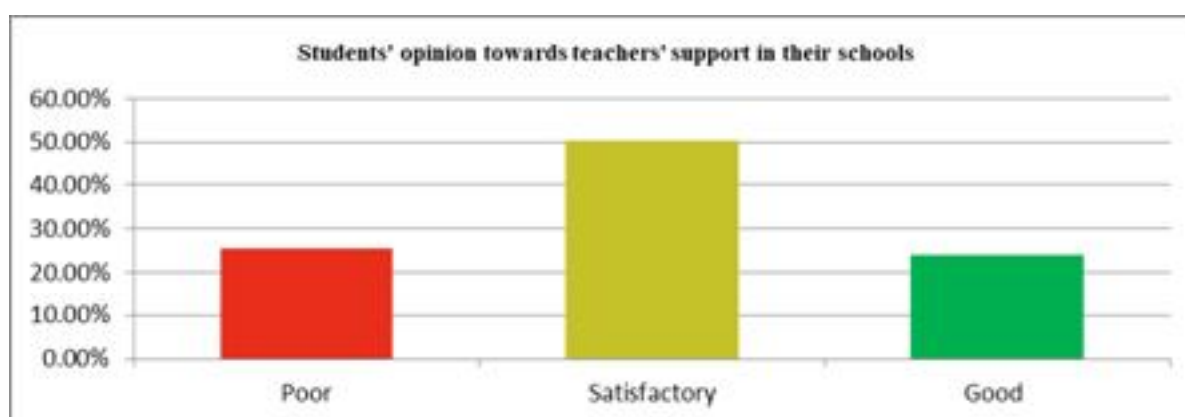
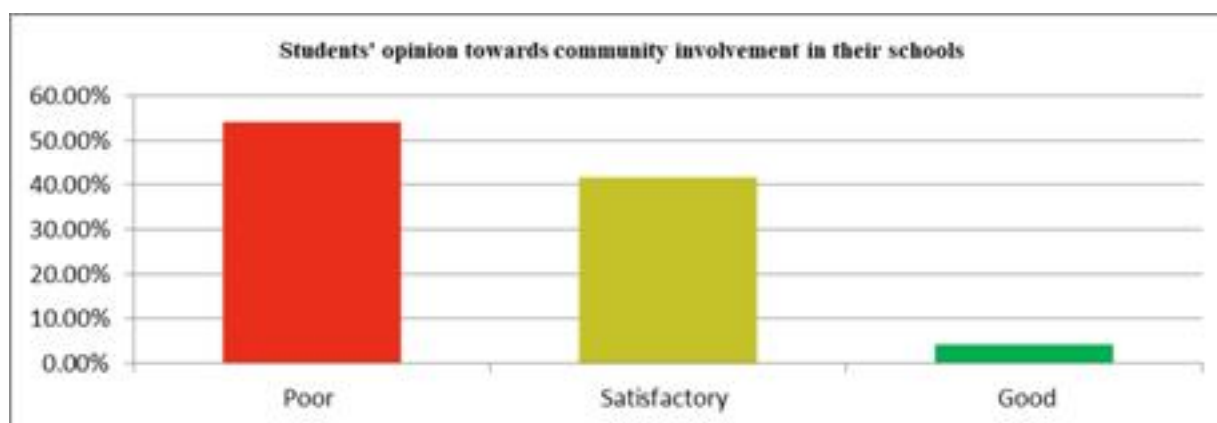
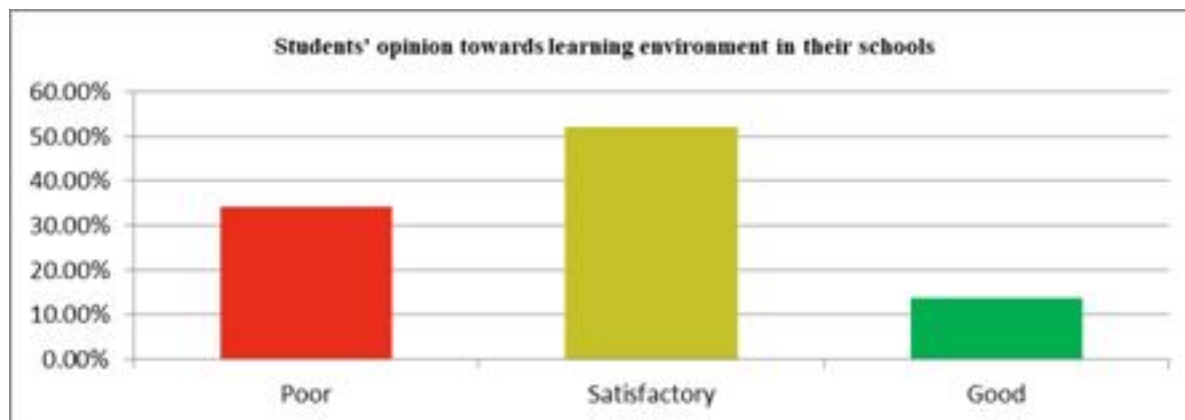


Figure 3.4: Opinion of students towards different dimensions of child friendliness of their schools





4) Discussion and Conclusion

Teachers who have a very important role in school, in growth and development of students are not friendly to students and, it might be due to the unawareness of teachers towards child rights (Singh, 2015). Teachers scold students, they are harsh, they do not motivate students, they do not value the opinion of students, they are insensitive towards the problems of learners, they give physical punishment to students, and they teach in coaching and tuition classes. As it is known that physical punishment is ban in schools even this brutal practice is going on, and the reason may be the reluctant attitude of children and parents towards it (Dileep, 2014). It is also visible that boys are more prone to be scolded and beaten by their teachers. Subsequently, teachers are irregular and unpunctual also. They do not complete syllabus within prescribed time. They unfairly evaluate students. These results are also supported by the students' lived experiences with teachers as they also mentioned their bad experiences with their teachers (Singh, 2015).

On instructional practices of the school, student's responses showed the monotony in teaching methods, no fun in learning, lack in proper feedback to students on their success or failure, lack in environment to encourage asking questions. Co-operative learning is also not used very much in the schools. Other problems with instructional practices are lack in learner's active involvement in learning, lack of freedom of expression to students, lack of individual attention to students, lack of co-curricular activities, unfriendly time table, and ineffectual communication. The pathetic condition of instructional practices in schools may be the lack of understanding of curriculum, pedagogy, and CCE, among teachers as

Kaur(2014) reported the lack in content knowledge, Ojha(2013) reported the lack of understanding of CCE, and Times of India(2015) reported the lack of grasping the syllabus among teachers.

Community's involvement in school is another dimension of the child-friendly environment, which is most neglected among all dimensions, especially in girls' schools. Schools are not found child-friendly because most of the schools have not constituted SMDC and PTA yet, and the result is in resemblance with Mehta(2013) who revealed that only 28.69 % schools constituted PTA and only 18.03% higher secondary schools formed SMDC. Due to absence of a common platform no discussion between parents and teachers on learning problems of students takes place in schools, and no collaborative work of parents and teachers to improve students' learning experiences is carried out in most of the schools. Along with all, schools also do not encourage the student's family to involve in activities of school. Schools do not have proper means to contact with parents, and teachers are not friendly to the parents. Community activities and excursion organized by schools to make the students involved with community is also not up to the mark in schools.

Thus, Status of schools on the above said dimensions showed that schools are violating the rights of children and hence cannot be accepted as child-friendly on the dimension of teachers' support, instructional practices, and community involvement.

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